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The Soviet Union and the North Korean Seizure of the USS Pueblo: Evidence from Russian Archives

By Sergey S. Radchenko



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The Soviet Union and the North Korean Seizure of the *USS Pueblo*: Evidence from Russian Archives

By Sergey S. Radchenko¹

On 23 January 1968 naval and air forces of the Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK) attacked the *USS Pueblo*, an intelligence gathering ship operating off North Korea's eastern shore, capturing the ship, killing one crew member and taking the rest prisoner. The Johnson administration assumed that Kim Il Sung had coordinated the attack with the Soviet leadership. As a consequence, this unexpected and highly provocative act sparked an acute international crisis. The White House regarded the attack on the *Pueblo* as part of a greater Soviet plot to wear down the United States, distract American attention from Vietnam, and weaken Washington's ability to put up resistance to worldwide communist expansion.²

If US policy-makers had been able to see behind the Iron Curtain, however, they would have been amazed to discover that the Soviets had not, in fact, been involved in the *Pueblo's* capture. Although the Truman administration had been correct to assume that the North Korean attack on South Korea in June 1950 had been planned in Moscow,³ by the late 1960's North Korean leader Kim Il Sung had gained enough autonomy vis-à-vis the Soviets that he could keep the Kremlin in the dark about his foreign policy moves.

Russian archival documents reveal that the capture of the *Pueblo* left Moscow struggling to understand Kim's thinking and alarmed that he might attempt to drag the

¹ Sergey Radchenko is a PhD candidate at the London School of Economics and a visiting faculty fellow at the National University of Mongolia. The author is grateful to Kathryn Weathersby, Coordinator of the CWIHP Korea Initiative, for valuable, very detailed comments on earlier drafts of this paper, and to James Hershberg, Christian Ostermann and Balazs Szalontai for additional insights and suggestions. Special thanks are also due to archivists at the Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (AVPRF) and the Russian State Archive of Recent History (RGANI), who tolerated the author's presence for weeks at a time. Research for this paper would have not been possible without the support of the Central Research Fund of the University of London, the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), and the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies of The George Washington University.

² Mitchell Lerner makes an excellent case to this effect in Mitchell B. Lerner, *The Pueblo Incident: a Spy Ship and the Failure of American Foreign Policy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), and Mitchell B. Lerner, "A Dangerous Miscalculation: New Evidence from Communist-Bloc Archives about North Korea and the Crisis of 1968," *Journal of Cold War History*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Winter 2004): 3-21.

³ See Kathryn Weathersby, "To Attack or Not to Attack? Stalin, Kim Il Sung and the Prelude to War," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 5 (1995): 1-9.

Soviet Union into a war with the United States. In January and February 1968 the Soviet leadership pulled all available strings to rein in Kim Il Sung, but their long-standing ideological commitment to North Korea, along with Moscow's desire to keep Pyongyang on the Soviet side in the Sino-Soviet split, or at least on the sidelines, meant that Moscow had few strings to pull. Instead, it was Kim who succeeded in manipulating his Soviet patrons, extracting greater economic and military aid in exchange for agreeing to moderate his war mongering. Stuck between the anvil of their commitment to fraternal North Korea and the hammer of possible war with the United States, the Soviet leadership learned painfully that Pyongyang's friendship was as much a liability as an asset to Moscow. However, given their struggle with the Chinese, their ideological imperatives, and their strategic concerns on the Korean peninsula, the Soviets continued to bear this liability for another twenty years, until Gorbachev's "New Thinking" finally freed them from their troublesome ally.

The Context: Soviet Policy toward North Korea, 1950-68

The Soviet reaction to the *Pueblo* incident can only be understood in the context of the general character of Moscow's policy towards North Korea. Several recent studies of Soviet-North Korean relations from the late 1940s through the early 1950s highlight Stalin's strategic concerns in Northeast Asia. Kathryn Weathersby points to Stalin's fear of Japan's resurgence and the consequent need to maintain a Soviet foothold on the Korean peninsula.⁴ Sergei Goncharov, John Lewis and Xue Litai suggest that Stalin intended to use Korea as a springboard for possible military action against Japan.⁵ Shen Zhihua narrows the rationale for Soviet involvement in the Korean War to Stalin's strategic goal of obtaining warm water ports on the Korean peninsula.⁶ While recent accounts have illuminated Moscow's strategic aims in North Korea in the early phase of the Cold War, the nature of the Soviet commitment to the DPRK after Stalin's death in 1953 has remained obscure. In particular, how did the strategic and ideological goals of

⁴ Kathryn Weathersby, "Soviet Aims In Korea and the Origins of The Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence From Russian Archives", *Cold War International History Project Working Paper* No. 8 (November 1993).

⁵ Sergei Goncharov, John Lewis and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao and the Korean War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993)

⁶ Shen Zhihua, "Sino-Soviet Relations and the Origins of the Korean War: Stalin's Strategic Goals in the Far East," *Journal of Cold War Studies* Vol. 2, No. 2 (Spring 2000): 44.

the post-Stalin leadership⁷ shape Moscow's approach to North Korea after the end of the Korean War?

In the mid-1950's North Korea's strategic importance to the Soviet Union declined for several reasons. First, Stalin's successor Nikita S. Khrushchev downplayed the prospect of war with the United States and pursued instead a policy of peaceful coexistence and economic competition with the West. In this context, the threat of a remilitarized Japan appeared less ominous than it had to Stalin. Indeed, Soviet-Japanese relations were normalized in 1956, and in the 1960s Moscow consistently overruled Kim Il Sung's objections to Soviet-Japanese rapprochement.⁸ Second, Khrushchev's military strategy focused on increasing the Soviet nuclear arsenal to the detriment of conventional capabilities, thus undercutting North Korea's importance as a possible military theater.⁹ Third, with the rapid growth of Sino-Soviet cooperation in the mid-1950s, Khrushchev placed all his eggs in the Chinese basket and paid less attention to other communist states in Asia – Mongolia, North Korea and North Vietnam.¹⁰ Moreover, Khrushchev did not have the strong ideological commitment to Kim Il Sung's regime that he had, for example, to the Cuban revolution and its charismatic leaders.¹¹

Khrushchev's successors reasserted a more ideologically consistent foreign policy after Nikita Sergeyevich was removed from power in October 1964. Since Khrushchev had followed Stalin's example in running foreign affairs nearly single-handedly, the new

⁷ For a recent account discussing the constant interplay of Moscow's strategic and ideological goals, see Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁸ On the North Korean problem in the Soviet-Japanese rapprochement, see my paper, "North Korea and the Soviet-Japanese Rapprochement," presented at the Conference on the New East European Evidence on the Cold War in Asia, 30 October -1 November 2003, Budapest, Hungary, sponsored by The George Washington University Cold War Group (GWCW) and the Cold War History Research Center in Budapest.

⁹ Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: from Stalin to Khrushchev*, 193.

¹⁰ On Khrushchev's lukewarm attitude towards Mongolia's needs, in contrast to the much more robust approach of his successors, see Sergey Radchenko, "The Soviet's Best Friend in Asia: the Mongolian Dimension of the Sino-Soviet Split," *Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 42* (November 2003). On the Soviet disengagement from Vietnam in the late 1950s – early 1960s see Ilya Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2003).

¹¹ William Taubman provides an excellent account of Khrushchev's contradictory initiatives in *Khrushchev: the Man and His Era* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003). Anastas Mikoyan reportedly claimed: "We [Soviet leaders] had been waiting all our lives for a country to go communist without the Red Army. It happened in Cuba, and it makes us feel like boys." (Mikoyan quoted in Anatoly Gribkov and William Smith, *Operation ANADYR: U.S. and Soviet generals recount the Cuban missile crisis* (Chicago: Edition q, 1994), 11). The idealism and naiveté of Cuban revolutionaries appealed more to Khrushchev than did Kim Il Sung's grotesque, overtly Stalinist, and secretive regime.

“collective leadership” headed by Leonid Brezhnev and Aleksei Kosygin lacked foreign policy experience. Brezhnev was a party *apparatchik*, and, by his own admission, “never had anything to do with this damn foreign policy.”¹² Kosygin was an economist, a respected state administrator, but by no means a diplomat. Given their lack of practical knowledge about international affairs, the new leadership turned to theory, promising to return to a class-conscious foreign policy—the black and white paradigm of “us” (communists) versus “them” (capitalists).¹³ Armed with naïve faith in international communist solidarity and unwavering commitment to supporting fraternal allies worldwide, the new Soviet leaders tried to mend fences with a reluctant China, offered unprecedented military and economic assistance to North Vietnam, and subsidized the unruly North Korean regime despite Pyongyang’s unwillingness to respect Soviet foreign policy priorities.¹⁴

This new policy soon led to disillusionment. Kosygin, who traveled to China to restore fraternal ties and overcome deep-seated bitterness, found Chairman Mao unenthusiastic and even insulting.¹⁵ Sino-Soviet relations consequently deteriorated, dramatically demonstrated by Beijing’s unwillingness to back Soviet “joint actions” to aid North Vietnam’s war effort. But though Kosygin’s ideological yardstick failed to measure the breadth of the Sino-Soviet rift, it worked well enough in North Vietnam and North Korea, which stood to benefit from increased “fraternal” attention. As the Sino-Soviet confrontation intensified, the Soviets supplied weapons and rubles to the states on the Chinese periphery – North Korea, North Vietnam, and Mongolia. The greater Moscow’s concern became over the build-up of Chinese military forces along the Soviet border, the more committed it became to China’s neighbors, whose support would be critical in case of a major confrontation with the Chinese.

¹² Petro Shelest, *Da Ne Sudimy Budete: Dnevnikovye Zapisi, Vospominaniya Chlena Politbyuro TsK KPSS* (Be not judged: diaries, recollections of a CC CPSU Politburo member) (Moscow: Edition Q, 1995), 186 & 219.

¹³ The argument that after Khrushchev’s fall the Soviet foreign policy became more ‘ideological’ is not reflected in the existing literature. One of the reasons for the scholarly neglect of this important shift in Moscow’s priorities has been the dearth of materials on Soviet policy-making under Brezhnev and Kosygin. The scope of this essay does not permit a closer examination of the Soviet ideological agenda in late 1964-early 1965. My doctoral thesis, “The China Puzzle: Soviet Policy towards the People’s Republic of China, 1962-1967” (London School of Economics, 2005) contains a thorough discussion of this issue.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Soviet strategic considerations thus quickly returned to the forefront. However, while Mongolia eagerly followed Moscow's lead in the Sino-Soviet split, Pyongyang and Hanoi could not be as easily manipulated. Despite enormous aid to the Vietnamese war effort, Soviet policy-makers gained little leverage over their trigger-happy comrades, who disregarded Soviet advice to use peaceful methods of struggle with "US imperialism."¹⁶

Pyongyang proved even more unresponsive to Soviet calls for restraint. Kim Il Sung continued to speak of an armed "liberation" of South Korea, despite Soviet efforts to dissuade him from a provocative foreign policy course. Brezhnev and Kosygin were acutely conscious of their responsibility to preserve peace, and thus directed their foreign policy away from military conflict with the United States. However, in East Asia this goal conflicted with their "internationalist," ideologically driven obligations, and with their need to contain China. Moscow's commitment to North Korea thus left it little room to maneuver. Moreover, putting pressure on Kim Il Sung conflicted with Brezhnev's injunction to the leaders of the Soviet party to the effect that "not only pressure and brusqueness, but any posture of superiority [...] must resolutely be eliminated from relations with the fraternal countries and parties."¹⁷

The North Korean leadership greeted Moscow's renewed support with enthusiasm, as it promised untold benefits in the form of weapons and economic aid. Kim Il Sung's attitude towards his Soviet – and Chinese – comrades appears to have been distinctly utilitarian. On a personal level he bitterly resented Soviet and Chinese interference, exhibited most recently following the so-called "coup attempt" against the North Korean leader in August 1956, when Anastas Mikoyan and Peng Dehuai forced Kim to reinstate his political opponents into the Korean Workers Party.¹⁸ By the end of the decade the Great Leader managed nonetheless to purge the offenders, and then to execute them, but his bitterness over the Soviet and Chinese interference lingered on. Six months earlier, Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's personality cult had posed a serious threat to the North Korean leader, whose own personality cult dwarfed that of

¹⁶ For a recent account of Soviet policy towards Vietnam in the mid-1960s see Ilya Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996).

¹⁷ "Leonid Brezhnev's draft speech to the November (1964) Plenum," RGANI: fond 2, opis 1, delo 758, list 19.

¹⁸ See Andrei Lankov, *Severnaya Koreya: vchera i segodnya* [North Korea: yesterday and Today] (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1995) for an in-depth account of the 1956 crisis in Pyongyang.

Stalin.¹⁹ Kim Il Sung was also alarmed by Khrushchev's efforts to mend fences with the United States, since the Soviet call for "peaceful coexistence" conflicted with Kim's assertions of an 'imminent' American aggression against the DPRK, the threat of which provided the rationale for keeping his country excessively armed and at a high state of military readiness.

Despite these grievances, several reasons propelled Kim to maintain comradely relations with the USSR. First, Moscow provided a guarantee of security. Whatever he might have thought of Khrushchev's policies, Kim Il Sung preferred protection provided by the Soviet Union to the unappealing prospect of facing North Korea's adversaries alone. Second, the Soviet comrades supplied Kim with the subsidies on which North Korea depended for its survival. Third, until the Sino-Soviet split changed the rules of the game, Kim could choose either to be a part of the socialist "camp"—and thus recognize Soviet authority in ideological matters—or not to be a part of it and risk political isolation.

As has long been well known, the Sino-Soviet split afforded Kim Il Sung much needed political flexibility.²⁰ He could now pursue his own domestic and foreign policy agendas, relying on the competition between Moscow and Beijing for influence over North Korea to keep up the aid flow. Accordingly, Kim sabotaged Khrushchev's COMECON project, believing that it relegated North Korea to the status of a Soviet economic appendage.²¹ The Great Leader condemned the United States and its "puppets" in Northeast Asia, devoted increasing resources to strengthening the DPRK's defense capabilities, and ignored Khrushchev's calls for peaceful co-existence with the West. At the same time, to maintain a steady flow of aid from his Soviet comrades, Kim flattered the Soviet leaders as the "elder brothers" of North Korea. "We believe," Kim Il Sung told Soviet Ambassador to Pyongyang Vasily Moskovsky, "that the Korean Workers' Party is the younger brother of the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union]. Therefore [...]"

¹⁹ Balazs Szalontai, *The Failure of De-Stalinization in North Korea, 1953-1964: The DPRK in a Comparative Perspective*, PhD thesis (Budapest: Central European University, 2003).

²⁰ For a recent elaboration of this proposition, see Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, New ed. (New York: Basic Books, c2001), 154.

²¹ For Khrushchev's efforts to curb Pyongyang's engineering projects in the late 1950s-early 1960s, see Balazs Szalontai, *The Failure of De-Stalinization in North Korea, 1953-1964: The DPRK in a Comparative Perspective*.

we have always and fully supported and will support your party and government in all matters.”²² [Document 1]

In the fall of 1962 Kim Il Sung even found it expedient to praise Khrushchev’s handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis, despite strong Chinese criticism of Soviet “capitulationism” in Cuba. “I personally believe,” Kim told Moskovsky, “that in this complicated situation the Soviet government and N.S. Khrushchev made the sole correct decision, and this decision speaks not to the weakness of the Soviet Union, but to its strength and to the wisdom of its government.”²³ [Document 4] But the Great Leader’s praise came with a price tag. In November 1962, quoting the need to defend the Far Eastern “forward post” of the socialist commonwealth, Kim asked for free military aid from the Soviet Union. His list included surface-to-air missiles (enough to increase the number of the North Korean air defense regiments from 2 to 14), Mig-21 planes and even submarines.²⁴ [Document 6]

Khrushchev reportedly turned down the ambitious North Korean demands, which was the ‘straw’ that broke the back of Kim Il Sung’s patience. In security terms, China could ostensibly replace the Soviet Union in the hour of need. Ideologically, Kim and Khrushchev were worlds apart as the North Korean leader called for a militant struggle against the US to counter Khrushchev’s insistence on peaceful coexistence.²⁵ Now, with Moscow refusing to provide much needed military aid, the Soviet-North Korean friendship rapidly deteriorated. [Document 19]

As Pyongyang joined the Chinese struggle against Soviet “revisionism,” the Moscow leadership dismissed North Korea as China’s satellite. In 1962-63 Soviet diplomats referred to Kim’s *juche* as a propaganda ploy that obscured Kim Il Sung’s pro-Chinese inclinations. As one embassy officer wrote, “in spite of all the efforts of the KWP leadership to present their propaganda as an example of an ‘independent line’ with

²² “Conversation between Vasily Moskovsky and Kim Il Sung” (14 August 1962), AVPRF: fond 0102, opis 18, papka 93, delo 5, list 4.

²³ “Conversation between Vasily Moskovsky and Kim Il Sung” (1 November 1962), AVPRF: fond 0102, opis 18, papka 93, delo 5, list 137.

²⁴ “Conversation between Vasily Moskovsky and Kim Il Sung” (14 November 1962), AVPRF: fond 0102, opis 18, papka 93, delo 5, list 152.

²⁵ For a view that mainly ideological grievances prompted Kim Il Sung’s rupture with Moscow following the Cuban Missile Crisis, see Adrian Buzo, *The Guerilla Dynasty: Politics and Leadership in North Korea* (Boulder: CO, Westview Press, 1999), 67.

regard to the international communist movement [...] in reality at the core of [their policy] lie[s] the so-called ‘general line’ of the CCP [Chinese Communist Party], anti-Marxist views of the Chinese leadership.”²⁶ [Document 19] Moskovsky lamented his predecessors’ shortsightedness. “We could have known as early as 1961 where the Koreans were looking – to the West or to the East,” he wrote in his diary.²⁷ [Document 16] It is perhaps ironic that while policy-makers in Washington viewed North Korea as a Soviet puppet, Moscow considered the DPRK a Chinese puppet. Kim Il Sung, meanwhile, vehemently denied that he was anyone’s puppet. As he declared to Kosygin in February 1965, “We [...] implement the purest Marxism and condemn as false both the Chinese admixtures and the errors of the CPSU [...] For all that we are still regarded as China’s disciples, although we are only pursuing our own independent policy.”²⁸

There were in fact similarities between the Chinese and North Korean ideological positions. Kim Il Sung’s assessment of the international situation was similar to Mao’s; he had difficulty accepting Khrushchev’s theory of peaceful coexistence with the US while American forces faced North Korea across the 38th parallel. Kim, like Mao, resented Khrushchev’s struggle against personality cults and decried Soviet efforts to integrate socialist bloc economies. But despite these affinities with Mao’s thinking, Kim Il Sung tried to steer an autonomous course and sought to assert his own leadership over the Afro-Asian solidarity movement. Inasmuch as China provided Kim with weapons, he paid lip service to Sino-Korean friendship. In fact, as Soviet diplomats concluded in retrospect, the two years of intense Sino-North Korean military co-operation (1963-64) played a “decisive role” in Pyongyang’s drift in China’s direction. But one-sided reliance on China for military and economic aid limited Kim Il Sung’s flexibility and therefore undermined the political component of *juche*. China and North Korea shared much ideological ground, but China was also a former imperial overlord that had dominated Korea’s politics for centuries. Kim Il Sung worried lest China’s increasing presence in North Korea lead to a reassertion of the traditional relationship. Soviet diplomats in

²⁶ “Report of the Soviet embassy in the DPRK on some new aspects in the Korean-Chinese relations in the first half of 1965” (4 June 1965), AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 21, papka 106, delo 20, list 14.

²⁷ Moskovsky, of course, meant the Soviet Union (West) and China (East), though geographically speaking, both lie mainly to the West of North Korea.

²⁸ “Conversation between Aleksei Kosygin and Kim Il Sung” (12 February 1965), Archive of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Collection 02/1, File 96, Archival Unit 101, Information 13, 1962-66. The author is grateful to the Korea Initiative for obtaining this important document.

Pyongyang appropriately concluded: “the possibility of ending up alone with only the Chinese caused anxiety for the Koreans” [Document 19]. The North Korean leader consequently took advantage of Khrushchev’s fall to mend fences with the Soviet Union.

The timing was felicitous. Soviet leaders embraced Kim Il Sung as a brother-in-arms in the struggle against “imperialism.” At the same time, Sino-Soviet relations continued to deteriorate in 1965, as Moscow prepared for a drawn-out struggle with the Chinese. The Great Leader seized the opportunity to remind his Soviet comrades that his country needed economic and military aid. In a meeting with Kosygin in February 1965, Kim complained that because the struggle against imperialism forced North Korea to maintain a large army, the Seven-Year Plan was not being fulfilled. Kim asked the Soviets to provide free military aid (including the latest air defense technology), amounting to a total of 150 million rubles (50% more than what North Korea asked from Khrushchev in the fall of 1962). This time, eager to show their internationalist spirit and win Kim’s gratitude, the Soviet leaders obliged.²⁹ [Document 18] Moscow also expressed readiness to subsidize the DPRK economy. Kosygin asked Kim “not [to] hesitate to tell us what’s hurting you” and promised to buy North Korea products, which were of no use in the Soviet Union and which, as the Great Leader readily admitted, “have been rejected abroad” because of their poor quality.³⁰

Soviet aid to the DPRK indeed expanded from 1965 to 1968, especially after Sino-North Korean relations soured during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. For example, in 1966 the North Koreans asked Moscow to assist in the construction of a power plant, a metal processing plant, an aluminum plant, an ammonium plant, and even an oil processing plant (despite the fact that the DPRK had no crude oil reserves). Pyongyang also proposed that Moscow buy North Korean-made factory equipment, since, despite its poor quality, it could be installed at a factory near Moscow frequented by foreigners in order to “propagate the achievements of the DPRK.” As to why the Soviets should subsidize North Korea contrary to their own economic interests, Pyongyang had a simple answer. In the words of Deputy Premier Yi Chu-yon, “we think

²⁹ The North Koreans immediately exploited Soviet willingness to provide weapons in order to extract more aid. Only days after the conclusion of military talks in Moscow in May 1965, Pyongyang requested additional weapons, including 57mm anti-aircraft guns, needed for “defense of large cities” [Document 18].

³⁰ “Conversation between Aleksei Kosygin and Kim Il Sung” (12 February 1965).

no one will feel offended if you give us special conditions. As everyone knows, our country is split into two halves, there are American forces in South Korea, and we went through a long and destructive war.”³¹

The Soviet leadership disagreed with many of Pyongyang’s policies, both internal and external, but paid Kim Il Sung’s bills nonetheless, believing that doing so was in line with the Soviet Union’s internationalist obligations as the leader of the socialist camp, not to mention the bonus of keeping the North Koreans from the Chinese embrace. Not surprisingly, in May 1966 Kim expressed to Brezhnev his “firm conviction that they [the North Koreans] cannot do without the deep [and] sincere friendship with the CC CPSU [Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union] and the Soviet people.”³² Thus, in the late 1960s Soviet-North Korean relations blossomed on the fertile soil of aid and credits from the USSR. As one Soviet diplomat wryly observed, the intensity of the two countries’ rapprochement was “in direct proportion to the volume of all kinds of aid to the DPRK from the Soviet Union.”³³ **[Document 19]**

In sum, while Soviet leaders treated North Korea as a junior partner in the global struggle against imperialism, and as a potential ally in the containment of China, Kim Il Sung, whatever ideological bond he still felt, took the Soviet Union for a cow he could usefully milk in order to keep his regime afloat. In this sense there are striking parallels between the Soviet-North Korean relationship and the American commitment to South Korea. In the late 1960s South Korean President Park Chung Hee played up the North Korean threat to extract more military and economic aid from the United States.³⁴ US policy was driven by considerations of a global struggle against communism, and in this respect was as ideological as Soviet foreign policy. The Americans satisfied Seoul’s demands in order to keep on good terms with the South Koreans – key allies in this

³¹ “Conversation between Vladimir Novikov and Yi Chu-yon” (9 June 1966), AVPRF: fond 0102, opis 22, papka 107, delo 4, listy 6-12. Lee explained the necessity of building an oil processing plant by reference to South Korea, where, he said, the Americans had already built such a plant. Lee said North Korea would import crude oil from the USSR and then process it.

³² “Leonid Brezhnev’s speech at the May (1966) CC CPSU Plenum” (27 May 1966), RGANI: fond 2, opis 3, delo 13, list 83.

³³ “Report of the Soviet embassy in the DPRK on some new aspects in Korean-Chinese relations in the first half of 1965” (4 June 1965), AVPRF: fond 0102, opis 21, papka 106, delo 20, list 26.

³⁴ For a recent account of US-supplied benefits enjoyed by the Republic of Korea in the 1950s and 1960s, see Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1997), 305-308 & 318-322. See also Mitchell Lerner, *The Pueblo Incident*, p. 132.

struggle. Thus, both Pyongyang and Seoul cashed in on the ideological commitments and Cold War strategies of their respective patrons, and in this sense benefited from the Cold War.

To what extent were Soviet leaders successful in winning North Korea's loyalty in the mid- to late 1960s? The evidence suggests that the record was at best mixed. Brezhnev and Kosygin appreciated that Kim Il Sung at last abandoned his presumably pro-Chinese views in the mid-1960s. Soviet leaders were even more enthusiastic about Kim's criticism of the Chinese Cultural Revolution as "unbelievable idiocy." In December 1966 Brezhnev noted with satisfaction: "the departure of the Korean comrades from the Chinese course is an actual fact."³⁵ As Bernd Schaefer has shown, the Great Leader was not inclined to follow China into the chaos of the Cultural Revolution.³⁶ Sino-North Korean relations deteriorated sharply in the late 1960s, to the point of border clashes. That much said, however, Moscow could not discount the possibility that Kim might again defect to the Chinese, which sharply limited Soviet flexibility and gave Kim additional leverage over Moscow. Kim in fact hurried to repair relations with China as soon as the Cultural Revolution subsided, not wanting to become over-reliant on Moscow and thus lose political maneuverability.³⁷

Moscow's commitment to North Korea complicated Soviet foreign policy, since the Soviet leadership disapproved of Pyongyang's militant approach. In April 1966 North Korean Foreign Minister Pak Song-ch'ol warned his Soviet colleague Andrei Gromyko to remain vigilant: the US attack could come soon. Pak Song-ch'ol stressed that Kim's ideas about "turning the country into an impregnable fortress" and "arming the entire people" were not just empty talk. "Currently, we are not in a state of peace, but in a state of armistice," he argued. "Different clashes occur; the enemy is searching out our weak points and would gladly exploit them."³⁸ [Document 20] In November 1967 Pak again

³⁵ "Leonid Brezhnev's speech at the December (1966) CC CPSU Plenum" (12 December 1966), RGANI: fond 2, opis 3, delo 45, list 63. Kim Il Sung was in Moscow at the time of the Plenum. For another version of Kim Il Sung's comments on the Cultural Revolution, see Bernd Schaefer, "North Korean Adventurism and China's Long Shadow, 1966-1972," *Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 43* (October 2004): 9.

³⁶ Bernd Schaefer, "North Korean Adventurism and China's Long Shadow, 1966-1972".

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "Conversation between Andrei Gromyko and Pak Song-ch'ol" (9 April 1966), AVPRF: fond 0102, opis 22, papka 107, delo 4, list 1.

told Gromyko: “one should not forget that the Americans have been in occupation of South Korea for 22 years, they will hardly content themselves with this. They want to conquer the whole of Korea so as to use it afterwards as a platform for attack against the Soviet Union and China.”³⁹ Moscow was dismayed by Kim Il Sung’s opposition to Soviet talks with the US on the non-proliferation treaty. The Soviets were outright annoyed when the Great Leader welcomed a flare-up in the Middle East in 1967.⁴⁰ Soviet policy-makers feared a global military conflagration. The war in Vietnam, chaos in China, and instability in the Middle East forced Moscow to adjust its struggle against imperialism to international realities. A conflict in Korea was the last thing the Kremlin desired. To alleviate Soviet fears, Kim Il Sung repeatedly assured Moscow that he had no plans to unify Korea by force.⁴¹ [e.g. **Document 23**]

The Seizure of the *USS Pueblo*

Contradicting his assurances to Moscow, in early 1968 the North Korean leader took several highly provocative steps that alarmed and angered his Soviet patrons. On 17 January a group of thirty North Korean commandos unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate South Korean President Park Chung Hee at his official residence, the Blue House in Seoul. Kim apparently calculated that the political instability this act would unleash in the South would bring pro-North Korean elements to power, giving him another (possibly last) chance at the much-desired reunification. When the Blue House attack instead caused an anti-DPRK uproar in South Korea, Kim Il Sung responded by drumming-up war hysteria in the North. Moscow became alarmed by rumors of massive evacuations from Pyongyang.⁴² [**Document 23**]

Then, on 23 January the North Koreans captured an American intelligence-gathering ship *USS Pueblo* not far from the port of Wonsan. It is not entirely clear why

³⁹ “Conversation between Andrei Gromyko and Pak Song-ch’ol” (20 November 1967), AVPRF: fond 0102, opis 23, papka 110, delo 3, list 3.

⁴⁰ For Kim Il Sung’s reaction to the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1967 see “Report of the Soviet embassy in Pyongyang on the position of the KWP leadership in connection with the events in the Middle East” (5 August 1967), AVPRF: fond 0102, opis 23, papka 112, delo 24, list 82. For Kim’s statements regarding the non-proliferation treaty see “Report of the Soviet Foreign Ministry (DVO) on the foreign policy of the DPRK” (3 August 1967), AVPRF: fond 0102, opis 23, papka 112, delo 24, list 60.

⁴¹ “Leonid Brezhnev’s speech at the April (1968) CC CPSU Plenum” (9 April 1968), RGANI: fond 2, opis 3, delo 95, listy 50-58. Hereafter, “Leonid Brezhnev’s speech at the April (1968) CC CPSU Plenum”.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Kim Il Sung took such a risky step. It appears quite likely that the Great Leader tried to divert the attention of the North Korean public from the failures of his economic policy, which contradicted his glorious self-portrayal.⁴³ He may have also intended to deflect international criticism for the Blue House raid, blaming instead US “aggression” against the North.⁴⁴ In any case, both the Blue House raid and the *Pueblo* incident helped Kim mobilize the North Korean masses. In addition, by proving that tensions on the peninsula were as high as Kim had been warning his Soviet friends, the North Korean leader expected to extract further aid and concessions from Moscow.

The capture of the ship caused a serious international crisis. The United States immediately augmented its naval forces off the North Korean coast, amid calls for military action both in the US and South Korea. President Lyndon B. Johnson carefully maneuvered to avoid entanglement in another Korean War, but the prospect of war was real nonetheless. Policy discussion in the White House turned on Moscow’s role in the *Pueblo* affair. Johnson speculated that the *Pueblo* incident was “related to the whole picture” and said “he would not be surprised if something happened in Berlin to coincide with what is going on in Vietnam and in Korea.”⁴⁵ Defense Secretary Robert McNamara claimed that it was “clear” that the Soviets knew of the incident in advance, while Johnson’s National Security Adviser Walt Rostow toyed with the idea of capturing a Soviet intelligence ship for the sake of symmetry.⁴⁶

Contrary to White House assumptions, however, the capture of the *Pueblo* was an unwelcome surprise to Moscow. The Soviets were not consulted in advance. On 24 January North Korean Deputy Foreign Minister Kim Tae-bong informed the “fraternal” ambassadors in Pyongyang about the capture of the American ship following its alleged intrusion into the country’s territorial waters.⁴⁷ Kosygin later complained to North

⁴³ Mitch Lerner presents a well-argued case to this effect. Mitchell Lerner, *The Pueblo Incident*.

⁴⁴ Kathryn Weatherby makes this argument in her paper “The Enigma of the North Korean Regime: Back to the Future?”, presented at the Conference on the US-Korean Alliance and the Future of Northeast Asia, 6-7 December 2004, Johns Hopkins’ School of Advanced International Studies, Washington D.C.

⁴⁵ “Notes of the President’s Tuesday National Security Lunch” (23 January 1968), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-68*, Vol. XXIX (Korea), Document 213, Online:

http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xxix/v.html, Date accessed: 17 March 2005.

⁴⁶ “Summary Minutes of *Pueblo* Group” (24 January 1968), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-68*, Vol. XXIX (Korea), Document 220, Online:

http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xxix/w.html, Date accessed: 17 March 2005.

⁴⁷ Bernd Schaefer, “North Korean Adventurism and China’s Long Shadow, 1966-1972,” p. 52.

Korean Ambassador Chon Tu-hwan that the Soviet Union had learned about the *Pueblo* affair only from the press and called for “full trust and frankness in our relations” [Document 24]. In a speech to a CPSU Plenum in April Brezhnev bitterly criticized Pyongyang’s unwillingness to supply the Soviets with any information about the American-North Korean talks at Panmunjom over the fate of the *Pueblo*’s crew.⁴⁸ [Document 23] It was instead the Americans who provided transcripts of the discussions to the Soviet Ambassador in Washington, Anatoly Dobrynin.⁴⁹

Thus, in early 1968 Soviet leaders were uncertain of the intentions of their North Korean comrades. In his report on the incident to the April Party Plenum, Brezhnev noted that the capture of the *Pueblo* was “unusually harsh” by international standards.⁵⁰ American intelligence ships operated with impunity near Soviet military bases, and the Soviets freely monitored US communications off the American shores. The North Korean initiative created an unwanted precedent, disturbing the Soviet-American reciprocal spying arrangements. But aside from the possible ramifications for Soviet intelligence missions, North Korean “adventurism” could lead to another war on the Soviet Far Eastern flank. Brezhnev noted soberly that “the leaders of the DPRK began to take a more militant road,” and that Moscow had no appreciation for their “extreme position.” War hysteria in Pyongyang, public declarations of promises to “smash American imperialism,” and massive evacuations of North Korean cities contributed to Soviet suspicions of Kim Il Sung’s plans.

Neither before nor after the *Pueblo* incident did Kim Il Sung come to Moscow for consultations. Instead, on 31 January 1968 he sent a letter to Kosygin ominously warning that “Johnson’s clique could at any time engage in a military adventure in Korea,” and that if the Americans attacked, Pyongyang counted on Soviet support in accordance with its [1961] treaty obligations. Kim expressed his hope that in case of war “the Soviet government and the fraternal Soviet people will fight together with us against the aggressors.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ “Leonid Brezhnev’s speech at the April (1968) CC CPSU Plenum”.

⁴⁹ See “Conversation between Andrei Gromyko and Llewellyn Thompson” (26 February 1968), AVPRF: fond 102, opis 28, papka 55, delo 2, list 19.

⁵⁰ “Leonid Brezhnev’s speech at the April (1968) CC CPSU Plenum.”

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

The Soviet-North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance signed in 1961 was similar in content to many other such treaties with “fraternal states” that committed Moscow to the defense of its protectorates. In practice, however, Soviet commitment was not as absolute as the treaties stated. In December 1966 Brezhnev had explained the Soviet position with regard to the Sino-Soviet Treaty. “We cannot allow [a situation],” he said, “in which the adventurist course of the Chinese leaders would involve us in an international military conflict by virtue of our obligations as allies.”⁵² Brezhnev noted that the reason the Soviets had not denounced the treaty with China was that the alliance deterred the Americans to a certain extent. But if the Red Guards dragged China into a war with the US, the Soviet Union would let their Maoist friends fight it out alone.

In the North Korean case, Moscow’s approach was similar. Unable to control the actions of its trigger-happy ally, the Kremlin was unwilling to hold to the letter of the 1961 treaty. For all their fraternal obligations and ideological commitment to the North Korean regime, their readiness to support the DPRK economically and militarily, the Soviet leadership was determined to avoid a world war. In that sense, Soviet policy in the late 1960s was a continuation of the approach Stalin took in the late 1940s, when he sought to avoid a direct US-Soviet confrontation on the peninsula.⁵³ As Brezhnev pointed out, the North Koreans were trying “to bind the Soviet Union somehow, using the existence of the treaty between the USSR and the DPRK [as a pretext] to involve us in supporting plans of the Koreans friends that we knew nothing about.”⁵⁴ **[Document 23]** Soviet leaders often followed Pyongyang in condemning the Americans’ evil designs on the Korean peninsula, but they were not eager to follow their comrades into the abyss of war.

It is reasonable to ask whether Kim Il Sung was in reality planning to start another Korean War. Some indirect evidence supports this unlikely possibility. By the late 1960s,

⁵² “Leonid Brezhnev’s speech at the December (1966) CC CPSU Plenum” (12 December 1966), RGANI: fond 2, opis 3, delo 45, list 124.

⁵³ For Stalin’s apprehensions about the prospects of a direct Soviet-US clash on the Korean peninsula, see Kathryn Weathersby, “‘Should We Fear This?’: Stalin and the Danger of War with America,” *Cold War International History Project Working Paper* No. 39 (July 2002); and Alexandre Mansourov, “Stalin, Mao, Kim, and China’s Decision to Enter the Korean War, Sept. 16-Oct. 15, 1950: New Evidence from the Russian Archives,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issues 6-7 (Winter 1995/96): 94.

⁵⁴ “Leonid Brezhnev’s speech at the April (1968) CC CPSU Plenum.”

peaceful reunification of Korea on Pyongyang's terms was a withering prospect, and Kim must have realized this. The entrenched US military presence in South Korea and the resurgence of Japan posed serious dangers to Kim's insecure regime. North Korean warnings about imminent war on the peninsula were not simple propaganda tricks to win Soviet support, but at least in part a consequence of a besieged fortress mentality. Kim might have preferred a war on his terms to an eventual confrontation on the enemy's terms. In 1968, with US forces bogged down in Vietnam, he might have thought the time was ripe to strike across the 38th parallel. Without US intervention, Kim could hope to win the war. And he might have counted on military support from the PRC. In the mid-1960s the Soviets collected intelligence to the effect that the Chinese had promised Kim that they would send a million soldiers to fight another Korean War, if he dared to start it.⁵⁵ While the reliability of this information is in doubt, we cannot rule out such a secret Sino-North Korean arrangement, at least not until the opening of the Chinese or the North Korean archives proves otherwise.

Yet other evidence suggests that the Great Leader's war mongering was a bluff. At the time Moscow was trying to bring the Vietnam conflict to a peaceful end, Kim must have known that the Soviet Union would not back another war. He also could not have forgotten how during the 1950-53 Korean War Stalin almost abandoned Kim to his fate after the swift US offensive in the fall of 1950.⁵⁶ In the late 1960s, unlike the late 1940s, Kim Il Sung could not really count on Beijing's support – regardless of whether such was promised – because China was still in the throes of the Cultural Revolution and Beijing's relations with Pyongyang had deteriorated significantly since 1966-67, when Red Guards began excoriating Kim Il Sung as a “fat revisionist.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See “Report of the Soviet embassy in the DPRK on the Korean-Chinese relations in 1966” (2 December 1966), AVPRF: fond 0102, opis 22, papka 109, delo 22, list 47 and “Report of the Soviet Foreign Ministry (DVO) on the Korean-Chinese relations” (7 March 1967), AVPRF: fond 0102, opis 23, papka 112, delo 24, list 7.

⁵⁶ On 13 October 1950, having received word from Beijing that the Chinese would not after all send troops to aid North Korea, Stalin sent Kim Il Sung a telegram ordering the evacuation of North Korea's forces from DPRK territory. Stalin thus made it clear that the Soviet Union would not intervene to save Kim's crumbling regime. See Alexandre Mansourov, “Stalin, Mao, Kim, and China's Decision to Enter the Korean War, Sept. 16-Oct. 15, 1950: New Evidence from the Russian Archives,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issues 6-7 (Winter 1995/96): 104.

⁵⁷ Bernd Schaefer, “North Korean Adventurism and China's Long Shadow, 1966-1972”.

It seems most likely, therefore, that Kim Il Sung wanted tension for tensions' sake, in order to motivate the North Korean people to raise their political vigilance and military preparedness and double their efforts in economic construction. Kim would not have been the first to adopt such a tactic. Mao Zedong successfully used seemingly irrational foreign policy initiatives, such as shelling Guomindang-held islands off the Chinese coast in 1958 in order to mobilize the Chinese people for the Great Leap Forward. The parallel between the 1958 and the 1968 crises could be taken a step further. Mao used the shelling of the islands to test the extent of Moscow's commitment to China's defense. The Chinese leader was very disappointed with Khrushchev's reservations and later accused Moscow of renegeing on fraternal commitments.⁵⁸ Kim Il Sung might have similarly appealed to Soviet treaty obligations in order to test Moscow's resolve to defend North Korea in case of an American attack, which Kim did regard as a real possibility. Finally, Kim Il Sung may have wanted to heighten the tension in the Far East in order to extract further military and economic aid from Moscow. Kim's letter to Kosygin stated in a straightforward manner that the Soviets should provide North Korea "with military and other aid and support." This would be the price Moscow would pay in exchange for Kim restraining his bellicosity.⁵⁹

Whatever Kim's motives, the Soviet leaders were deeply alarmed by his letter. The Kremlin immediately requested consultations with the North Korean leader, but Kim refused to come, saying he was too busy with defense preparations. Instead, he dispatched Minister of Defense Kim Ch'ang-bong to Moscow. On 26 February 1968 Kim Ch'ang-bong had a long meeting with Brezhnev. The General Secretary told the North Korean visitor bluntly: "Indeed, we have a treaty. Its essence is known both to you and to us. We would like to stress that it has a defensive character and is an instrument of defending the peace-loving position of North Korea." Brezhnev explained that the Soviets were for peaceful unification of the two Koreas and that "in any case, under the current circumstances we are against taking matters towards unleashing a war." The Soviet leader urged the North Koreans to settle the *Pueblo* incident quickly and through

⁵⁸ On the Chinese and Soviet approaches to the Taiwan Straits crisis in 1958 see Li Xiaobing, Chen Jian and David Wilson, "Mao Zedong's Handling of the Taiwan Straits Crisis of 1958: Chinese Recollections and Documents" and Vladislav Zubok, "Khrushchev's Nuclear Promise to Beijing during the Crisis", *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* Issues 6-7 (Winter 1995/96): 208, 219.

⁵⁹ "Leonid Brezhnev's speech at the April (1968) CC CPSU Plenum".

political means or else risk losing a “serious political gain.” In essence, Brezhnev warned Kim Ch’ang-bong that a North Korean attack against the South would not be supported by Moscow and that in case Pyongyang launched a war, Kim Il Sung would have to bear the consequences on his own.⁶⁰

After this frank clarification of Moscow’s position, the situation in North Korea began to normalize. The DPRK Foreign Ministry published a statement pledging commitment to the peaceful unification of the two Koreas. On 1 March 1968 Kim Il Sung informed Soviet Ambassador Nikolai Sudarikov that he was not in favor of “military hysteria.” Instructions were issued to slow the pace of the evacuations. At another meeting in March Kim Il Sung claimed that “war is not a question of tomorrow.” As Brezhnev reported to the April Plenum, as a result of these measures “the atmosphere has relaxed somewhat, the passions on the Korean and on the American sides have calmed down. On the whole one might say that by pursuing our consistent [and] principled line in this affair, we managed, first of all, to chip away at the American arrogance [*sbit spes*], to rebuff their blackmail and threats and, secondly, to exert considerable dissuading influence on the leadership of the DPRK.”⁶¹

Soviet “pressure” on Washington was probably not as influential as Brezhnev claimed. After the capture of the *Pueblo*, the Soviets augmented naval forces in the Far East “in order to protect the country in case of complications and to let the Americans understand that we are not joking, but approach this matter seriously.”⁶² The Soviet build-up was intended to remind Washington of Soviet strategic interests in Northeast Asia and to demonstrate to Pyongyang its commitment to the “fraternal” regime. But the last thing the Soviet leaders wanted was to engage American military forces. Kosygin made this clear to US Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson on 6 February 1968, declaring “there were enough conflicts in world already and there was no need to have a new one.”⁶³ In other words, preserving peace in the region was Moscow’s foremost priority.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ “Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State” (6 February 1968), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-68*, Vol. XXIX (Korea), Document 269, Online: http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xxix/zb.html, Date accessed: 17 March 2005.

In order to persuade the US to decrease its military presence off the Korean coast and thereby reduce tensions, the Soviet leaders sent a letter to President Johnson on 3 February that amounted, Brezhnev explained to the Plenum, to “direct pressure on the leadership of the USA in order to lessen its urge and desire to inflame provocations in the immediate proximity of the borders of the USSR and in relation to countries allied with us.”⁶⁴ Brezhnev’s account of this letter suggests that it was almost an ultimatum to Washington, but Ambassador Thompson regarded the letter as “relatively mild.”⁶⁵ It demanded that the Americans scale back their build-up in the Sea of Japan. President Johnson, likewise eager to avoid hostilities, sent a reply several days later agreeing to move one of the military vessels “somewhat southward.”⁶⁶ To the Plenum Brezhnev described this development as outright capitulation: “[President Johnson] ‘gave an order to stop any further amassing of naval and air forces at the present time’ and decreed the withdrawal of one of the aircraft carriers with accompanying vessels from the region of the incident. Indeed, the aircraft carrier *USS Enterprise* was pulled out from the DPRK’s shores.”⁶⁷ Such a presentation of US actions was important for Soviet self-image as an equal of the United States, a concern that haunted Soviet leaders throughout the 1970s.

More importantly, Brezhnev likely exaggerated the influence the Soviets had on Pyongyang. Kim Il Sung was persuaded not to fight a war that he most likely never intended to fight. For the North Korean leader, the military hysteria following the seizure of the *Pueblo* served to direct the public’s attention away from his domestic failures. The captured American sailors, their many confessions and apologies were an excellent propaganda resource for Kim. Consequently, Kim did not release the *Pueblo* crew until December 1968.⁶⁸

If Kim had been trying to test Moscow’s commitment to North Korea’s defense, he discovered its limits. The Soviets were willing to supply North Korea’s needs, but not

⁶⁴ “Leonid Brezhnev’s speech at the April (1968) CC CPSU Plenum”.

⁶⁵ “Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State” (3 February 1968), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-68*, Vol. XXIX (Korea), Document 260, Online: http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xxix/za.html, Date accessed: 17 March 2005.

⁶⁶ “Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union” (6 February 1968), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-68*, Vol. XXIX (Korea), Document 268, Online: http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xxix/zb.html, Date accessed: 17 March 2005.

⁶⁷ “Leonid Brezhnev’s speech at the April (1968) CC CPSU Plenum”.

⁶⁸ Mitchell Lerner, *The Pueblo Incident*, 213.

to risk a major war on Kim's behalf. Kim Il Sung could, however, obtain additional weapons and economic aid by raising the level of tensions on the Korean peninsula. After all, how could Moscow fail to support the state that stood on the frontline of the struggle against American imperialism? This trick worked well for Kim. Brezhnev informed the North Korean minister of defense "we fully understand the desire of the DPRK to strengthen its own defense and we actively support this."⁶⁹ [Document 23] Soviet support translated over the years into more subsidies for unpredictable and unreliable North Korea.

Conclusion

Brezhnev explained to the Party Plenum in April 1968: "the essence of [our] line [with regard to North Korea] is to consistently strengthen friendly relations with the KWP and the DPRK despite the existence of different approaches between us and the Korean comrades on a series of questions [...]"⁷⁰ Several factors led Moscow into this difficult position. First, the post-Khrushchev leadership, departing from their predecessor's "voluntarism," reaffirmed their ideological commitment to North Korea as part of a more "class-conscious" foreign policy. In naïve pursuit of this goal, the new Soviet leaders attempted to repair relations with China and committed the Soviet Union to the support of North Vietnam and North Korea. The Chinese leadership rebuffed Moscow's advances, but Soviet involvement with Hanoi and Pyongyang grew considerably in the mid and late-1960s. At the same time, increasingly hostile relations with Beijing heightened Soviet interest in meeting the needs of China's immediate neighbors.

North Korea thus received free weapons and economic aid from its Soviet comrades while maintaining considerable political freedom. As a result, North Korea often found itself at odds with Soviet foreign policy. While Moscow was eager to lessen international tensions and avoid a war, Kim's militancy compromised this aim. The *Pueblo* crisis caught the Soviets by surprise, and Kim was unwilling to enlighten the

⁶⁹ "Leonid Brezhnev's speech at the April (1968) CC CPSU Plenum".

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Kremlin as to his intentions. The resulting uncertainty raised anxiety in Moscow as Soviet leaders tried to keep their militant ally from sparking a war with the United States.

Moscow's leverage over Pyongyang was constrained by Soviet strategic concerns and ideological commitment to North Korea. Indeed, the *Pueblo* crisis did not lead to a worsening of Soviet-North Korean relations or to a reduction in Soviet aid as a punishment for Kim Il Sung's adventurism. On the contrary, Soviet aid and support continued, since breaking off this support would compromise the ideological pillar of Moscow's foreign policy and threaten Soviet security in Northeast Asia. The *Pueblo* incident thus represented a dramatic reversal of Cold War assumptions, as the Soviet Union found itself manipulated by a militant client it could not afford to control.

Appendix: Documents on Soviet-North Korean Relations, 1962-1968

Document 1

Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky and Kim Il Sung, 14 August 1962

[Source: Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (hereafter AVPRF), fond 0102, opis 18, papka 93, delo 5, listy 3-9. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

14 August 1962

[I] paid a visit to comrade Kim Il Sung in the building of the Cabinet of Ministers of the DPRK. After mutual greetings a conversation took place that lasted for 1 hour 15 minutes. Foreign Minister of the DPRK Pak Song Ch'ol was present during the conversation.

In the course of the conversation, comrade Kim Il Sung said the following:

We are happy to greet the new extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador of the USSR in the DPRK and express confidence that relations of fraternal friendship and cooperation between our peoples, governments, parties, and between us personally will further strengthen and develop.

This should be expected, added comrade Kim Il Sung, because our friendly relations are historically formed [and] traditional. The Soviet Union is our liberator and the best friend; it provides us with aid and support. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union is the vanguard of the international communist and workers' movement; it is a kind of an elder brother for our party. The CPSU has always helped our party, supported it [and] provided it with useful advice. We believe that the Korean Workers' Party is the younger brother of the CPSU. Therefore, stressed comrade Kim Il Sung, we have always and fully supported and will support your party and government in all matters. We will further educate our people in the spirit of internationalist fraternal friendship with the Soviet people, which has deep historical roots. This is our duty as communists.

To you, as to the ambassador representing here the Communist Party and the government of the Soviet Union, continued comrade Kim Il Sung, we will provide full support in work, inform you about all the changes that take place in our country. We, as true friends, do not have secrets from each other. [...]

[I] thanked comrade Kim Il Sung for a detailed account, conveyed to him friendly greetings and wishes of good health from comrade N.S. Khrushchev, told [him] about my meeting with comrade Khrushchev before my departure for Pyongyang. Nikita Sergeevich asked [me] to pass on [to you] that the Central Committee and he personally believe that relations between our parties have been good and we are happy with this. Comrade Kim Il Sung replied that he fully agreed with this estimate of Nikita Sergeevich and believed that we had no unclear questions and doubts. [...]

When I passed on to Kim Il Sung Nikita Sergeevich's invitation to visit or come for a [medical] treatment in the Soviet Union, he cordially thanked [me] for the invitation, promised to make use of this invitation as soon as this becomes necessary for health, and stressed that he had no one else to ask for medical help except the CPSU.

Further, comrade Kim Il Sung said that after the holiday he plans to attend to military matters, become acquainted with the state of defense of the country. In this regard, he mentioned the significant military aid provided by the Soviet Union to the DPRK during his visit to Moscow in the summer of 1961, as well as the aid being provided at the present time by the Soviet comrades in the sphere of air defense. He also added that soon after the holiday of 15 August he will meet with the Soviet ambassador and talk about military matters. [...]

Document 2

Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky and North Korean Foreign Minister Pak Song Ch'ol, 26 August 1962

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 18, papka 93, delo 5, listy 28-29. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

26 August 1962

Minister of Foreign Affairs comrade Pak Song Ch'ol invited me and [Soviet] counselors to have a day of rest, on Sunday, 26 August, together with him and several officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK. [...]

[Pak Song Ch'ol:] Now our party has adopted a dictum: to build socialism based on self-reliance. We know that already some people are inclined to accuse us of nationalism and even of opposition to the international division of labor. But this is not correct, says Pak Song Ch'ol, for we cannot tell [*orientirovat*] our people all our lives, until we build communism, that the Soviet Union and the PRC will help us, will give us everything. We already have many [people with] parasitic attitudes, [who say] that it is time to work a little less, make lesser aims, ask for more technologies from the Soviet friends, that is – that the Soviet Union and the PRC take on greater responsibilities in the construction of communism in the DPRK. This is also wrong. Here is where we took the dictum of “self-reliance.” And some people are already trying to connect this dictum with the [allegation] that [we] ignore the experience of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries and do not want to take COMECON into account. [...]

Document 3

Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky and acting Soviet Military Attaché Ustinov

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 18, papka 93, delo 5, list 48. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

1 September 1962

Acting Military Attaché of the Embassy Colonel Ustinov reported that the second detachment of the airplanes we have presented to the DPRK have successfully landed on the airfield near the Chinese border. One fact deserves attention – a fact that the Korean military does not hide from us. They do not want the Chinese to see or to know that

Soviet pilots landed planes on this airfield. Therefore all measures were adopted in order to quickly take the Soviet pilots away from the airfield and organize their rest in a different place. [...] Here, in Korea, everything is done in order that [the existence of the Soviet] planes and submarines be unknown to the Chinese friends. We have still not ascertained the reasons for this phenomenon.

Document 4

Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky and Kim Il Sung, 1 November 1962

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 18, papka 93, delo 5, listy 135-138. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

1 November 1962

On 1 November at 12 in the afternoon [I] was received by comrade Kim Il Sung at my request. At the beginning of the conversation comrade Kim Il Sung asked what impression I had from my trip to Panmunjom. [I] told comrade Kim Il Sung that during [my] trip to Panmunjom I was particularly greatly impressed by the neutral zone, the American houses, the American soldiers, and then – for several kilometers to the South – abandoned land. The picture is not a happy one, when one knows that all of this could be used in the interests of the people if the motherland were reunified. Probably rice was grown and peaceful farmers lived on this land, where now American garrisons are located; therefore, I said, my impression from the trip is a heavy one. Comrade Kim Il Sung agreed with me.

I told comrade Kim Il Sung that the Korean general Ch'ang Ch'ong Hwan held a dinner in honor of my visit, at which we had a pleasant and useful conversation, that the general himself made a good impression on me. Further, [I] told comrade Kim Il Sung that Moscow paid great attention to the concern that he [Kim Il Sung] voiced in a conversation with me [on 14 August 1962] regarding the necessity of strengthening the defense of the DPRK and, in particular, anti-aircraft defense.

Comrade Kim Il Sung thanked me for this message [and] took over the initiative in the conversation. He informed me that recently, when [U.S. President John F.] Kennedy made noise about Cuban affairs, they [the North Koreans] had a meeting of the main Military Council under the CC KWP. The meeting discussed the question of the state of defense along the sea and land borders of the DPRK.

We came to the conclusion, said comrade Kim Il Sung, that our border along the 38th parallel is firmly defended [na prochnom zamke]. Defensive lines in several layers, built into the mountains and hills, give us an opportunity to fully destroy the enemy if he attempts to break through to the North. The defense of the coastline and air defense are in much poorer shape. The coastline from Wonsan to Ch'ongjin and further out is one of our vulnerable places. Major cities, such as Ch'ongjin, Wonsan, Hamhung, Pyongyang, and others are poorly protected from air [raids]. The Military Council made an appropriate decision regarding further strengthening of the DPRK's defense and improving battle readiness of the forces, but, taking into consideration the presence of new American equipment in South Korea, probably our decisions will not be sufficient. I am pleased, noted comrade Kim Il Sung, that the Soviet government approached with understanding the question of defense of our Republic. If the Soviet government does not mind, we are ready to send a military delegation for talks on the question of providing aid to us.

I said for my part, that [I] will immediately bring this request to the attention of the Soviet government.

Comrade Kim Il Sung further explained his point of view with regard to the events around Cuba. He said that in no country does the revolution go smoothly; that many unexpected matters come up in the course of its development; that the revolution in Cuba was not made by the Russians, the Koreans, the Chinese [or] the Czechs; that it was carried out by the [Cuban] people themselves; and the essence of our task is to support it [the revolution] by all means, but to support it wisely, not to take the matter to extremes.

I know, comrade Kim Il Sung said further, that in some circles the initiative of N.S. Khrushchev is looked upon as a concession to the Americans, but I personally believe that in this complicated situation the Soviet government and N.S. Khrushchev made the sole correct decision, and this decision speaks not to the weakness of the Soviet Union, but to its strength and to the wisdom of its government. The socialist camp does not need a war right now. Comrade Kim Il Sung stressed several times that a war is not needed right now. If we manage to ensure that the USA removes all kinds of blockades of Cuba, then this will demonstrate not the weakness, but the strength of the Soviet Union and the wisdom of its government.

Comrade Kim Il Sung further inquired how the preparations for the 45th anniversary of the October Revolution are coming along in the Soviet Union.

I told [him] that this year the 45th anniversary of the Great October socialist revolution in our country has been greeted by great successes in industry and good results in agriculture. Therefore, from the point of view of our internal successes, the 45th anniversary of October will be commemorated with festivity. How the international situation will develop is difficult to tell now.

When I talked about the successes of our industry in light of information from the C[entral] S[tatistics] D[irectorate] of the USSR, comrade Kim Il Sung said the following:

A restructuring of industry was recently carried out in the DPRK. The main thing in this restructuring was a change in the system of supplying industry and strengthening party control over industry. We increased the party apparatus in the party com[mittees] of industrial enterprises, gave the party com[mittees] significant rights, and this eradicated [sveli na net] former one-manager's rule [edinonachalie]. Three months have passed and I can state with confidence that all our large enterprises have begun working better.

The thing is that it is becoming difficult for one director and one manager to direct a large enterprise. Therefore we decided to organize a complex management, that is –

management by a party com[mittee], which includes the director himself and which controls him. One should say right away that red tape and subjectivism have been reduced considerably in the solution of this or that question, and the directors themselves say that it has become easier for them to manage the enterprise on the basis of a collective decision of a party com[mittee]. [...]

Document 5

Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky and Kim Il Sung, 10 November 1962

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 18, papka 93, delo 5, listy 144-146. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

10 November 1962

The Aleksandrov Ensemble of the Soviet Army performed in the great theatre of Pyongyang; com. Kim Il Sung, other members of the Politburo, members of the government, ministers, and many members of the CC KWP attended. After the concert, comrade Kim Il Sung hosted a small reception for the leaders of the Ensemble, where he made a brief speech. [...]

The further we move [in time] from the day of the liberation of our country by the Soviet Army, said comrade Kim Il Sung, the brighter its heroic deed stands out before us, the heroic deed of the entire Soviet people in the liberation of Korea from Japanese imperialism. The Korean people will never forget this heroic deed. We know that it is thanks only to the Soviet people and their Army that we obtained the opportunity of independent development of our socialist state. [...]

The Russian folk songs make one sad and happy; they inspire confidence in victory, praise the heroism, courage, and valor of the Soviet people. I always listen to these songs with great pleasure. I think that my colleagues listen to them with the same kind of pleasure.

He [Kim Il Sung] raised the first toast to the Soviet people, who liberated Korea from the Japanese yoke, to the CPSU, to its leadership. Relations between our parties, said comrade Kim Il Sung, have been remarkably good. [...]

In the break between the concert sections, comrade Kim Il Sung remarked very positively on Russian folk songs, Russian music, and sharply criticized jazz music, which, he said, he simply cannot bear to listen to.

Document 6
Record of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky and Kim Il Sung, 14 November 1962

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 18, papka 93, delo 5, listy 152-154. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

14 November 1962

[I] Visited comrade Kim Il Sung.

[I] informed him that Moscow is prepared to receive a military delegation at a time suitable to the Korean friends. Comrade Kim Il Sung thanked [us] for the prompt resolution of the question of the delegation's visit, having said that we have not yet confirmed the final composition of the delegation, but there was an exchange of opinions on this question in the Politburo and we are thinking of sending a military delegation headed by Kim Kwang Hyop, my deputy, because the new Minister of Defense is ill and remains at the hospital for treatment. [We] are thinking of including the head of the General Staff in the composition of the delegation, and then we will see whom else [to include].

The situation with regard to the defense of our country is a difficult one; as I told you before, the country's air defense is exceptionally weak, a significant part of the coastline is not defended. Of course, we are unable to compete with the USA in the sphere of arms and defense activities; the USSR is doing this successfully. But we are compelled to ask

for significant help from the Soviet Union this time. For defense of the coastline we will require, additionally, submarines, and for air defense – MIG-21s. Whereas now we have only 2 “surface-to-air” missile divisions, we will need to raise their number to 14 divisions. According to preliminary cost estimates, this aid will cost approximately 100 million rubles. But, as I told you before, at the present time we do not have such funds. Therefore we will request the Soviet government to provide us with weapons aid free of charge. I hope, said comrade Kim Il Sung, that comrades [Nikita] Khrushchev and [Frol] Kozlov understand the reasons for this request and I know that they are no less concerned than I about the defense of the Far Eastern forward post. Addressing himself to me, comrade Kim Il Sung said that you have toured the whole Eastern coast and have seen that it provides a convenient platform for the enemy’s landing. You have also been to the South and saw for yourself that the situation on the border is tense. Therefore, we are counting on your help in the talks [in Moscow].

Then comrade Kim Il Sung asked me to convey hearty greetings personally from him to comrades Khrushchev, Kozlov, and [Aleksei] Kosygin and to inform them that the situation in the country is good, and that the plan for grain harvesting and preparation will be implemented fully. In industry, with the exception of the coal [industry], things are coming along just as well. The plans and obligations will be fulfilled this year.

Inside our party the situation is also good. We have now achieved firm unity and cohesion, there are no anti-party groups. In our opinion, the KWP is now cohesive and battle-ready as never before. Pass on to comrades Khrushchev [and] Kozlov that we, as before, fully support the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; we have no doubts in the correctness of its domestic and foreign policies.

I heard, comrade Kim Il Sung said further, that you had a conversation today with the Minister of External Trade Li Il Gen[?]. I am aware that talks are being held in Moscow at the experts level and I would very much request that Moscow support us on the main positions: that is, 10 thousand tons of cotton and 70-60 thousand tons of wheat. I have agreed on these questions with comrade Khrushchev, and I think it is not necessary to

review them. Regarding cotton, you know that we do not grow our own cotton, and the Chinese for several years have had a bad harvest of cotton. They used to give us up to 40 thousand tons, but now, because of the bad harvest, they cannot do this. Although our chemical industry is developing successfully, it also is not yet capable of providing us with the necessary quantity of artificial fibers and cloth. Therefore I would ask you to request that comrades Kozlov and Kosygin support us in this question. We will take all measures to fulfill our mutual obligations to the Soviet Union, our situation improves from year to year, and we will repay the debt.

[Kim Il Sung] asked me when I would be leaving for Moscow and how long I would stay there. [I] replied that I would be leaving tomorrow and will stay in Moscow for as many days as the Plenum work requires. It would be good, said comrade Kim Il Sung, if you participated in the meetings with the military delegation in Moscow. I replied that my government, and not I, decide this question.

Again, I would like to thank comrades Khrushchev, Kozlov, [and] Kosygin for deep understanding of our needs and ask [you] to convey to them greetings and best wishes personally from me, said comrade Kim Il Sung.

Document 7

Record of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky and North Korean Foreign Minister Pak Song Ch'ol, 29 December 1962

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 19, papka 97, delo 4, listy 3-5. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

29 December 1962

[...] Tonight [I] visited a reception hosted by the Romanian ambassador. During the reception [I] had brief exchanges with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, comrade Pak Song Ch'ol. [...]

Pak Song Ch'ol evaded the question of why the Korean leadership did not inform the ambassadors about the recent plenum, and then, as if [he found] an excuse, declared that it was difficult for him to speak Russian [...]. I remarked that his Russian was not worse than comrade Kim Il Sung's, and comrade Kim Il Sung can speak and understand us without an interpreter. Pak Song Ch'ol replied that he studied the Japanese language in his childhood and youth, and later – Chinese. He knows Japanese well now, and Chinese to a lesser extent, but comrade Kim Il Sung knows the Chinese language better than Russian. [I] did not understand whether a hint was dropped here that their leader understands the Chinese better than the Russians or whether this was simply an answer to an exchange regarding the knowledge of languages.

Document 8

Record of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky and North Korean Foreign Minister Pak Song Ch'ol, 3 January 1963

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 19, papka 97, delo 4, listy 8-12. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

3 January 1963

In the evening the Minister of Foreign Affairs Pak Song Ch'ol held the New Year's dinner, to which ambassadors and charges d'affaires and their wives were invited. From the Korean side, the minister, his deputies, and heads of departments of the MFA DPRK were present at the reception.

At the beginning of his speech directed towards the ambassadors, Pak Song Ch'ol touched on the successes of the DPRK in conquering the 6 economic heights. Then he went into lengthy and broad propaganda [*agitatsiei*] regarding the necessity of strengthening friendship with the peoples of the Soviet Union and China, [and] the friendship of all socialist countries with them [Soviet Union and China].

In order to defeat imperialism, he said, we must [display] cohesion, we must strengthen unity.

After the first toast, permeated by insincere babbling about unity, the minister, his deputies, and the Chinese charge d'affaires, who was sitting right in front of me, pronounced another 4-5 toasts for unity. With this, the Korean comrades tried to play [the role of] a kind of mediator between countries that did not have unity between themselves.

Having listened to all of these calls for unity, I asked the minister what could explain [the fact] that all his deputies and the Chinese charge d'affaires are calling for unity all evening. Has the unity between the DPRK and the USSR been broken, what's the matter here?

The minister started explaining to me again that it is necessary to strengthen the cohesion of all countries of the socialist camp and strive towards full isolation and contempt [sic] of the imperialists. After this I asked those who were sitting at the same table with me to hear my point of view on this question. I said that the Soviet people are building communism. You, the Korean and the Chinese comrades, also drew socialism and communism on your banner. This means that we have one goal, and we are united. However, despite the fact that [we have] one goal, the roads to this goal have become different for some time. There are two roads to achieve this goal – the first is the bloody road, the second is the peaceful [road], but with intensified class struggle.

All the Soviet people stand on the second road, but the Albanian leaders and some Chinese comrades prefer the first road. Our people believe in the decision of their party and we will follow only the road of peaceful co-existence. We do not have one opinion with the Albanian and the Chinese comrades on this question, and it is very bad that they were afraid for a long time to tell us openly about this, but played a bad game, directed at the sabotage of the unity of the socialist camp.

I noted further that the second question, regarding which much has been said today, is the question of unity on [the basis of] principles of Marxism-Leninism. I was listening for a long time and with attention to your statements on this issue, and one gets the impression

that someone among those present [has] retreated from the principles of Marxism-Leninism, and that you want to direct someone towards the true road, but whom – you do not say.

We have a proverb: “the hat burns on the thief’s [head].” I am not concerned about this question, and I do not go into the discussion of this question, for I know firmly that the CPSU is true to Marxism-Leninism and correctly applies this teaching. You, on the other hand, all evening display [your] concern regarding someone’s alleged unfaithfulness to Marxism-Leninism.

During the five months of my stay here I read a great number of articles from the Chinese and the Korean press that had many overt and covert accusations addressed to someone, to the effect that these unknowns, under the cover of a creative approach, are allegedly perverting Marxism-Leninism. You have not stressed this here, but in the press you come out against the creative application of the Marxist-Leninist teaching.

One can see a dogmatic approach to this teaching from your articles in the newspapers. But, indeed, V.I. Lenin permitted and even decreed that we use his teaching creatively. What do you want then, with whom are you fighting in this question – with Lenin? And so you, our dear Chinese charge d’affaires, are saying today that [you] are for principled unity on the basis of Marxism-Leninism, [and] you are prepared to get so drunk at this reception as to fall under the table. To fall under the table and to pull you out of there is not a difficult thing, and it is not the first time that we will have to pull you out. But to pull you out onto the right Leninist course – this is a more difficult issue, and in the course of one evening at this reception [this is] simply impossible.

The comrades listened to me and did not get into polemics, and the minister again offered a toast to friendship and unity.

Then the Polish ambassador, comrade Dryglyas, [transliteration from the Russian spelling] remarked that we should speak frankly among ourselves, that the Poles have a

saying, similar to a Russian one, something like “what a sober man has on his mind, a drunk man has on his tongue.” Today at the New Year’s party, the Ambassador said, we have had a little to drink, so let’s talk frankly. The minister supported this proposal [and] suggested that we have another drink and then have a talk.

I said that this saying in no way fits us as communists. If you treat someone [to a drink] in order to extract something from him [while he is] under influence, then this is an unprofitable method in relations between communists. As far as I know, we [in the Soviet Union] impose party sanctions for these methods. Bourgeois diplomats use such methods, but in the circle of ambassadors of socialist countries, as I see it, comrade minister, this is inappropriate. One should and must talk about politics only when sober.

The minister and the Polish ambassador agreed with me.

After this I asked to raise a toast to the minister’s wife and to his children. I wished the minister’s family health and many joys in life and said that the joy for children and for all of us would be, first of all, peace in the world. The minister’s wife added in response that the happy and joyful life for her and her children also depend on the unity of the socialist countries. Having noted that I tried to avoid a political toast, but tried in vain, [I] offered to join my common toast with a political addition of the minister’s wife, but still to drink to their family’s happiness. Happiness of a friend’s family, with whom we work on the solution of common problems is a matter of concern for us. Everyone agreed, felt flattered, and the conversation on political subjects ended at this, though the tipsy Chinese charge d’affaires went on mumbling to himself something about unity. [...]

Document 9

Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky and North Korean Foreign Ministry Official Pak Yong-guk, 1 April 1963

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 19, papka 97, delo 4, list 169. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

1 April 1963

In connection with the departure for the motherland of the counselor-emissary comrade Kryukov M.E., the Embassy hosted a cocktail reception in the evening. [...]

Comrade Pak Yong-guk (head of the 1st department) spoke on behalf of the MFA DPRK. [...]

“The old diplomats understand us better” said comrade Pak Yong-guk. It is difficult to say what he had in mind: perhaps he had the intention of causing a quarrel between the old ambassadors in the DPRK with the new ones, or perhaps he meant to thank the “old” diplomats of the Soviet Embassy for the fact that they worked for five years but stayed on the leash of the MFA DPRK and were not able to figure out that views and sentiments were being formed here that are far from compatible with the official assurances of eternal friendship.

Document 10

From the Diary of Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky, 6 April 1963

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 19, papka 97, delo 4, list 187. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

6 April 1963

[...] Ambassador’s briefing [by the Soviet Foreign Ministry] has been weak so far. Sometimes this leads to the thought that the country to which I have been assigned is probably not a very important one, though the disagreements with China, as I see it, make this country important for study, because the knot [sic] is now here.

Document 11

Record of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky and Kim Il Sung, 22 April 1963

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 19, papka 97, delo 4, listy 207-217. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

22 April 1963

At 9 hours 30 minutes [I] visited comrade Kim Il Sung upon his invitation.

Having greeted [me] comrade Kim Il Sung congratulated [me] on the birthday of V.I. Lenin and said that they annually extensively celebrate this remarkable occasion, that if it were not for Lenin, then, probably, you and we would not be meeting here today talking about our business.

[I] thanked comrade Kim Il Sung and, on my part, also congratulated him on this great holiday. Having explained the essence of our answer to the memorandum of the government of the PRC dated 20 October 1962, [I] handed comrade Kim Il Sung a copy of the answer of the Soviet government to the government of the PRC.

Comrade Kim Il Sung thanked [me] for the information and said that they will with pleasure acquaint themselves with the copy of this document as it touches upon an exceptionally important question – the question of defense of the countries of the socialist camp.

A long pause followed. It could be seen that he was either unprepared for a conversation on this subject or did not want to disclose his views ahead of time.

After a period of silence, comrade Kim Il Sung said: since we have not met with you for a while, I would like to inform you regarding some questions of the economic development of our country.

You are probably already familiar with the information of the C[entral] S[tatistics] D[irectorate] regarding the work of industry in the first quarter. We believe that these are good results. We are taking a number of significant measures for improving the state of

affairs in industry; with this, we base ourselves on the fact that we exert our influence on South Korea by successful economic development in North Korea.

[I] noted that this was in accordance with the Leninist manner, that comrade Kim Il Sung probably remembers Lenin's instruction that we will exert our main influence on the capitalists by our economic successes. Kim Il Sung said that yes, he remembers this instruction.

We are committing great efforts to the development of socialist industry in the country, said comrade Kim Il Sung, although I have to tell you that in 1963 we will not speed up the pace in comparison with 1962, but will do everything in order to solidify the successes achieved in 1962. We have now uncovered significant lagging behind on the part of the mining industry, which began to hold back the processing industry. In this connection, our metals processing plans are not working at full capacity, one can feel the shortage of coal. [...]

At the beginning of the conversation, said Kim Il Sung, I noted that we exert the greatest influence on South Korea by the development of our economy. In this connection, I would like to talk briefly about the situation in South Korea. At the present time the intelligentsia of South Korea speaks from the platform of political and economic independence, although it does not speak out openly against the USA. Many interesting editorial articles have appeared; and they also argue the line of the necessity of the independent political and economic development of South Korea. We like these articles. They show that the intelligentsia and the national bourgeoisie of South Korea do not support the government of Park Chung Hee and see that he, lacking his own finances for the development of the economy, is failing the so called Five Year Plan.

I cannot tell you now that some major events can be expected, but in my view, said comrade Kim Il Sung, the revolutionary situation is developing successfully and is ripening. Under these circumstances, we feel great responsibility for the situation in the

South of the country and see our main task in constant strengthening of the base of the liberation of South Korea – the DPRK. [...]

In the sphere of ideological work, continued comrade Kim Il Sung, I would like to tell you first of all that I was pleased to have acquainted myself with a series of statements on this subject [tightening screws on the intelligentsia] made by comrade N.S. Khrushchev [in December 1962 and March 1963]. We like many things in these statements. We think that the CC CPSU does the right thing when it takes the leadership of the intelligentsia's work into its own hands. One must not allow these characters to get out of hand [*raspuskat etu pubkiku nelzya*].

We are currently paying much attention here to questions of class education. We are doing this because the youth does not know about the conditions of life and work under capitalism. They think that all they are using now came to us without any struggle. This is the first thing, which makes us seriously look into questions of the class education of youth. Secondly, we know that the unification of the country will create additional difficulties for us. We know that after the unification we will have to sustain major ideological work in the territory of South Korea, and we have to prepare the entire population of the DPRK for this work. [...]

Document 12

Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky and the First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the DPRK Kim Il, 11 June 1963

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 19, papka 97, delo 5, list 74. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

11 June 1963

In accordance with instructions from the center, [I] visited the First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the DPRK Kim Il. [...] [I] read out the information to Kim Il [no further details given]. [...]

Having attentively listened to me, comrade Kim Il thanked me for the confidential information regarding the foreign policy steps of the Soviet government.

He did not make any remarks regarding the essence of the information, having merely remarked that one must not trust the American imperialists and it is necessary to keep up one's guard with them.

In the course of the conversation that followed, I told comrade Kim Il about the impression that F[idel] Castro gained from his tour of the Soviet Union [in May 1963] and his visit to one missile regiment. Kim Il remarked that missiles are a good thing and added that one should let the Americans feel what kind of missiles these are [*chto predstavlyayut soboi eti rakety*].

Document 13

Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky and Romanian Ambassador to North Korea [M.] Bodnaras⁷¹

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 19, papka 97, delo 5, listy 81-83. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

22 August 1963

On the first day of my return from vacation [I] received the Romanian ambassador, comrade Bodnaras at his request. [...]

He declared that recently he had two meetings with comrade Kim Il Sung and came in order to inform me about the content of the conversations. [...]

[The second] conversation [between Kim Il Sung and the Romanian] ambassador lasted 4 hours.

⁷¹ Balazs Szalontai unearthed the Hungarian version of the conversation between Moskovsky and Bodnaras; the content appears similar to this document. See Balazs Szalontai, *The Failure of De-Stalinization in North Korea, 1953-1964: The DPRK in a Comparative Perspective*, PhD thesis (Budapest: Central European University, 2003).

At the beginning of the conversation Kim Il Sung declared that he was equally upset and “insulted” by the actions of the Chinese and by the “attacks on China” on the part of the Soviet leaders.

Kim Il Sung told the Romanian ambassador that the Chinese are taking extreme measures, bordering on the severance of all relations, that he, Kim Il Sung, does not approve of their position and thinks that if the Chinese displayed cool mindedness and patience, one could avoid [these] extremes. He is concerned about these extreme Chinese measures, and at the same time he does not share the point of view of the leaders of the Soviet Union who have recently launched “vicious attacks against the Chinese party.”[...]

In the course of the conversation Kim Il Sung touched on the relations between the KWP and the CPSU. He declared that comrade [Anastas] Mikoyan’s visit to the DPRK in 1956 introduced unwanted layers to these relations. The visit of comrades Mikoyan and Peng Dehuai, said Kim Il Sung, insulted the CC KWP. After this visit, some of the Soviet Koreans were shot, and he, Kim Il Sung, now regrets this. He now looks at these events with different eyes, and if he had known everything back then, he would not have allowed these events [to take place].

Document 14
From the Diary of Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky, 4
September 1963

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 19, papka 97, delo 5, list 112. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

4 September 1963

I am noticing as of late that all responsible Korean officials, beginning with the highest leadership, have turned into meteorologists. They cannot find any other topic for discussion except for weather. [...]

Document 15

Record of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky and First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the DPRK Kim Il, 4 September 1963

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 19, papka 97, delo 5, list 124. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

4 September 1963

[I] was present at the conversation of the First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Kim Il, with the delegation of the Soviet-Korean Friendship Society. At the beginning of the reception Kim Il thanked the members of the delegation for coming to the 15th anniversary celebrations of the establishment of the DPRK. In this connection, the head of the delegation comrade Stepakov V.I. replied that the delegation was quite grateful for the invitation. We stand, continued comrade Stepakov, for the strengthening of friendship, for its development, for we believe that this is useful both for the Soviet and for the Korean peoples. We have no reasons to be poor friends. We look at this invitation as an effort to further strengthen Korean-Soviet friendship and we approach this visit very responsibly.

Kim Il hesitated somewhat and replied that the friendship between the Korean and the Soviet peoples has great meaning and that he does not think that our friendship is a poor one.

Document 16

From the Diary of Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky, 26 September 1963

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 19, papka 97, delo 5, list 159. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

26 September 1963

[...] Analyzing the development of events I again and again arrive at the conclusion that if [the former Soviet Ambassador A. Puzanov] had listened to subordinates more attentively, and not just to Kim Il Sung, it might have been possible to decipher as early as 1961 where the Koreans are looking – to the East or to the West. [...]

Document 17

Record of Conversation between Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vasily Kuznetsov and North Korean Ambassador to the Soviet Union Kim Pyong-chik, 17 April 1965

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 21, papka 105, delo 2, listy 17-20. Obtained and translated by Sergey Radchenko]

April 17, 1965

Kim Pyong-chik informed [Kuznetsov] about the situation in South Korea and the demonstrations there against the Japanese-South Korean negotiations.

This [protest] movement, said Kim Pyong-chik, is directed by an underground branch of the Korean Worker's Party, which is not "yet sufficiently strong." Under such circumstances, the main task lies in awakening the conscience of the workers and peasants and in organizing them. [...]

Opposition parties also take part in the movement against the Japanese-South Korean talks. They, of course, have their own goals, and they do not speak out in the interests of the people. However, we intend to use their activities. [...]

Of course, sooner or later, the treaty on normalization of Japanese-South Korean relations will be signed. But our task is to delay ratification as long as possible, and to educate and unite the people's masses in the course of the extensive movement for breaking off the negotiations. [...]

Kim Pyong-chik thanked V.V. Kuznetsov for Soviet support of the DPRK in this question [of opposition to the Japanese-South Korean talks], because “it is better to publish materials in *Pravda* one time than a hundred times in the Korean newspaper *Nodon Sinmun*, since the whole world reads *Pravda*.”

Document 18

Record of Conversation between Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vasily Kuznetsov and the North Korean Ambassador to the Soviet Union Kim Pyong-chik, 21 May 1965

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 21, papka 105, delo 32, list 21. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

21 May 1965

I received the ambassador of the DPRK comrade Kim Pyong-chik on his request. The ambassador informed me that comrade Kim Il Sung expressed great satisfaction that the Soviet Union had agreed to give the DPRK, free of charge, weapons and military equipment in the amount of 150 million rubles. Comrade Kim Il Sung asked me to convey his deep gratitude to the Soviet government.

At the same time comrade Kim Il Sung, the ambassador said, gave the instruction to the military delegation to request [from the Soviet Union] further aid on top of the 150 million rubles. We are talking about increasing two-fold the amount of the antiaircraft guns “ground-air” (from 4 to 8 divisions), which would help in organizing the defense of large cities. Besides this, the ambassador said, we need weapons for coastal defense and 57 mm howitzers. If this additional request is satisfied, the total amount of aid will exceed 150 million rubles.

[I] told Kim Pyong-chik that I would report to the Soviet government what the ambassador said. [I] asked the ambassador whether the Korean military delegation would raise the question of additional supplies of weapons during the talks.

Kim Pyong-chik replied in the affirmative, and explained that he told [me] about the additional request of the Korean side for my information.

The meeting was attended by the 1st secretary of the D[alne]V[ostochny]O[tdel] [Far Eastern Department] Nemchinov V.S. and 3rd secretary of the DVO Putivets A.D. The conversation was interpreted by Kim Hen Son, member of the staff of the DPRK Embassy.

DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE USSR

[Signature] (V. Kuznetsov)

Document 19

Excerpts from the Report of the Soviet Embassy in Pyongyang, “Some New Aspects of Korean-Chinese Relations in the First Half of 1965,” 4 June 1965

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 21, papka 106, delo 20, listy 14-27. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

4 June 1965

At the end of 1964 and in the beginning of 1965 certain new aspects emerged in Korean-Chinese relations, which in general could be characterized as an attempt by the Korean leadership to abandon a one-sided orientation towards China.

This process began after the October CC CPSU Plenum, after the trip of the Korean delegation headed by comrade Kim Il to Moscow for the celebrations of the 47th anniversary of the October Revolution, and particularly after the February 1965 visit to Korea by the Soviet delegation headed by comrade A[leksei] N[ikolaevich] Kosygin.

As is known, in mid-1964 propaganda of the views of the Chinese leadership in the DPRK was in full swing. Despite all the efforts by the KWP leadership to present their propaganda as the manifestation of an “independent line” with regard to the parties of the international communist movement, as an aspiration to strengthen the unity of the

socialist camp, in reality it [the Korean propaganda] was based on the so-called “general line” of the CCP, the anti-Marxist views of the Chinese leadership. All the attacks were directed against the CPSU, against its internal and external policies.

The Chinese propaganda materials were widely distributed among the Korean populace. The Korean press published all major polemical editorials of the newspaper “Renmin Ribao” and the journal “Hongqi”. [...]

Propaganda for the first time began to stress the thesis that the Korean-Chinese friendship became stronger as a result of the joint struggle against “modern revisionists,” that the basis for the friendship is the “ideological unity” of the revolutionary peoples.

However, by the end of 1964 the Korean leadership, apparently began to understand more clearly all the negative consequences of their orientation only towards China.

As a result of extensive contacts that took place between the KWP and the CCP in 1964, it became more obvious to the Korean leadership what kind of role the Chinese leaders prepared for them in their plans for splitting the international communist movement and creating a pro-Chinese bloc of parties with headquarters in Beijing. The Korean leadership, like the Chinese leaders, recognized the splitter groups as “independent Marxist-Leninist parties.” The leaders of these parties, when they arrive from Beijing to Pyongyang are received at the highest level. But at the same time the Korean leadership is beginning to understand that, despite the huge efforts of the Chinese leaders and their large financial aid, the splitter groups expose themselves more and more. The Korean leadership, seemingly, is becoming more and more convinced that “close contacts” with these groups do not add to the authority of the KWP in the international communist movement.

Also, the Korean leadership could not help but grow alarmed over the obvious great Han nationalism and political adventurism of the Chinese leaders, and the possibility of ending up alone with only the Chinese caused anxiety for the Koreans.

The Korean leadership also took into consideration the fact that the enormous propaganda campaign of the Chinese leaders [and their efforts] to put together a bloc inside the communist movement did not produce the expected results. Moreover, the rude attacks that the Chinese leaders continued to stage against the CPSU after the October CC CPSU Plenum put the CCP leadership into even greater isolation. Thus, in a conversation with the Sov[iet] Ambassador in May 1965, Kim Il Sung admitted that only the communist parties of Japan and Indonesia follow the Chinese leadership in supporting open polemics.

One-sided orientation towards China led to the worsening of the DPRK's political and economic ties with the USSR and the socialist countries of Europe. And this, in turn, became one of the reasons for serious economic difficulties of the DPRK.

Among the reasons that forced the Korean leadership to make certain corrections in their policy in general and in the Korean-Chinese relations in particular, a very important one is the worsening situation in Vietnam in connection with the escalating American aggression, the possibility of serious conflicts on the 38th parallel of the Korean peninsula, and also the consequences of such course of development for the DPRK.

[...] while continuing to speak out in favor of strengthening Korean-Chinese friendship, the Korean leadership undertook to limit somewhat the possibilities for propagating the views of the Chinese leadership in the DPRK.

Once again the thesis of the KWP's independent policy is being stressed with particular emphasis.

At the same time, the independence thesis in the statements of the Korean leadership already sounds like an attempt to recognize some of their policy mistakes. In this connection, the explanation given by Kim Il Sung in a conversation with the Soviet ambassador on 3 May of this year appears particularly interesting. Complaining about the

difficulties with which the DPRK is faced in the pursuit of its independent policy, Kim Il Sung said that one has to carry out this policy under the circumstances of open polemics between the CPSU and the CCP, taking into account that the DPRK borders two socialist countries – USSR and China, and a capitalist country-Japan.

The Korean leadership took a different position, in comparison with the Chinese leaders, with regard to the March consultative meeting of fraternal parties.⁷² The leadership of the KWP, like the Chinese, did not agree to take part in the work of the meeting, but unlike the Chinese, did not attack the results of the work of that meeting.

Recently, the leaders of the KWP even began to make critical remarks addressed to the Chinese leadership, which continues to carry out its wild anti-Soviet campaign.

In a conversation with the Soviet ambassador on 3 May of this year Kim Il Sung said: “we do not share the point of view of some people, who continue open polemics at the present time.”⁷³

In the statements of the Korean leaders, calls for strengthening the unity and cohesion of the international communist movement and the socialist camp now sound somewhat different. Whereas before, this unity was understood by the Korean leadership as the unconditional recognition of the Chinese “general line,” at the present time, in light of removal in Korean propaganda of the slogan of struggle against “modern revisionism,”

⁷² The March (1965) Consultative Meeting was convened in Moscow to discuss international problems with “fraternal” parties, despite China’s opposition. Zhou Enlai claimed in a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador that the meeting became “a new, almost unsurpassable barrier, which the CPSU leadership has erected between our parties.” See “Conversation between Sergei Lapin and Zhou Enlai” (15 May 1965), AVPRF: fond 0100, papka 516, delo 5, list 201. Brezhnev claimed that the meeting was a success, however. “The Chinese [...] tried to ruin this consultative meeting. The meeting has had a good result. It is even clearer now that the Chinese prediction about the split among the communist and workers’ parties has failed.” See “Conversation between Yumjaagiin Tsendenbal, Leonid Brezhnev and Aleksei Kosygin” (13 April 1965), Mongol Ulsyn Zasgiin Gazryn Arkhiv: not filed. Brezhnev probably exaggerated the Soviet success. The meeting gathered only 19 parties (China, North Korea, North Vietnam and Romania, among others, refused to attend) and produced a fairly pathetic communiqué, which only embarrassed the Soviets, for it showed that the international communist movement has not made up its mind yet as to whether to follow Beijing or Moscow.

⁷³ See our N 70 from 7 May 1965. [footnote in document]

the unity is based on the struggle against American imperialism and support of the national liberation movement. [...]

The Korean leadership in the past unequivocally supported China's measures in putting together a race-based bloc and, with the help of the Chinese, tried to widen their connections in the liberated African countries. [...]

However, at the present time the Korean leadership does not always come out in support of the Chinese on the questions of Afro-Asian solidarity. They come out in favor of united actions by all anti-imperialist forces, including the USSR, all socialist countries, countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

On questions of attitude to the events in Vietnam, to the support of the DRV in the struggle against American imperialism, the Korean leadership has now more skeptically appraised the actions of the Chinese leadership. The Korean leadership cannot help but understand that a further deterioration of the situation in Vietnam (what the Chinese leaders are trying to accomplish) may cause complications on the demarcation line between the DPRK and South Korea. [...]

Judging from the statements of the leaders of the KWP, the Chinese leaders failed to disparage the Soviet Union's aid to the struggling people of Vietnam. "Some people are trying to downplay [Soviet] aid to Vietnam" – said Kim Il Sung in a conversation with the Soviet ambassador – "but we do not believe such propaganda".⁷⁴

The Korean leadership instructed its delegation to the extraordinary session of the World Peace Council in Stockholm, which discussed measures to provide aid to Vietnam, not to support the Chinese draft resolution.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ See our N 70 from 7 May 1965. [footnote in document]

⁷⁵ On the Sino-Soviet polemics in the World Peace Council meetings, 1963-1966, see John Gittings, *Survey of the Sino-Soviet Dispute: a Commentary and Extracts from the Recent Polemics, 1963-67* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 193-196.

Recalling this episode, Kim Il Sung told the Soviet ambassador: “the Chinese wanted to impose their draft resolution on us, but we did not agree.”⁷⁶ [...]

Continuing to follow the Chinese in speaking out against the “great power tendency of holding back independent, all-rounded development of other countries under the pretext of economic cooperation and international division of labor,” seeing in economic cooperation the attempt of the “revisionists to put the economies of socialist countries under their control,”⁷⁷ the Korean leadership in reality is taking steps to widen cooperation, using criticism in this case as a measure of “independence” and as a lever for political pressure in favor of more profitable conditions of economic aid. [...]

The questions of Korean-Chinese military cooperation, the extent of which is kept in strict secrecy by both countries, had, it seems, the decisive role in the rapprochement between the DPRK and China on other questions as well.

As events have shown, following the return of the DPRK military delegation [...] from Moscow, the Chinese leadership seized the opportunity and undertook to widen military cooperation with the DPRK.

One could make a judgment as to the extent of this cooperation by reference to many Chinese military delegations that visited the DPRK in the following 2 years, to joint Korean-Chinese maneuvers, to training of Korean military personnel in Chinese military academies, and to supplies of Chinese weapons.

All of this gave the leadership of the KWP an opportunity to become thoroughly acquainted with the condition of the defense industry of the PRC. [...]

At the same time, the Korean leadership continued to watch jealously Soviet military aid to Cuba, Indonesia, the DRV, and other countries. Visits of the military representatives of

⁷⁶ Ibid. [footnote in document]

⁷⁷ *Nodon Sinmun*, 17 April 1965. [footnote in document]

the DPRK to these countries in 1964 showed, it seems, the advantages of Soviet aid in comparison with Chinese, the deteriorating situation in Southeast Asia, insistent attempts of the USA to prompt the normalization of relations between Japan and South Korea, their efforts to put together a new aggressive bloc in the East, the volume of American military aid to the South Korean army – all of this could not help but make the Korean leadership (while still widening cooperation with China) look for pretexts for resumption of military aid from the USSR. [...]

New aspects that appeared in the recent period in Korean-Chinese relations have in general a positive character. They create objective preconditions for improvement of Soviet-Korean relations at the state-to-state level. The intensity of this process is, evidently, in direct proportion to the volume of all kinds of aid to the DPRK from the Soviet Union.

At the same time, the Korean leadership, it seems, will continue to demonstrate their special friendship with China, will avoid doing anything that might influence the character and volume of aid they receive from the PRC.

FIRST SECRETARY OF THE EMBASSY OF THE USSR IN THE DPRK

(A. Borunkov)

ATTACHE OF THE EMBASSY OF THE USSR IN THE DPRK

(V. Gorovoi)

Document 20

Record of Conversation between Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and North Korean Foreign Minister Pak Song Ch'ol, 9 April 1966

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 22, papka 107, delo 4, listy 1-5. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

SEND TO THE MEMBERS OF THE POLITBURO OF THE CC CPSU AND
CANDIDATE MEMBERS OF THE POLITBURO OF THE CC CPSU

23 May 1966

A. Gromyko

From the diary of

A.A. Gromyko

Secret, Copy #40

N1550/GS

RECORD OF CONVERSATION

With the minister of foreign affairs of the DPRK comrade Pak Song Ch'ol

9 April 1966

I received Foreign Minister of the DPRK comrade Pak Song Ch'ol, who is in Moscow as part of the delegation of the Korean Workers' Party to the 23rd Congress of the CPSU.

In the course of the conversation, comrade Pak Song Ch'ol told [me] about the situation in the DPRP. As a whole, things in Korea, he said, are going well, but they would be still better if it were not for the presence of the American forces in South Korea. As everyone knows, he continued, we are currently not in a state of peace, but of armistice, various clashes occur, the enemy is searching out our weak points, and would use them gladly.

In light of such circumstances, great attention is paid in the DPRK to strengthening the defense capability of the country, and this causes delays in the implementation of the 7-year plan of economic development. The implementation of the 7-year plan is lagging behind by two years. The Korean Workers' Party put forward the slogan "arm the entire people," "turn the country into an impregnable fortress." These are not simply words – we are forced to direct substantial funds into the strengthening of the country's defense.

Of course, said comrade Pak Song Ch'ol, we would not be able to handle the task of strengthening the self-defense capability of our country by ourselves, and we asked for help. The Soviet Union met our wishes [*poshel nam na vstrechu*] and provided good military and economic aid.

As everyone knows, the main task of the Korean communists is the liberation of the South Korean people, who are under the yoke of American imperialism. The Korean Workers' Party's position on this question is to achieve unification of the country peacefully, on a democratic basis, relying on the Korean people, to make the American imperialists get out of South Korea. The struggle of the South Korean population themselves plays a very important role in this regard.

We are also counting on international support of the efforts of the Korean people to achieve unification of their motherland by peaceful means. Of course, the enemy will stand in the way. The American imperialists who are trying to turn the whole of Korea into their colony would like to destroy the DPRK. The South Korean puppet clique of Park Chung Hee is sounding trumpets about a Northern expedition, unification of Korea under the "supervision of the UN." We are resolutely against this.

The Soviet government supports our position on the question of Korean unification. Using this opportunity, I would like to thank [the Soviet Union] once again for supporting our struggle. With a feeling of deep gratitude we heard the expression of this support in the report of comrade L.I. Brezhnev at the 23rd Congress of CPSU.

We believe, said comrade Pak Song Ch'ol, that the first of the most urgent tasks is the withdrawal of American forces from South Korea, dissolution of the so-called "UN Commission on the Unification and Reconstruction of Korea." We are confident that in the future Soviet comrades will support our position in international organizations, at international meetings, conferences, etc. In this connection, I would like to ask that you continue to expose the fact that the American forces in South Korea are there under the UN flag. In reality, the forces in South Korea are not UN but American forces, and they

should not be allowed to use the name of the UN for justification of their presence in South Korea.

Furthermore, comrade Pak Song Ch'ol remarked that currently Japanese militarism is rapidly resurrecting, and it presents a danger to peace-loving peoples equal to that from West German *revanchism* in Europe. The US imperialists, who are resurrecting the militarist forces of Japan, made the Japanese government enter into a conspiracy with South Korea, with the aim of putting together a military bloc in which they also plan to involve Taiwan, South Vietnam and other countries.

We consider the signing of the Japanese-South Korean treaty the first concrete step on the road to the resurrection of the overseas expansionism of the Japanese militarists.

Everyone knows about the Japanese plans for the operations of the so-called “3 arrows” and the “flying dragon,” which are directed against our countries. Japan is providing weapons for South Korea. That is why we come out against the resurrection of the militarist forces of Japan, expose the intrigues of the Japanese army machine [*voenshchina*]. In our opinion, this helps the struggle for peace in the Far East and in the world as a whole. We know that the Soviet government supports us in this, and are confident that the same support will be provided in the future.

The South Korean puppet regime, comrade Pak Song Ch'ol said further, is trying to avoid isolation in the international sphere. With this aim, the South Koreans, in particular, are trying actively to penetrate various international organizations, to participate in international negotiations, conferences, and meetings. Using international meetings, they are trying to invite to such meetings in Seoul representatives of, among others, socialist countries, and to travel to the socialist countries, if international meetings take place there.

We are aware, the minister said, that there will be a UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization] meeting on oceanography in Moscow this May. The South Koreans intend to send their delegation to this meeting. I am

confident that the Foreign Ministry of the USSR will not grant entry visas to the South Koreans. I also think, comrade Pak Song Ch'ol said, that in case an international meeting takes place in Seoul, none of the socialist countries will send her representatives there.

Pak Song Ch'ol also touched on the question of the Koreans who live in Sakhalin. According to reports, the South Korean authorities allegedly requested the Japanese government that Japan, either itself or through the International Red Cross, help the return of the Sakhalin Koreans to South Korea. Having said that he does not know whether the Japanese side has put this question before the Soviet side, Pak Song Ch'ol expressed his hope that with regard to the Koreans who live on the territory of the USSR, the Soviet government will conduct business only with the government of the DPRK, and not with the government of Japan or the International Red Cross.

On my part, I replied to comrade Pak Song Ch'ol that we fully support the position of the DPRK regarding the question of the unification of the country, withdrawal of American forces from South Korea, and consider that the policy of the DPRK government on this question is correct and that it serves the interest of the entire socialist camp. Struggle against the aggressive intrigues of American imperialism generally and in the Far East in particular is our common policy. We have followed, are following, and will follow this policy. We have always exposed and will expose the intrigues of US imperialism in South Korea, using the UN for this purpose.

I said that if the Korean comrades have any concrete wishes with regard to international meetings, conferences, sessions of international organizations, we would like them to put forward these wishes to us so that the Soviet representatives could take them into account in the diplomatic and political struggle against the US imperialists and Japanese militarists.

As far as the departure of Koreans from Sakhalin to South Korea is concerned, we do not intend to discuss this with the Japanese or with any international organization.

With regard to the participation of the South Korean representatives in international meetings, comrade Pak Song Ch'ol was told that neither have the South Koreans visited the USSR nor our representatives visited Seoul to participate in international meetings. This is our definite policy. One should not doubt that this time, too, the South Korean representatives will not be allowed to participate in the oceanography conference in Moscow.

Pak Song Ch'ol remarked that the DPRK comes out for improving relations with Japan, but that the Japanese ruling circles treat the DPRK with hostility.

In this connection, I told comrade Pak Song Ch'ol that in the course of the postwar years, Soviet-Japanese relations have remained somewhat cool. We do not have a peace treaty with Japan, and this has its effect on our relations. The government of Japan every once in a while tells us about its territorial claims, but we do not discuss this question, as in reality it does not exist. It has long been solved. At the same time, we maintain diplomatic, political, and economic relations with Japan. In our position with respect to Japan, we take into account that Japan is an ally of the United States, we come out against its aggressive course, strive to pull it away from the US in the interests of our common struggle against American imperialism.

In Soviet-Japanese relations certain practical questions, such as trade, economic relations, and cultural exchanges, may be further developed. Exchange of visits will continue. As you know, the Japanese foreign minister, [Etsusaburo] Shiina, visited the Soviet Union. He invited the minister of foreign affairs of the USSR to visit Japan.

Comrade Pak Song Ch'ol said that they, of course, do not think that the Soviet Union must break off its diplomatic relations with Japan, or not carry on cultural or economic exchange with her. This also applies to Soviet-American relations. But, he continued, it is important that there be a difference between diplomatic activity and our common political posture.

I replied to comrade Pak Song Ch'ol that the external policy of the Soviet Union was defined clearly by the 23rd Congress of the CPSU, and all diplomatic or other activity is subordinated to the implementation of this external policy. In our work, we direct ourselves according to the instructions of V.I. Lenin about the necessity of going sometimes even into the enemy's lair in order to carry out successfully our policy for socialism. We have a lot of work ahead of us. In light of the decisions of the 23rd Congress of the CPSU, we are planning new activities, new steps in the sphere of foreign policy, and we intend to begin their implementation with renewed energy.

Pak Song Ch'ol thanked me for the important explanations given to him.

The conversation lasted for 1 hour. The conversation was attended by the charge d'affaires of the DPRK in the USSR Ho Gan, a member of staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of DPRK Li Syn Hek, Ambassador of the USSR in the DPRK Gorchakov A.I., head of the DVO Sudarikov N.G.

In the course of the breakfast that followed I confirmed the invitation previously extended for comrade Pak Song Ch'ol to visit the Soviet Union with his family for rest and [medical] treatment when he finds it convenient.

The conversation was recorded by the third secretary of the DVO Putivets A.D.

A. Gromyko

Correct: [Signature - Putivets]

Document 21

Record of Conversation between Soviet Politburo member Nikolai Podgorny and Kim Chung-wong, 20 January 1967

[Source: AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 23, papka 110, delo 3, listy 10-12. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko]

RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Between N.V. Podgorny and the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the
DPRK in the USSR Kim Chung-wong

20 January 1967

In the course of the conversation, which took place after the DPRK ambassador presented his credentials, N.V. Podgorny told the ambassador that the Soviet people are satisfied with the development of party and state relations between the USSR and the DPRK, especially in recent years. We, noted N.V. Podgorny, attach particular importance to the meetings and conversations with com. Kim Il Sung that took place last year in Vladivostok and Moscow.⁷⁸ The Communist Party and the Soviet Government are doing all they can to continue to strengthen the traditional friendship and co-operation between the Soviet and Korean peoples. One of the examples of the successful development of our friendly relations is the forthcoming visit to Moscow of the government delegation of the DPRK, headed by com. Kim Il for discussions of economic questions.

Kim Chung-wong replied that the leaders of the KWP and the DPRK government are also happy with the state of—and desire the development of—Soviet-Korean relations. Com. Kim Il Sung reported to the Politburo regarding the results of the negotiations in Moscow, and the Politburo praised [these results] highly. [...]

Continuing the conversation, N.V. Podgorny told Kim Chung-wong about the aid provided by the Soviet Union to the Vietnamese people in the struggle against American aggression. He remarked that the aid of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries would be still more effective if the Chinese leaders did not refuse co-operation with us in this important matter. However, the PRC leadership, which is busy with the

⁷⁸ Leonid Brezhnev unofficially met with Kim Il Sung in May 1966 in Vladivostok. During that meeting Kim reportedly claimed that the North Koreans “cannot do without deep and sincere friendship with the CPSU and the Soviet people.” Records of these talks are still not available, but Brezhnev summarized his meetings with Kim Il Sung in detail in his report to the CC CPSU Plenum on 27 May 1966. See “Leonid Brezhnev’s speech at the May (1966) CC CPSU Plenum”, RGANI: fond 2, opis 3, delo 18, listy 83-88. Rapprochement between Moscow and Pyongyang went a step further during Kim Il Sung’s visit to Moscow in late 1966. Records of his talks with the Soviet leadership are not available; we do know, however, that the Chinese Cultural Revolution was discussed. See “Leonid Brezhnev’s speech at the December (1966) CC CPSU Plenum” (12 December 1966), RGANI: fond 2, opis 3, delo 45, list 63.

implementation of the “cultural revolution” in their own country, is letting the Americans know that they will not change their position, which is in effect to the USA’s benefit, if the latter does not touch China. N.V. Podgorny inquired as to his interlocutor’s opinion about the Chinese “cultural revolution.”

Kim Chung-wong replied that, despite the lengthy border between the DPRK and China, the “cultural revolution” does not influence the Korean side. The situation in the party and the country is solid. As far as support for the struggle of the Vietnamese people is concerned, the DPRK is doing its best in providing the DRV with aid.

In reply to N.V. Podgorny’s question about the situation along the demarcation line in Korea, the ambassador said that American and puppet forces have not stopped provocations against our side. The situation on the 38th parallel is always tense. That is why we maintain the condition of complete battle-readiness, so as to repel any incursion by the enemy. At the same time the ambassador hinted that keeping tensions high along the demarcation line is a kind of help for the Vietnamese people, because it is distracting a part of the US forces from Vietnam.

N.V. Podgorny stressed that the USSR and the DPRK are tied with a treaty of friendship, co-operation and mutual help, which serves as a reliable guarantee for the DPRK in repelling possible attacks upon her security. Soviet military forces are standing guard for the interests of the socialist camp. The imperialists cannot fail to take these circumstances into account, and they will hardly attempt to attack the DPRK. [...]

Document 22

Record of Conversation between Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and North Korean Charge d’Affaires Kang Ch’ol-gun, 31 January 1968

[Source: AVPRF, fond 102, opis 28, papka 55, delo 2, listy 4-5. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

“31” January 1968

N 129 / GS-NS

RECORD OF CONVERSATION BETWEEN A.A. GROMYKO AND CHARGE
D'AFFAIRES OF THE DPRK IN THE USSR KANG CH'OL GUN

Kang Ch'ol Gun, having repeated the statement of the DPRK Government dated 27 January 1968 in connection with the capture of the American spy ship *Pueblo* by the coastal guard of the DPRK, passed over the text of the statement and expressed his hope that the Soviet Government will support the position of the DPRK government in connection with the capture of the American ship.

A.A. Gromyko replied that the Soviet Union has already taken a series of measures in support of the Korean friends. When approached by the Americans, the Soviet Union firmly declared that any pressure on the DPRK on the part of the USA is unacceptable. The Soviet representative in the [UN] Security Council spoke out resolutely in support of the position of the DPRK Government. The Soviet ambassador in Pyongyang informed comrade Kim Il Sung about all measures that had been taken.

A.A. Gromyko asked comrade Kang Ch'ol Gun to explain how the Soviet side could use the copies of the admission by the captain of the *Pueblo* and the tape recording of his statement that was provided by the Korean comrades. Wide circulation of these materials would help expose the US position.

Kang Ch'ol Gun promised to clear up this question in Pyongyang and make a reply. He asked about the prospects of discussing the *Pueblo* question in the Security Council.

A.A. Gromyko replied that one should not expect the Security Council to make a mutually acceptable decision. Probably, the veto will be used. Some members of the Council, in particular, representatives of the Afro-Asian countries (Algeria, Ethiopia, India, Pakistan, Senegal) may take certain measures in the direction of settling the conflict between the USA and the DPRK. The Afro-Asians pay the greatest attention to the possibility of providing good will service or mediation in this or that form on either

[UN General Secretary] U Thant's part or his special representative, or themselves, the Afro-Asian members of the Council. However, one could not say anything concrete about this at the moment.

Comrade Kang Ch'ol Gun asked that I continue informing him in the future about the work of the Security Council, and, in particular, about possible steps by the Afro-Asian members of the Council.

The meeting was attended by the deputy head of the FED [Far Eastern Department] A.I. Elizavetin, 2nd secretary of the FED Yu. D. Fadeev, 2nd secretary of the embassy of the DPRK comrade Son Gen Mo and interpreter comrade Kim Ham.

Correct: [Signature]

Sent to:

1. comrades Gromyko
2. Kuznetsov
3. DVO
4. OMO
5. file

Document 23

“On the current problems of the international situation and on the struggle of the CPSU for the unity of the international communist movement,” Excerpt from a speech by Leonid Brezhnev at the April (1968) CC CPSU Plenum, 9 April 1968

[Source: Russian State Archive of Recent History (RGANI), fond 2, opis 3, delo 95, listy 50-58. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

9 April 1968

[...] In international life during the last several months, events in the Far East draw [particular] attention in connection with the incursion in the Korean [territorial] waters of an American military vessel *Pueblo*. Despite the limited scale of these events, they had principal importance, both from the point of view of rebuffing the aggressive actions of the USA and in terms of our attitude towards certain peculiarities of the policy of the Korean friends. The Politburo has reported many times to the CC Plenum regarding our

line in relations with the KWP and the DPRK. The essence of this line is to consistently strengthen friendly relations with the KWP and the DPRK despite the existence of different approaches between us and the Korean comrades on a series of questions of the international communist movement and other [problems].

On the whole, the situation in the course of the entire preceding [in the text, mistakenly, “subsequent”] period developed precisely along these lines. We developed contacts with the Koreans in various spheres and above all in the economic [sphere]. Trade was developing; we concluded a series of agreements on co-operation in timber clearing, on building an oil refinery, etc. We continued to provide aid in defending the DPRK. The Korean press stopped publishing unfriendly statements addressed to the CPSU and the Soviet Union.

One should remark in particular that during his meetings with us, comrade Kim Il Sung assured [us] that the [Korean] friends did not intend to solve the problem of uniting North and South Korea by military means, and in this connection [did not intend] to unleash a war with the Americans, whose forces, as is known, are stationed in South Korea.

However, several indications appeared recently that, seemingly, suggested that the leaders of the DPRK have begun to take a more militant road. This became particularly noticeable at the time of the incident with the American vessel *Pueblo*.

You know, comrades, the factual side of things. I am talking about the incursion of the American military vessel *Pueblo* into Korean territorial waters. On 23 January of this year this vessel was detained by DPRK naval forces (as the friends assert, detained in their territorial waters) and, after a firefight, taken to a port, where it came under arrest. One should say that the measures taken in this case by the government of the DPRK appear unusually harsh: as a rule in the practice of international relations, in case of an incursion by a foreign military vessel into the territorial waters of any state, it is simply advised to leave these waters or forced to do so.

Washington's reaction was fierce, rude and aggressive. The government of the USA made accusations and threats addressed to the DPRK; considerable naval forces and air forces were deployed near North Korea's shores, including the flag carrier of the 7th Fleet, the atomic aircraft carrier "Enterprise." Calls for the bombardment of Korean ports, forced return of *Pueblo*, etc. were heard in the USA. The Americans clearly counted on forcing the DPRK's retreat before the cannon barrels of their ships. Besides this, President Johnson used this incident to further increase military preparations and heat up military hysteria on an international scale. New categories of reserves were mobilized into the US army, demonstrative measures were taken to increase military preparedness in Europe.

Under these circumstances, the CC CPSU and the Soviet government found it necessary to voice public support for the DPRK, a socialist country, with which we are moreover bound by a treaty of friendship and mutual help. We did it, supporting the right of the DPRK to defend its security and censuring the aggressive behavior of the USA.

Besides this, the Politburo and the Soviet government considered it useful to exert direct pressure on the leadership of the USA in order to lessen its urge and desire to inflame provocations in the immediate proximity of the borders of the USSR and in relation to countries allied with us. In this connection, a decision was made to send a communication to President Johnson on behalf of the Soviet government.

The 3 February [1968] letter to Johnson drew attention to the fact that the USA is conducting a concentration of military fleet and aviation on an unprecedented scale in the immediate proximity of the Far Eastern regions of the Soviet Union. The American President was told, "in our actions we must take into consideration what is happening near our borders that touches on the security interests of the Soviet Union." At the same time it was stressed that efforts to act with regard to the DPRK by means of threats and pressure can only lead to a dead end and to further complications, fraught with far reaching consequences.

At the same time, we took certain measures to increase the military preparedness of the Soviet military forces in the Far East in order to protect the country in case of complications and to let the Americans understand that we are not joking, but approach this matter seriously. The adopted measures worked. On 6 February [1968] Johnson sent a reply in which he tried to explain the amassing of US military forces in the Sea of Japan area by reference to militant statements and actions of the DPRK, and assured us that a “prompt settlement [of the crisis] serves our common interests.” The President’s message said in the end that he “gave an order to stop any further amassing of our naval and air forces at the present time” and decreed that they will pull out one of the aircraft carriers with accompanying vessels from the region of the incident. Indeed, the aircraft carrier “Enterprise” was pulled out from the DPRK’s shores.

At the same time we insistently advised the Korean comrades, with whom we maintained systematic contact throughout this period, to show reserve, not to give the Americans an excuse to widen provocations, to settle the incident by political means. When it became clear to the entire world that the attempts of the USA to make the DPRK retreat before blackmail and military threats had failed, when the government of the USA was forced to conduct talks with the representatives of the DPRK in Panmunjom regarding *Pueblo*, we expressed an opinion to the Korean leadership that now, without any harm and even with political advantage for the DPRK, one could finish this affair by disgraceful deportation of the crew of the USA spy vessel from the territory of North Korea.

But the Korean comrades maintained a fairly extreme position and did not show any inclination towards settling the incident. DPRK propaganda took on a fairly militant character, the population was told that a war could begin any day, that the military forces of the DPRK are “ready to smash American imperialism.” In effect, a full mobilization was declared in the country; life, especially in the cities, was changed in a military fashion; there began an evacuation of the population, administrative institutions, industries, and factories of Pyongyang.

At the same time the leadership of the DPRK took one more step that alarmed us. On 31 January [1968] Kim Il Sung addressed an official letter to comrade Kosygin as head of the USSR Council of Ministers. This letter said that “Johnson’s clique could at any time engage in a military adventure in Korea,” that the policy of the American imperialists “is a rude challenge to the DPRK and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, who are bound together by allied relations according to the treaty of friendship, co-operation and mutual help between the DPRK and the USSR; [it is] a serious threat to the security of all socialist countries and to peace in the entire world”.

This message further officially informed the Soviet government on behalf of the government of the DPRK that they are “forced to conduct preparations to give the aggression an appropriate rebuff” and [the letter] expressed confidence that “in case of the creation of a state of war in Korea as a result of a military attack by the American imperialists, the Soviet government and the fraternal Soviet people will fight together with us against the aggressors...”

Kim Il Sung’s letter ended with a proposal: in case such situation materialized, “[you should] provide us without delay with military and other aid and support, to mobilize all means available.”

Matters took a serious turn.

An official communication along government lines, bypassing comradely consultations along party lines that are usual in such cases, spoke to the intention [of the Korean leadership] to bind the Soviet Union somehow, using the existence of the treaty between the USSR and the DPRK [as a pretext to] involve us in supporting such plans of the Koreans friends about which we knew nothing. The CC Politburo believed that the time had come to state our attitude clearly to the Korean comrades regarding these questions and certain peculiarities of their policies that concern our country.

Without giving an official reply to Kim Il Sung's message, we addressed a communication to him to come to Moscow for a comprehensive exchange of opinions regarding the situation which has emerged. Comrade Kim Il Sung replied that at the present time circumstances do not permit him to leave the country. Member of the KWP CC Politburo, Deputy Premier and Minister of Defense Kim Ch'ang Bong was [instead] dispatched to Moscow for the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Soviet Army.

On the Politburo's instructions I received Kim Ch'ang Bong on 26 February [1968] and had a long discussion with him, in the course of which [I] expressed in all earnestness our position on a series of important questions.

He was told that we still base ourselves on the assumption that the Korean comrades maintain a course of peaceful unification of Korea, for we are not aware of [any] changes [to this course]. In any case, under the current circumstances we are against taking the matter towards unleashing a war, though we fully understand the desire of the DPRK to strengthen its own defense and we actively support this. We do not understand the meaning of the information that reached us regarding the evacuation of Pyongyang. We have no information from [our Korean] friends regarding their talks with the Americans, and regarding the aims that these talks pursue.

As far as the question of the Soviet-Korean treaty and Kim Il Sung's letter regarding this question are concerned, Kim Ch'ang Bong was told literally the following: "We indeed have a treaty. Its essence is known to both you and us. We would like to stress that it has a defensive character and is an instrument of defending the peace-loving position of North Korea. Since comrade Kim Il Sung did not put the circumstances and the details of the current situation in a concrete form, we consider it very important to conduct serious consultations with him on this question. The problem of military actions is a very difficult question, especially under the current circumstances, when the entire world struggles against war. It is impossible to talk about a military situation, much less about some kind of military actions, by means of short letters. This is a very serious question and it demands serious consultations."

At the same time, an opinion was expressed again that the question of the *Pueblo* crew, this whole incident, should be settled by political means without much delay, because otherwise the DPRK could lose the serious political gain obtained at the early stage of the incident.

There are reasons to think that the measures taken by the Politburo have born fruit. In any case, one could note the following facts:

1. Soon after the conversation with Kim Ch'ang Bong, the DPRK Foreign Ministry published a statement that stressed: "the government of the DPRK, both now and in the past, has not changed its policy directed at the preservation of peace in Korea and the peaceful solution of the question of the unification of Korea."
2. The Koreans informed our ambassador regarding the progress of talks with the Americans. One should say that these talks have taken on a fairly protracted character. The Koreans are demanding official apologies from the USA, the Americans are offering various compromises, but an agreement has not yet been reached.
3. The Korean comrades made it known to the United States through neutral countries that they are prepared to exchange the *Pueblo* crew for patriots arrested in South Korea, and that in this case they will not demand apologies from the USA.
4. On 1 March [1968] Kim Il Sung invited the ambassador of the USSR and asked him to pass to Moscow his gratitude for the conversation with Kim Ch'ang Bong, for the sincere exposition of the opinion of the CC CPSU. At the same time Kim Il Sung assured him that the evacuation activities conducted in Pyongyang did not have an emergency character, that measures have been taken to stop panicky rumors, and corrections are being made to the statements of the DPRK press. In conclusion, Kim Il Sung said: "we have no intention of raising military hysteria." Indeed, the tone of the Korean press has recently become calmer.
5. There is also information that the local authorities in the DPRK have been instructed not to overdo various kinds of mobilization-related activities: evacuation of

people, industries and factories. “War is not a question of tomorrow,” Kim Il Sung declared at one of the closed meetings in Pyongyang at the beginning of March.

This is how the incident with the vessel *Pueblo* is developing. It [the incident], as one knows, is not yet finished, and the situation might deteriorate again. However, the atmosphere has relaxed somewhat, the passions on the Korean and on the American side have calmed down. On the whole one might say that by pursuing in this affair our consistent [and] principled line, we managed, first of all, to chip away at the American arrogance [*sbit spes*], to rebuff their blackmail and threats and, secondly, to exert considerable dissuading influence on the leadership of the DPRK, especially in connection with the question of the treaty, which has important meaning for the state interests of the Soviet Union. [...]

Document 24

Record of Conversation between Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR Aleksei Kosygin and North Korean Ambassador in the USSR Chon Tu-hwan

[Source: AVPRF, fond 102, opis 28, papka 25, delo 2, listy 26-28. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Sergey Radchenko.]

May 6, 1968

Chon Tu-hwan passed greetings and the text of the reply telegram for L.I. Brezhnev and A.N. Kosygin with Kim Il Sung’s thank you note for congratulations on his 56th birthday.

Then the ambassador said that he was glad to have been appointed to work in the Soviet Union, which is the liberator and the war friend of Korea, in the period when relations of friendship and co-operation between the two parties, governments and peoples are strengthening. This was to a great extent facilitated by the mutual visits of the heads of both countries. He remarked that Kim Il Sung, before the ambassador’s departure for Moscow, gave him the instruction to work in the direction of all-around strengthening of the traditional Korean-Soviet friendship.

Chon Tu-hwan briefly spoke about the situation in the DPRK. He emphasized that after the incident with the American spy ship *Pueblo* the situation in the Korean peninsula region had become rather tense, the US and the South Koreans were resorting to blackmail, provocations, they were hastily preparing for a new war.

Provocations became especially frequent after the talks between Johnson and Park Chung Hee. According to press reports, the people of South Korea, inspired by the successes of the DPRK, are conducting an energetic military struggle against the puppet regime of Park Chung Hee. At the beginning of this year, a group of South Korean guerrillas undertook an attempt to attack the residence of Park Chung Hee. This year on 30 April there was a raid on the Seoul Telegraph, as a result of which the work of the Telegraph was temporarily paralyzed.

Japanese militarists contribute to the heightening of tensions on the peninsula. Because of them, talks between the Red Cross [organizations] of the DPRK and Japan regarding the repatriation of Korean citizens resident in Japan broke up twice. The Japanese authorities are increasing their penetration of South Korea, they are entering into an ever closer conspiracy with the South Korean puppets: the Japanese militarists are preparing plans for war against the DPRK.

The main position of the DPRK government on the question of peaceful unification of the country remains unchanged. However, in light of the increasing danger of war, the DPRK is facing the task of defending the gains of socialism. That's why construction in the country is proceeding simultaneously in the economic and military fields. Successes in this regard are the result of the wise leadership of the party and the consistent implementation of the spirit of independence and self-reliance (juche).

The Korean people, fully and wholly supporting the political program of the DPRK government presented by comrade Kim Il Sung at the session of the Supreme People's

Council of the DPRK in December of 1967, is achieving successes in the field of economic construction.

The plan of the first quarter of the current year has been successfully implemented. However, in the metallurgic industry, because of the shortage of coke, certain difficulties have emerged.

Considering the tense conditions in Korea and Asia, the government of the DPRK is striving to develop and strengthen co-operation between the DPRK and the USSR.

A.N. Kosygin thanked [the ambassador] for greetings conveyed from comrade Kim Il Sung, for his reply telegram, and for the report made by the ambassador regarding the situation in Korea.

A.N. Kosygin remarked that the content of this report regarding the situation in Korea is accessible to all, we receive similar information from press reports. The difficulty of the situation on the Korean peninsula is understood in the Soviet Union, and developments are watched closely. However, we are not aware of the considerations and plans of the DPRK government with regard to the further development of events. This makes it difficult for the Soviet Union to provide the DPRK with support on the international level and, in particular, in international organizations. The Soviet comrades are compelled only to use materials published in the open press. Evidently, the Korean comrades have their own considerations on this account.

A.N. Kosygin asked the ambassador to tell comrade Kim Il Sung that we would like full trust and frankness in our relations. As far as we are concerned, we always acted like this before, and we are acting like this now. We do not have secrets from you, and we tell you everything frankly. In the Soviet Union we understand the difficulties that arose in the DPRK as a result of the decrease in supplies from China, of coal in particular. The Soviet Union is doing the best it can to relieve the economic difficulties of the DPRK. For

example, we send coal to the DPRK even from the Donbass basin, even though the cost of transportation in this case is greater than the cost of coal itself.

However, big difficulties arise when the Soviet coal is unloaded in the DPRK. Sometimes over 2000 train cars are stuck on the Soviet border, and they are stuck there because the Korean side cannot unload them on time.

The Soviet side is planning on continuing economic co-operation with the DPRK in the future. In the near future we will look into the question of sending [Deputy Head of Council of Ministers] V.N. Novikov to Pyongyang to participate in the work of the 2nd session of the intergovernmental Soviet-Korean consultative committee for economic, scientific and technological questions.

A.N. Kosygin asked [Amb. Chon] to tell Kim Il Sung that we remember talks with him in the Soviet Union, when questions of Soviet-Korean and inter-party relations were discussed frankly. A.N. Kosygin stressed that the spirit of frankness remains the main thing in Soviet-Korean relations.

In conclusion, comrade A.N. Kosygin asked [Amb. Chon] to convey greetings to Kim Il Sung, Ch'oe Yong-gon, Kim Il, and other Korean leaders from comrades L.I. Brezhnev and N.V. Podgorny.

Chon Tu-hwan thanked [com. Kosygin] for the greetings, said that they will be conveyed as addressed. [He] thanked him for understanding the difficulties the DPRK is going through. [He] expressed confidence that during the period of his work in Moscow, the Soviet government will co-operate with him.

Member of the Kollegia of the Foreign Ministry of the USSR V.I. Likhachev, counsellor of the Korean embassy Kang Ch'ol Gun, 3rd secretary Kim Ze Rok were present at the meeting. The conversation was recorded by the attaché of the Department of Far Eastern Affairs of the Soviet Foreign Ministry V. Gorovoi.