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Juche and North Korea's Global Aspirations

By Charles K. Armstrong

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Christian F. Ostermann, Series Editor

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North Korea International Documentation Project
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
One Woodrow Wilson Plaza
1300 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20523

Telephone: (202) 691-4110

Fax: (202) 691-4001

Email: nkidp@wilsoncenter.org

NKIDP Web Page: <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/nkidp>

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#1 Charles K. Armstrong, "Juche and North Korea's Global Aspirations"

***Juche* and North Korea's Global Aspirations**

Charles K. Armstrong

Columbia University, New York

Engaging the World

The late 1960s and 1970s were a time of unprecedented outward expansion for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Admission to several UN bodies, active lobbying at the UN General Assembly, a successful diplomatic offensive in the Third World, and new economic and political ties to advanced capitalist countries all reflected a new global presence for the DPRK.¹ Sheltered within the socialist bloc for decades, North Korea broke out into the world in the 1970s. In a sense, this was North Korea's pursuit of what later would be called "globalization," foreshadowing South Korea's globalization or *seggyewha* policy of the early 1990s. But it was a peculiar and limited kind of globalization. The ultimate failure of North Korea's pursuit of globalization *avant le lettre* was perhaps inevitable, reflecting the contradiction between North Korea's stated policy of *juche* (independence or self-reliance) and the necessary requirements for active engagement in the international system, particularly the global economy. International engagement without significant internal reform or opening had some success until about the mid-1970s, especially in North Korea's Third-World diplomacy, but this rise in global stature would sputter out in the 1980s, before crashing spectacularly in the 1990s.

For the first twenty years or so after its founding in 1948, the DPRK remained ensconced almost exclusively within the community of fellow socialist nations. It had no formal diplomatic ties outside the Soviet bloc, China and North Vietnam until the 1960s. Economically North Korea was equally isolated from the non-communist world. Until the 1970s, the vast majority of North Korea's foreign trade – nearly 90% in 1966, according to the CIA – was with other communist countries. China and the USSR alone comprised nearly three-quarters of North Korea's total trade in the late 1960s.² But from about 1962, following the conclusion of post-war reconstruction and the sharp drop in developmental assistance from the USSR and the East bloc, North Korean trade with non-communist countries steadily increased.³ Paradoxically, the first capitalist country North Korea turned to for trade and investment was its former colonizer Japan.⁴ Despite a lack of diplomatic relations and ongoing North Korean propaganda about the threat of Japanese "militarism," Japan soon

became North Korea’s most important non-communist trading partner. Trade with Japan constituted almost one-half of North Korea’s trade with the non-communist world in the mid-1960s, and Japan would remain North Korea’s largest capitalist trading partner for decades to come.⁵

North Korean trade with the “Free World” rose dramatically with the relaxation of Cold War hostilities in the early 1970s. Having mended fences with China after the easing of the Cultural Revolution in that country, and enjoying a period of good relations with the USSR at the same time, the DPRK appears to have felt secure enough to pursue its own version of détente with the West in an atmosphere of a global reduction in East-West tensions. While North Korea sent some feelers to the US on reducing mutual hostilities in the early 1970s,⁶ and signed an unprecedented joint communiqué with South Korea in July 1972, the main focus of North Korea’s new overtures to the capitalist world was to establish and expand economic ties to Western Europe and Japan.

Between 1970 and 1975, North Korea signed nearly \$600 million dollars’ worth of contracts with Japanese and West European companies.⁷ Unfortunately for North Korea, the timing of this outward expansion was not good, coming just before the OPEC oil shock of 1973 and the resulting global economic downturn. By the latter half of 1974, North Korea began defaulting on its debts, mainly to Japanese, French and British banks and firms. By mid-1975, according to US intelligence estimates, North Korea was some \$200-300 million in arrears; the DPRK soon had the dubious distinction of being the first communist country to default on its debts to the West.⁸ In May 1975, Japan’s Export-Import Bank denied further loans to the DPRK. North Korea soon found more creative ways to earn foreign exchange. In the fall of 1976, North Korean diplomats in several Scandinavian countries were accused of smuggling ginseng, liquor, cigarettes, industrial goods, and – according to some reports – illicit drugs.⁹ Several diplomats were expelled.¹⁰ As a result of its debt defaults and illegal smuggling activities, North Korea achieved a kind of pariah status vis-à-vis Western financial institutions, governments and potential trading partners and investors that it has still not entirely shaken off.

A Global Development Model

If North Korea’s First World economic diplomacy had fizzled out by the late 1970s, its Third World diplomacy was somewhat more enduring, although this too would reach its limits within a couple of decades. In the 1960s, and especially in the 1970s, North Korea presented itself enthusiastically as a model for Third World development. At first glance, this

seems like a peculiar position for the DPRK to take. Few countries in the world have emphasized their distinctiveness and independence as much as North Korea. The core ideological concept and “guiding political principle” of the DPRK for several decades has been “*juche*,” meaning autonomy, independence, or self-reliance. When Kim Il Sung first elaborated on the *juche* principle in his speech of December 1955, he declared, “We are not engaged in any other country’s revolution, but solely in the Korean revolution. This, the Korean revolution, determines the essence of *juche* in the ideological work of our Party.”¹¹ Yet for some twenty years, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, North Korea worked assiduously to present *juche* as a model – of politics, economic development, and foreign relations – for other countries to emulate.¹² And indeed, the notion of “self-reliance” embodied in *juche* did seem to jibe with a certain *Zeitgeist* during this period. For many countries, especially those freed from colonial domination in the first few decades after World War II, the idea of self-reliance— and North Korea’s apparent success at self-reliant development— held a powerful allure. For a time at least, North Korea’s leaders did seem to believe their country was an example for the Third World worthy of emulation, Kim Il Sung tried with some success to present himself as a leader of the non-aligned Third World, and a number of Third World governments, particularly in Africa, seemed to find aspects of the North Korean model both relevant and attractive. Yet, the contradiction remained: how could something “uniquely Korean” also be a model for export in far-flung parts of the world, from Asia to Africa to Latin America?

Rivalry with the South was one important component of North Korea’s Third World diplomacy. The DPRK in its early years was at a considerable disadvantage vis-a-vis the ROK in terms of diplomatic relations, although now the two states are nearly even. In the 1960s, North Korea opened diplomatic relations with dozens of new countries, mostly in the Middle East and Africa. But South Korea did the same, and remained ahead of the North in the diplomatic game. In the 1970s, North Korea apparently decided it would try to close the gap, and did indeed reach parity with the South in terms of numbers of countries with which it had diplomatic relations [TABLE].¹³

TABLE: DPRK Establishment of Diplomatic Relations, 1971 – 1980¹⁴

1971 Yugoslavia, Syria, Malta
1972 Cameroon, Rwanda, Chile, Uganda, Senegal, Upper Volta, Pakistan,
Madagascar, Zaire
1973 Togo, Benin, Gambia, Mauritius, Sweden, Iran, Argentina, Finland, Norway,
Malaysia, Denmark, Iceland, Bangladesh, India, Afghanistan, Angola

1974 Libya, Gabon, Costa Rica, Guinea-Bissau, Nepal, Ghana, Laos, Australia,
Jordan, Niger, Jamaica, Venezuela, Botswana, Austria, Switzerland
1975 Fiji, Portugal, Thailand, Kenya, Burma, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tunisia, Sao
Tome- Principe, Cape Verde, Singapore
1976 Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles
1977 Barbados
1978 Western Samoa
1979 Grenada, Nicaragua, St. Lucia, Dominican Republic
1980 Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Mexico

As the table above demonstrates, among the countries with which the DPRK established diplomatic relations in the 1970s, 11 were in Europe, 10 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 3 in the Middle East, 13 in the Asia-Pacific, and 27 in Africa. The 1970s represent the peak of North Korean Third World diplomacy and the promotion of *juche* as a model. By the mid-1980s, North Korea’s image in the developing world sharply declined and many developing countries shifted their diplomacy more in favor of South Korea.

Joining the Third World

As noted previously, North Korea’s diplomatic relations were confined solely to other socialist states until the late 1950s. In the mid-1950s North Korea began to cultivate ties with what would soon be called “Non-Aligned” nations of the Third World. Throughout the wave of independence struggles in Africa and Asia during the 1950s to the 1980s, North Korea declared its solidarity with various anti-colonial and national liberation movements. Coincidentally North Korea began its Third World diplomacy in 1955, the year the term “Third World” was coined by the French demographer Alfred Sauvy.¹⁵ In April of that year, the DPRK sent a delegation to the Asian Conference for the Relaxation of International Tension (ACRIT) in New Delhi, the first major Third World conference attended by North Koreans. Although North Korea (along with South Korea) was excluded from the 1955 Conference for Afro-Asian Solidarity held in Bandung, Indonesia, which effectively launched the Non-Aligned Movement, the DPRK media covered the Bandung Conference quite positively.¹⁶ The DPRK publicly supported Egypt in the Suez Crisis of 1956, and even sent a small amount of economic assistance to the Nasser government. This was a foretaste of the extensive assistance and advice North Korea would give to Third World governments in future years, especially in Africa. The first non-socialist Third World government with whom the DPRK established full diplomatic relations was the Algerian National Liberation Front

(FLN) in September 1958, four years before the FLN ousted the French and took power in Algiers.¹⁷

Regionally, North Korea's Third World diplomacy primarily focused on South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa; Latin America, dominated overwhelmingly by the US, was largely off-limits to North Korea influence, although the DPRK did have diplomatic relations with several Latin American countries by the end of the 1970s. The major exception to this was Cuba after the 1960 revolution, with which North Korea developed strong relations, the two regimes seeing themselves on the front lines against US imperialism.¹⁸ Kim Il Sung reportedly told the outgoing Cuban ambassador to Pyongyang in 1967 that North Korea "supported only those Latin American revolutionary movements which the Cubans also agreed with and which they supported."¹⁹ But this show of support for Latin American revolution was generally more symbolic than real – although there were exceptions. In 1971, for example, Mexican authorities arrested nineteen Mexicans who had allegedly received guerilla training and financial support from North Korea. As Mexico had no diplomatic relations with North Korea, five Soviet diplomats were expelled because of alleged Soviet complicity in the affair.²⁰

North Korea in the 1960s and 1970s might indeed have seemed a model of post-colonial nation-building, having been founded by anti-imperialist fighters, built up an impressive industrial economy, and successfully resisted (albeit with considerable Chinese assistance) the military might of the United States in the Korean War. With no foreign troops on its soil after the withdrawal of the Chinese People's Volunteers in 1958, North Korea looked particularly good in contrast to the South, heavily dependent on US economic assistance and host to tens of thousands of American troops. Externally, the DPRK propaganda line was consistently in favor of anti-colonial nationalism and independence throughout the Third World. In his frequent commentary on the *juche* idea, Kim Il Sung regularly pointed to "US imperialism" as the main enemy of the Third World peoples, and advocated *Juche* as the very embodiment of anti-imperialism. The DPRK portrayed the North Koreans' struggle against the US and South Korea as identical with the struggle of Third-World peoples for independence, and completely compatible with "proletarian internationalism":

We should unite closely with the peoples of all the socialist countries; we should actively support the Asian, African and Latin American peoples struggling to throw off the imperialist yoke, and strengthen solidarity with them.²¹

This revolutionary spirit was very much in sync with a good many movements for Third World solidarity in the age of decolonization.

Over the course of the 1960s, North Korea normalized relations with some two dozen new governments, mostly in Africa and the Middle East. The DPRK tried to use its new diplomatic stature to advance its agenda in the United Nations, advocating DPRK participation in General Assembly debates on the Korean Question, an end to US dominance in UN activities on the Korean Peninsula, and the removal of US forces from South Korea. Outside the UN forum, North Korea tried with some success to play a leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement, formally launched in Belgrade in 1961. Trade and military exchange with non-socialist Third World countries were also of some economic benefit to North Korea, although economic relations with China and the Soviet-bloc states remained far more important to the DPRK until the very end of the Soviet Union. June 1961 was a particularly fruitful month for North Korea’s Third World diplomacy: DPRK Trade Minister Yi Chu-yŏn visited Indonesia and India, opening trade and consular relations with these two countries, while also establishing a trade agreement with Burma. On a tour through West Africa that summer, North Korean officials signed similar trade agreements with Guinea, Mali and Ghana. Guinea, in fact, had been the first sub-Saharan African country with which the DPRK established full diplomatic relations, in October 1958 (and only the second non-East Bloc country after Algeria, earlier that year). In October 1961, North Korea and Mali produced a joint communiqué on “Afro-Asian solidarity against US imperialism.”²²

In the Middle East, North Korea’s first diplomatic success was with the Nasser government of Egypt, to which the DPRK had given token financial assistance during the Suez Crisis. In 1961, a DPRK delegation visited Egypt to discuss establishing consular relations, and North Korea sent similar preliminary missions to South Yemen, Morocco, and Iraq. North Korea officially condemned Israeli actions in the Middle East as complicit with US imperialism; the DPRK strongly sided with the Arab states against Israel in the 1967 war, for example.²³ By 1963, the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the DPRK, North Korea was no longer the isolated outpost of the Soviet bloc that it had been in the aftermath of the Korean War: twenty-two foreign delegations participated in the fifteenth-anniversary celebrations in Pyongyang, representing for the first time many Asian, African and Middle Eastern countries outside the socialist bloc. The following year, Pyongyang hosted the Asian Economic Conference, attended by delegates from thirty-four Asia-Pacific and African

countries. Kim Il Sung proclaimed the DPRK a model of self-reliant development and anti-imperialist independence for the entire Third World.²⁴

Kim's most important Third World summit appearance of the 1960s was in Indonesia in April 1965, the tenth anniversary of the Bandung Conference. This was Kim's first visit outside the socialist bloc since the founding of the DPRK. Indonesia's President Sukarno had visited Pyongyang the previous year, where he seems to have been greatly impressed by North Korea's self-reliance strategy and Kim Il Sung's leadership. Kim was accompanied in his visit to Indonesia by his son Kim Jong Il, a fact that was not stressed in the DPRK media at the time but became an important part of the younger Kim's foreign policy resumé in latter years, after Kim Jong Il had taken power in the DPRK.²⁵ During this visit Kim Jong Il met Sukarno's daughter Megawati, whom he invited to Pyongyang in 2002, when Megawati was president of Indonesia.

The highlight of Kim's visit was his speech at Ali Archam Social Science Institute in Jakarta on April 14. The speech, entitled *On Socialist Construction in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the South Korean Revolution*,²⁶ outlined the basic principles of *Juche*, called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Korea, and called for strengthening the anti-imperialist movement in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.²⁷ Dae-sook Suh has called the speech Kim's "way of declaring political independence from China and the Soviet Union."²⁸ In fact, although Kim attacks "revisionism" and great power arrogance in his speech, he does not criticize the USSR and China directly. His speech is mostly concerned with extolling the success of North Korea's socialist development (especially in the economic realm) and criticizing the South, as well as American imperialism. In the middle part of the speech Kim outlines the principles of *juche*, making his famous declaration that the DPRK is based on "Juche in ideology, independence in politics, self-reliance in economy, self-defense in national defense."²⁹ This was the first time Kim had so explicitly presented his country as a model for Third World development, and his speech was well-received. Kim was given an honorary degree by the Indonesians and praised by Sukarno as being "the most respected leader in the world."³⁰

Kim, it seemed, had suddenly emerged as a leader of the "non-aligned" countries of the Third World, a development which both encouraged and concerned North Korea's European socialist allies, who worried that the DPRK might become too independent of the Soviet bloc.³¹ Kim and Sukarno, North Korea and Indonesia were newfound allies at the forefront of the anti-imperialist struggle. This moment of triumph was short-lived, however, as Kim Il Sung turns out to have visited Indonesia during its infamous "year of living

dangerously.” By the end of 1965, Sukarno’s left-leaning government had been toppled by a coup amidst one of the bloodiest anti-communist massacres in history. The coup installed the pro-American General Suharto in power for the next thirty years. At the same time, the American military escalation in Vietnam created a much more volatile and dangerous atmosphere for North Korea’s interests in Asia.

The Vietnam War

The DPRK had identified Korea’s position with that of Vietnam from the beginning of the American military intervention in Vietnam in 1961. Of course, the Western countries had also linked together the Korean and Vietnamese questions as early as the 1954 Geneva Conference on Korea and Indochina. The Soviet-aligned countries as well conflated Korea and Vietnam in the 1950s and 1960s, as expressed in socialist East Germany’s “Committee for the Assistance of Korea and Vietnam.” Two divided countries on the periphery of China, Korea and Vietnam seemed strikingly, even confusingly, alike in the minds of Europeans and Americans. From a Chinese perspective also, Vietnam and Korea were two of a kind: for centuries important buffer states on the southern and northeastern flanks of the Chinese empire, respectively, the two countries had been traditionally the most faithful members of the Sino-centric “tributary system,” acknowledging the titular supremacy of the Chinese Emperor over their own kings, and borrowing heavily from Chinese models of politics, social organization, and elite culture.³² More recently, the Chinese communist movement had been a kind of “elder brother” to the Vietnamese and Koreans – both Ho Chi Minh and Kim Il Sung had spent years in China working with the Chinese Communist Party – and the PRC leadership saw Korea and Vietnam, along with Taiwan, as the three most important fronts in the struggle against US imperialism.³³

The DPRK leadership tended to be more enthusiastic than the Vietnamese about the parallels between their two countries. Ho Chi Minh, while expressing gratitude for North Korean assistance against South Vietnam and the Americans, was more focused on the indigenous aspects of the Vietnamese war of independence, perhaps because he wanted to be seen as more of a nationalist than an “internationalist.” Kim Il Sung, for his part, made a special point of showing solidarity with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in their joint struggle against the US and its client states of South Korea and South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh visited Pyongyang in June 1961, and in their joint communiqué the two leaders condemned US intervention as the primary impediment to national unification in their two countries and demanded an immediate American withdrawal from the region. The growing

American military presence in Vietnam was attacked by the DPRK media as an “invasion” of the country in 1962. The following year, North Korea established a committee to support the South Vietnamese resistance movement, and at the same time the DPRK built up its own defense forces in a new policy of “equal emphasis” on the civilian and military sectors of the economy. The Park Chung Hee military regime in South Korea showed no signs of weakening, and indeed was consolidating its hold with massive US economic and military support. Under these circumstances, North Korea’s build-up of both military forces and rhetoric also reflected a real concern about the threat from the South, and its support for North Vietnam was a means of weakening the US in the region – and perhaps a way of living vicariously through a guerrilla movement in South Vietnam that, unlike the long-defunct guerrilla movement in South Korea, showed signs of real success.

Blocked from any significant direct engagement on the Korean peninsula itself, the two Koreas played out a kind of proxy war in Vietnam. In 1965, under strong US pressure and with promises of lavish American aid, the ROK began to dispatch combat troops to aid the American effort in Vietnam.³⁴ The South Korean intervention was condemned in the strongest possible terms by Pyongyang. The DPRK for its part sent medicine, clothes, and other goods to aid the South Vietnamese guerilla movement. In July North Korea offered to send the South Vietnamese resistance forces as much material aid and military equipment as they needed; in January 1966 the DPRK and DRV concluded an “Economic Agreement on Free Aid,” and throughout the Vietnam War North Korea continued to send aid to the DRV, although the precise amount is not known. Kim Il Sung offered to send combat troops in 1966 as well, but he was turned down.³⁵ Other than military advisors and some air support, it does not appear that the DPRK ever contributed its own military forces to the Vietnam War. South Korea, in contrast, had sent some 325,000 soldiers to Vietnam by the time ROK troops withdrew in 1973. In the end, of course, the US- and South Korea-backed Saigon government fell, and the communist North was triumphant. For Kim Il Sung, Vietnamese unification was a hopeful portent of what he wished to happen in Korea. In April 1975, as Phnom Penh and Saigon were falling to the revolutionary forces of the Khmer Rouge and North Vietnamese respectively, Kim gave a triumphant speech in Beijing, in which he declared Asia to be on a “high tide of revolution.” If a revolutionary war were to break out in Korea, Kim said, “we will only lose the Military Demarcation Line and will gain the country’s reunification.”³⁶

The Indian Summer of World Revolution

From Beijing, Kim went on to Algeria, Mauritania, Romania, Bulgaria, and finally to Yugoslavia, where he met with Tito, one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), in Belgrade on 6 June. The year 1975 marked the high point of North Korea's diplomatic offensive in the Third World and toward the non-aligned countries in particular.³⁷ In August, the foreign ministers of the member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement agreed to admit the DPRK as a member, while rejecting Seoul's application to join. It was, of course, a victory in the competition with the South, but Pyongyang's courting of NAM also represented a shift away from radical regimes and movements to the more moderate countries of the Third World as a whole, which responded with initially strong support for North Korea's position in North-South rivalry and the United Nations.³⁸

North Korea's moment in the sun was not to last, however; in a little over a year, the DPRK's image had been badly tarnished, mostly because of its relations with first world countries: its default in repayment of its debts to European and Japanese trading companies, the ejection of its diplomats from Scandinavia countries on charges of smuggling, and the DMZ "axe-murder incident" in August 1976 which brought US-DPRK tensions to one of the highest points since the Korean War.³⁹ Furthermore, the NAM itself proved to be less than unified over the Korean Question, and differences over Korea came out in the open at the NAM Summit Conference in Colombo, Sri Lanka in August 1976. At the Sixth NAM Summit, held in Havana in 1979, the Cubans sharply criticized both the United States and China, and tried to push NAM in a more pro-Soviet direction, with North Korea caught in the middle.⁴⁰ North Korea tried to remain neutral in this dispute, stressing independence; this moderation apparently was effective, and Pyongyang was admitted to the Coordinating Bureau of the NAM that year.

Nevertheless, before this sharp change in fortunes, events in the mid-1970s seemed to prove Kim's Beijing speech to be correct: there was a "high tide of revolution" not just in Asia, but in the Third World as a whole, and in Africa in particular. It was, in retrospect, a Pyrrhic victory. The blooming of various "people's democracies" in the period dating roughly from the fall of Saigon in 1975 to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 would prove to be the last advance of Marxist-Leninist socialism before its rapid march into the dustbin of history. It is, however, worth remembering how remarkable this mid-1970s transformation was: in a period of some eighteen months in 1974 and 1975, for example, self-professed Marxist-Leninist leaders came to power in Angola, Mozambique, Madagascar and Ethiopia; eight other African states declared themselves "socialist," or what the Soviets sometimes called "socialist-oriented."⁴¹

But the socialist world had ceased to be unified since the early 1960s, or even particularly civil among its members. The Sino-Soviet dispute played itself out in Africa, where there was fierce inter-communist rivalry, as well as various forms of cooperation, among Soviet, Chinese, East European, Cuban and North Korean aid programs and advisors. Bedfellows could be strange. For example, in Angola, the Soviets supported the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), while the Chinese, Romanians and North Koreans sided with the rival National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), which was also supported by the United States; in effect, North Korea was siding with the US against the Soviet Union.⁴² Furthermore, North Korea did not always display much ideological discrimination with the African regimes it supported. Pyongyang assisted such unsavory right-wing dictators as Mobutu in Zaire, Idi Amin of Uganda, and Bokassa, the self-styled Emperor of the Central African Republic. North Korean engineers built a presidential palace for Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, president of Burundi, in the late 1970s.⁴³

Much of North Korea's aid to Africa appears to have been in the form of military assistance and training (although here the figures, mostly from South Korean intelligence sources, must be treated with some caution). According to one estimate, there were 8,000 North Korean military personnel sent to 38 countries between 1966 and 1983, while in the same period North Korea provided training for some 7,000 military personnel from 30 countries.⁴⁴ The London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies reported in 1985 the presence of 1,000 North Korean military personnel in Angola, 100 in Madagascar, 40 in Seychelles, 20 in Uganda, and "unspecified numbers in seven other African countries," as well as 300 in Iran.⁴⁵ Mobutu of Zaire replaced his Israeli military advisors for North Koreans to train his elite military division, and was warmly welcomed in Pyongyang in December 1974.⁴⁶ North Korean military aid to Mugabe's regime in Zimbabwe was instrumental in the consolidation of his regime, in particular his ability to crush the resistance in Matabeleland between 1982 and 1985. Interestingly, the only country other than the USSR and China with which North Korea has signed a mutual defense treaty was Libya in 1982. But North Korean aid to Africa was not only military: between 1957 and 1982, 57% of North Korea's trade agreements had been signed with African countries. North Korea had become, relative to the size of its own economy, a rather substantial contributor to African development.⁴⁷

North Koreans in Ethiopia

Ethiopia under Mengistu Haili Miriam was one of the most significant of the Marxist-Leninist experiments in Africa, and one of North Korea’s most active African partners in the late 1970s and early 1980s. After the 1974 overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie, Mengistu approached the Americans for support; rebuffed, he turned to Moscow in January 1975. The Soviets gave generously: Ethiopia was the most important Soviet-led intervention outside Europe until Afghanistan in 1979, the largest foreign assistance program the USSR had undertaken since China in the 1950s, and the largest socialist multilateral aid project since the reconstruction of North Korea after the Korean War. China itself was conspicuously absent in Ethiopia, focusing on other parts of Africa and leaving the reconstruction of Ethiopia to the USSR and its close allies. Cuba played a particularly active role, sending 11,600 soldiers and 1,000 advisors.⁴⁸ East Germany was also a leading source of military and economic aid to the Mengistu regime.⁴⁹ North Korea’s highly visible presence in Ethiopia during the Mengistu period is rather ironic, as Ethiopia under the old regime had participated in the Korean War on the *South* Korean side. Kim Il Sung commented to GDR leader Erich Honecker in 1984 that “we have agricultural specialists in nearly all African countries,” and that “Ethiopia has obviously achieved the highest level of consolidation of a Marxist party” in Africa.⁵⁰

North Korea’s decision to send military advisors, engineers, and agricultural experts was almost a mirror-image of its role as an aid recipient after the Korean War, and perhaps that was a conscious motivation. Just as the Soviets helped rebuild Pyongyang and the East Germans Hamhung,⁵¹ so the North Koreans helped to reconstruct Addis Ababa as a “socialist” city. One unique skill the North Koreans had was in staging parades and “mass games,” which they taught the Ethiopians to perform for the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the revolution in September 1984.⁵² Another of their projects was the “Victory Monument” in front of the main hospital in Addis Ababa.

North Korea sent around 500 advisors to Ethiopia from 1977, mostly in the military field to train in anti-guerilla tactics and for fighting Somalia (which by now had switched to a pro-American position). Agricultural advisors were also sent, whose projects included an attempt to plant rice in the south of the country, an experiment that utterly failed. Mengistu himself visited Pyongyang twice and was deeply impressed by what he saw there, so much so that he made his citizens sport North Korean-style uniforms.⁵³

According to my interviews with Assefe Medhanie, formerly in charge of foreign affairs for the Ethiopian Workers’ Party, the Mengistu regime sought “loose solidarity under the umbrella of the Soviet Union,” and turned to several socialist countries for support. The Chinese were not forthcoming with the kind of weaponry and aid they wanted, and the

Chinese presence in Ethiopia was minimal. But the North Koreans were active in several areas, including small-scale construction and festivals (which particularly impressed the Ethiopians). North Korea built two large ammunition factories in the country and supported Ethiopians' ambitions to produce their own weapons. There was some competition between the Cubans and North Koreans, and Koreans also helped in the war against Somalia, although not on the scale of the Cubans. Assefe had the sense that the North Koreans considered Mengistu as the kind of take-charge "big man" who seemed like a Kim Il Sung in the making.

Nevertheless, despite the mutual admiration that existed between the two governments, *juche* never really took root in Ethiopia. A few university professors were invited to Pyongyang to study *juche* but, as my informant put it, "came back running." Some students went to study Taekwondo, but many more students went to Eastern Europe to study modern administration and science; a group of North Korean students also came to study in Addis Ababa. Party relations were good, with members attending each others' Party Congresses. But the deeper "lessons" of the North Korean experience did not seem particularly applicable to the Ethiopian environment. *Juche*, the Ethiopians felt, did not translate.⁵⁴

"Victory" at the United Nations

North Korea's Third World offensive helped secure the DPRK's first "victory" at the United Nations in the General Assembly (UNGA) in October 1975. In the early 1970s, North Korea dropped its hostile position toward the UN; North Korea and China had after all ostensibly fought a war against the international body, even though the Korean War enemy was usually portrayed as the "American imperialists." But now the PRC had finally taken Taiwan's seat at the UN Security Council (UNSC), joining the Soviet Union as one of the Permanent Five UNSC members. The United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK) was dissolved, and the DPRK joined the World Health Organization in 1973, the first of several UN bodies Pyongyang would join in the 1970s. It refused to join the UN itself alongside South Korea, although this had been proposed by the Soviet Union as early as 1956.⁵⁵ Only after the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the recognition of South Korea by both Russia and China in 1992 would the two Koreas join the international body.

At the 30th UN General Assembly in 1975, a DPRK proposal on the Korean Question was adopted for debate by the UNGA for the first time. North Korea's proposal called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the Korean peninsula (meaning, essentially, US forces

from South Korea) and the dissolution of the UN Command. The US and other supporters of South Korea submitted a rival resolution that would allow the maintenance of US troops while the UNC was officially dissolved. The two draft resolutions were taken up for debate by the full UNGA in October 1975. The pro-DPRK resolution passed with considerable support from Third World countries, particularly in Africa. This has been portrayed in North Korean propaganda ever since as a resounding victory for the DPRK and a sign of its deep global support.⁵⁶ However, a pro-ROK resolution also passed shortly thereafter. None of these resolutions changed the situation on the Korean peninsula. Contrary to DPRK official accounts, North-South rivalry at the UN in the mid-1970s resulted not in a North Korean victory, but a stalemate.

The Limits of North Korea-style "Globalization"

Despite North Korea's initially successful diplomatic offensive in the Third World, Juche was never much of a development model, for several reasons. First, at the most general level there is probably no readily transferable model of development, including that of South Korea, and North Korea's conditions are truly unique in the world. Second, of course, North Korea's development path has been a failure by almost any measure, as was beginning to become evident in the 1980s (especially in contrast to South Korea). No sensible Third World government would try to emulate it at the present time. Third, even at the height of North Korea's Third World activism, Juche diplomacy was useful more for domestic propaganda and diplomatic rivalry with South Korea than as a genuine blueprint for developmental assistance, although there were no doubt some true believers on both sides. Ironically perhaps, North Korea's economic involution since the early 1990s has reduced the DPRK to a level of poverty more typical of the poorer states of southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa than of the advanced economies of East Asia. In that sense, in its very failure, North Korea has been a more typical example of a Third World state than it would care to admit.

As for the First World, North Korea's attempts at economic engagement with advanced capitalist countries in the early 1970s did not result in deep and extensive linkages between North Korea and the West, nor did they give much long-term benefit to either side. North Korea did manage to establish diplomatic relations with a number of countries in Northern and Western Europe, but the expansion of ties with the First World reached a plateau in the mid-1970s. The DPRK would not move beyond this plateau until the late 1990s, when under very different circumstances (and with the encouragement of South Korea) North Korea launched an unprecedented diplomatic offensive in Europe, the

Americas and the Asia-Pacific. Furthermore, North Korea's initial turn to advanced capitalist countries for trade and economic assistance ended badly, with massive unpaid debts and diplomats expelled for smuggling. North Korea had hoped that engagement with the West would bring in the necessary capital and technology to help fulfill its ambitious Six-Year Economic Plan (1971-76), much as assistance from the Soviet Union, China and Eastern Europe had enabled North Korea's post-Korean War development program.⁵⁷ Such hopes, and with them the goals of the Six-Year Plan, remained unfulfilled in the late 1970s, and North Korea's industrialization efforts were frustrated at the very moment when the South Korean economy was beginning to move successfully into its heavy industry phase.

Finally, notwithstanding its new relationships with Western and non-aligned nations, the DPRK remained closely tied to the Soviet bloc and China. The USSR and China still accounted for nearly half of North Korea's trade in the late 1970s. Trade with the Third World comprised another 25% of North Korea's overall trade.⁵⁸ While North Korea sought imports and investment from the West, few outside of the communist bloc and the poorer nations of the Third World were interested in North Korea's exports.⁵⁹ As Kim Il Sung remarked to Erich Honecker during the latter's official visit to North Korea in December 1977, the DPRK was first and foremost a socialist nation. The Korean Workers' Party advocated the "joining of all revolutionary forces, especially those of socialist countries, 'Third World' countries, the non-aligned nations, the international workers movement, and the national liberation movement." Despite "difficulties in joining the forces of socialist nations" due to the friction between the USSR and China, both were "comrades in arms of the DPRK."⁶⁰ Pyongyang's official foreign policy priority remained the "all-round victory of socialism," and North Korea's solidarity with the Third World and opportunistic engagement with capitalist nations were supposed to be means to that end.⁶¹ A closed-door, command-economy nation such as North Korea could only engage comfortably with the wider world while the socialist community of nations provided it with guaranteed markets and military and political support. With the collapse of that socialist universe at the end of the 1980s, North Korea's globalization came to an abrupt end as well, and the DPRK had to practice a grim, genuine "self-reliance" for the first time.

DOCUMENT APPENDIX



DOCUMENT No. 1

[Source: MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1967, 61. doboz, 1, 002130/1967. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Balázs Szalontai].

Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, 9 March 1967.

As we already reported in an open telegram, Kim Il Sung—in the presence of the members of the KWP Presidium and several other high-ranking leaders—received Cuban Ambassador Vigoa, who will leave the DPRK in the immediate future. Following the reception, Kim Il Sung gave a luncheon in honor of the Cuban ambassador. In the opinion of several fraternal ambassadors, this honor given to the Cuban ambassador reflected the close relationship between the Korean and Cuban parties.

According to the information received from GDR Ambassador Comrade Horst Brie about the conversation that took place between Comrades Kim Il Sung and Vigoa, it was the following parts which were the most significant:

Kim Il Sung praised the right policy of the KWP Presidium, which was also justified by the present events. He considered the international situation as well as the situation of the Communist and workers' movement extremely complicated. Speaking of the Korean-Chinese relationship, Kim Il Sung stated that it was very problematic, and he referred to the Chinese provocations that had become known recently. Evidently referring to the [alleged] conflict between [himself] and Kim Gwanghyeop that the Red Guards were spreading rumors of, Kim Il Sung jokingly remarked that Kim Gwanghyeop was sitting alongside him, participating in the conversation, and that it was obvious what this meant. During the conversation Kim Gwanghyeop made anti-Chinese remarks. Among others, he declared that he knew the current Chinese ambassador to Pyongyang well since they had fought together against the Japanese for a long time, and [he knew] why [the ambassador] was now under attack.

(Comment: as we already reported, according to the information we received from Mongolian sources, the work of the current Chinese ambassador to Pyongyang, who has not been here for a long time, has been criticized at home.)

Kim Il Sung spoke disapprovingly of the activity of the Chinese embassy here, pointing out that the latter carried out anti-DPRK propaganda among the ethnic Chinese people living in the DPRK. The Korean comrades were indignant with the provocations committed against the Korean embassy in Beijing. Kim Il Sung said that they [the Chinese] planted signs in front of our embassy saying: Brezhnev and Kosygin should be roasted in their own fat.” We understand what these and similar attacks mean! With regard to the issue of the glass display case [set up by the Chinese embassy in Pyongyang], Kim Il Sung stated that the behavior of the Chinese was not compatible with the principles of proletarian internationalism and one should instead declare it a bourgeois nationalist action. Speaking of the well-known behavior of the new Albanian ambassador, he stressed that the latter, though he had not spent more than a few days in the DPRK, once more put the photos that had been removed by the Albanian chargé d’affaires ad interim into their glass display case. This is hostile behavior, a step unworthy of a fraternal ambassador!

Kim Il Sung considered Korean-Cuban relations to be very good. He stated that the latter was characterized by close friendly cooperation and that the views of the two parties were completely identical. The KWP fully supported the standpoint of the Cuban Communist Party. As an example, he noted that the KWP supported only those Latin American revolutionary movements which the Cubans also agreed with and which they supported.

During the conversation, Cuban Ambassador Vigoa asked a few questions. For instance, he inquired about the Korean-Yugoslav relationship and the possibility of establishing diplomatic relations [between Pyongyang and Belgrade]. Kim Il Sung answered the question concerning the establishment of diplomatic relations in the negative, and pointed out that the Romanians had similarly proposed the establishment of relations, and the Soviets also found that useful. (Comment: A few days after the conversation between Kim Il Sung and Vigoa, the Korean press published a long anti-Yugoslav article based on Japanese sources.)

Comrade Vigoa inquired about the Korean comrades' opinion regarding the Soviet standpoint concerning the agreement on nuclear non-proliferation. It became clear from the reply of Kim Il Sung that they did not agree with it, but would not attack and criticize it openly.

In another part of the conversation Kim Il Sung made mention of Mao Zedong. Pointing at Choe Yonggeon, who was present, he stated that he was the same age as Mao, yet his state of health was better and his mind was also livelier. Although at that time [in 1957], as opposed to [the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union] Khrushchev, Mao Zedong had apologized for his earlier interference in the internal affairs of Korea. By now "Mao Zedong has made twice as many mistakes as Khrushchev did" - said Kim Il-Sung.

With regard to the question of unity in the international Communist and workers' movement, Kim Il Sung said that he saw two possibilities. One is that the small countries, on the basis of their collective action, persuade the two big ones, that is China and the Soviet Union, to restore their unity and cooperation. The other is that the two big countries reach an agreement "on their own," without the help of the small ones. Of these two possibilities, it is the first one that is realistic, whereas the second one seems unrealizable.

István Kádas

(ambassador)



DOCUMENT No. 2

[Source: SAPMO-BA, DY 30, J IV 2/2A/2123. Obtained for NKIDP by Bernd Schaefer and translated for CWIHP by Grace Leonard.]

Report on the official friendship visit to the DPRK by the Party and state delegation of the GDR, led by Com. Erich Honecker, 8-11 December 1977

CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE SOCIALIST UNITY PARTY
– Internal Party Archives –
From the files of: Politburo
Memorandum
No. 48
13 December 1977
DY30/
Sign.: J IV 2/2 A – 2123

Report on the official friendship visit to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea by the Party and state delegation of the German Democratic Republic, led by Comrade Erich Honecker, Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany and Chairman of the State Council of the German Democratic Republic, from 8 to 11 December 1977.

At the invitation of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers Party and the Council of Ministers of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, a Party and state delegation from the German Democratic Republic, led by Comrade Erich Honecker, Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany and Chairman of the State Council of the German Democratic Republic, made an official friendship visit to the DPRK from 8 to 11 December 1977.

I.

The visit was the first meeting of the highest representatives of the GDR and DPRK since Comrade Kim Il Sung's visit to the GDR in 1956. The meetings between Comrade Erich Honecker and Comrade Kim Il Sung, with both delegations present, were friendly. The visit

resulted in an agreement on a joint communique. A Consular Treaty and an Agreement on the Further Development of Economic and Scientific/Technical Cooperation were signed.

The Party and government of the DPRK organized an impressive reception by the people of Pyongyang for the GDR's Party and state delegation. During its stay, the delegation toured the Kimsong tractor plant and attended the opera, "The Flower Girl," in the Mansuda Palace. Comrades Erich Honecker and Kim Il Sung spoke at a celebration of friendship, at which there were 20,000 participants and which took place in the Athletic Palace in Pyongyang.

During the official proceedings each side reported to the other about the realization of the resolutions of the IX Party Congress of the Socialist Unity Party and of the V Party Congress of the Korean Workers Party. There was a comprehensive exchange of views on the development of relations between the two Parties and nations, the international situation, and the Communist world movement. Willingness was expressed to expand in all respects the cooperation between the Socialist Unity Party and the Korean Workers Party, and between the GDR and the DPRK. Comrade Kim Il Sung repeatedly stressed the great importance of Comrade Erich Honecker's visit for deepening mutual understanding and bilateral relations.

The mass media of the DPRK reported in detail about the visit by the GDR's Party and state delegation. Press accounts of the toast by Comrade Erich Honecker at the reception by the Korean side did not report remarks on issues of European security and disarmament.

II.

In his remarks, Comrade Erich Honecker praised the DPRK's great achievements in building socialism and affirmed the GDR's support for proposals by the DPRK for resolving problems on the Korean peninsula.

Comrade Honecker reported in detail about the domestic and foreign policy of the GDR in realizing the resolutions of the IX Party Congress of the Socialist Unity Party. He stressed that the successes of the GDR in building a developed socialist society are the result of intense work and creative initiative on the part of the workers of the GDR under the leadership of their Marxist/Leninist party. The indestructible bonds to and cooperation with the Soviet Union and fraternal Socialist nations are very important for stable and dynamic development in the GDR. Preparations for the 60th anniversary of the Great October Socialist

Revolution have turned into the greatest competition in the GDR. The Socialist Unity Party is devoting special attention to further improving social democracy, especially in terms of broad inclusion of citizens in leading the state. Political/ideological work is the heart and soul of the Party's efforts. Its centerpiece is disseminating and popularizing the works of Marx and Lenin, educating for socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism.

The Socialist Unity Party strongly opposes the increasing ideological diversion and stepped-up agitation by FRG imperialism against the GDR. It completely rejects all appearances of anti-communism and anti-Sovietism. Comrade Honecker outlined the mutual foreign policy positions of the community of socialist states on issues of international development. He stressed that the solid alliance with the Soviet Union and the other fraternal nations is the foundation of our foreign policy. New friendship treaties entered into with the Soviet Union and other socialist nations are particularly important. They play an important role in consolidating the socialist world system as the greatest achievement of the international working class. He stressed the necessity of strengthening the Warsaw Pact in order to protect the peaceful building [of socialism] in our countries from NATO's aggressive intentions.

Relations between the GDR and the People's Republic of China are poor for reasons that are known. There are no Party relations. The XI Party Congress of the Communist Party of China characterized the Soviet Union as the number one enemy. Beijing is further improving its reactionary interplay with imperialism. Subversive activity with regard to the international Communist movement continues. Beijing criticizes

NATO for not building up enough arms for a war against the Soviet Union. This is tantamount to a challenge to wage war against the GDR. The GDR completely rejects the policies of the Chinese leaders, which run counter to the interests of Socialist countries, the international workers movement, and the national liberation movement. At the same time, it advocates normal development of state relations with the People's Republic of China and, given proper conditions, resuming Party relations, as well. But this is not possible at the cost of compromising principle issues, such as the unbreakable bond to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and to the Soviet Union itself.

Comrade Honecker addressed in detail the situation in Europe, especially in the FRG, and the status of relations between the GDR and the FRG. He spoke about the NATO military forces directly arrayed against the GDR and relations between the FRG and South Korea.

In its policies towards developing nations, the GDR concentrates on supporting nations with a socialist orientation, such as Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Guinea-Bissau. It supports the efforts by many Asian states to create stable relations of peaceful coexistence on this continent, and thereby to ensure important conditions required for guaranteeing security in Asia. This includes ensuring peace on the Korean peninsula.

In his statements on the communist world movement, Comrade Honecker stressed that the Socialist Unity Party maintains good relations with the overwhelming majority of fraternal parties based on Marxism/Leninism and proletarian internationalism. He stressed the mutual responsibility of the communist parties and praised the Berlin Conference as a meaningful success by the Communist movement. Comrade Kim Il Sung expressed his gratitude for the selfless aid and support of the GDR, especially during the War of Liberation of the Fatherland and during the period that followed. Even today the GDR is providing valuable support to the Korean people in the struggle to unify the country.

The Korean Workers Party considers unification of the fatherland to be its primary mission. To achieve this goal, at its V Party Congress the Party resolved to build up socialism in the north, to support the struggle of revolutionary forces in South Korea, and to consolidate solidarity with international revolutionary forces. Building Socialism in the DPRK is the foundation for establishing the new social order in the entire nation.

It is worthwhile to demonstrate the superiority of the socialist order to the south and to show the entire world that the DPRK is a sovereign, independent state. In contrast, South Korea is a base for American imperialism. After the victory over the Japanese militarists, the socialist countries, the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and the GDR as well provided great assistance to the Korean people. But this alone could not resolve every problem. So it was necessary to do everything in our power to become self reliant. Since then an independent national economy has been created. Currently the ideological, technical, and cultural revolution are the focal points, which is in accord with the resolutions of the V Party Congress.

The DPRK stands directly before the enemy. Since there was no bourgeois revolution in Korea, the transition period to socialism and communism is relatively long. There is residual

feudalism, Confucianism, Buddhism, sectarianism. Since Korea is surrounded by large countries, toadyism before the great foreign powers was very prevalent. The ideological revolution is no less important than creating the material foundations for socialism. The experience of the Korean Workers Party demonstrates that people very actively take part in the revolution, in smashing the old social order. The higher the material standard of living climbs, the more ideologically lazy people become and the more careless their activity is. All people must be transformed according to the model of the worker class.

The Korean Workers Party today has 2.2 million members. All of the other members of society are included in the various organizations. Organized Party life and learning occupy an important place in the ideological work. Nearly the entire population takes part in training that is conducted every Saturday. In addition, two hours of self-study are conducted daily.

The technical revolution is very important. The primary issues are reducing the differences between light and heavy physical labor, between industry and agriculture, and liberating women from heavy housework, actively drawing them into societal life.

Our cultural revolution is different from that in other countries. Its goal is to provide all people with knowledge. This is why the mandatory 11-year polytechnical school system was introduced. One million intellectuals have already been trained in the DPRK. The issue is repelling enemy attempts to infiltrate the cultural realm.

Turning to the economic situation, Comrade Kim Il Sung reported that a new 7-year plan begins in 1978. The objective of this plan is to develop modern industry, pervaded with science and based on the Juche principle. This does not mean rejecting economic cooperation with other countries. But industry must still support itself based on native raw materials.

The main points of the 7-year plan cited by Kim Il Sung provide for industrial production to increase by approximately 100 percent and are to be approved at a Central Committee meeting and thereafter at a meeting of the Supreme People's Assembly on 15 December 1977.

Comrade Kim Il Sung addressed the complicated situation in the development of the South Korean revolution. Comrade Kim Il Sung spoke out against the concept of two Korean states

and rejected the US proposal for so-called cross-recognition (Soviet Union recognizes South Korea, US recognizes the DPRK). The DPRK will patiently continue its work with respect to the South, so that Park Chung Hee becomes even more isolated and the struggle for democratization can be continued. The DPRK holds fast to the three principles for unifying the land, which were announced in 1972. Negotiations with the South, which began in 1972 based on this foundation, have currently been broken off because those in power in South Korea have publicly come out in favor of two Koreas.

Comrade Kim Il Sung stressed the differences in the situations of the GDR and DPRK, both in the negotiations and in his speech at the friendship celebration. He stated that the existence of the GDR was historically necessary.

In his remarks on the international situation, Comrade Kim Il Sung stressed that the Korean Workers Party advocates joining all revolutionary forces, especially those of socialist nations, "Third World" countries, the non-aligned nations, the international workers movement, and the national liberation movement.

There are difficulties in joining the forces of Socialist nations due to relations between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. Seen from a historical perspective, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China are comrades-in-arms of the DPRK. The DPRK has a common border with the People's Republic of China that is approximately 1500 kilometers in length. Although the two countries are close, the DPRK does not agree with everything China does. Relations with China were poor during the "Cultural Revolution." China agitated against the "Korean revisionists" over loudspeakers that were set up along the entire Sino-Korean border.

But if the DPRK improves relations with China, it need not worry about the US. The DPRK cannot concentrate troops in the north and in the south simultaneously. This is why the DPRK has endeavored to improve relations since the end of the "Cultural Revolution." It has succeeded. However, the DPRK does not accept Chinese assertions such as the characterization of the Soviet Union as "Social Imperialism."

The DPRK is not a blind follower of China.

The Soviet Union supported Korea in its war of liberation. After the war it provided political and material assistance in the amount of 2,220 billion [old denomination] rubles. The DPRK is striving for better, amicable relations, but cannot get involved in the polemics between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. In this issue, it favors maintaining strict independence and supports anything that promotes joining forces.

There are people who believe that the DPRK is more on China's side. This is not the case. The principles of the DPRK for the joining of forces in the Communist world movement are the struggle against imperialism, for socialism and communism, for support of the international workers and democratic movements, and non-intervention in domestic matters. The DPRK maintains normal relations with the other socialist nations and has no differences of opinion with them. The DPRK participates in the non-aligned movement because it is highly anti-imperialist in character. Relations between the DPRK and the countries of the Third World are good.

Comrade Kim Il Sung remarked on the danger of Japanese militarism recurring. Japanese militarists are no less dangerous than those in West Germany. He opposed the stationing of US troops in Asia and the transformation of ASEAN into a military organization.

III.

Comrade Erich Honecker and Comrade Kim Il Sung praised how well relations between the two Parties and states have developed. The results of the visit have created favorable conditions for successfully further developing cooperation between the Socialist Unity Party and the Korean Workers Party, the GDR and the DPRK. Comrade Erich Honecker addressed in detail the status of relations between the two Parties and states and passed on to Comrade Kim Il Sung written proposals for further cooperation in the political and economic arenas. The proposals he set forth for further developing scientific/technical and economic cooperation, and the written draft of a governmental agreement in this regard, were appraised by Comrade Kim Il Sung as a very useful foundation for further developing economic cooperation.

Comrade Kim Il Sung explained that a trade deficit has come about in the last five years due to certain economic difficulties in the DPRK, and the loans could not be repaid on time. The DPRK thinks it is possible to cooperate with the GDR in mining heavy metals. The GDR

could supply facilities, while the DPRK has labor and raw materials. The FRG works very actively in South Korea, and this is why the DPRK and the GDR should work closely with one another. He particularly stressed developing cooperation in joint development of heavy metals and the production of sintered magnesite.

He was particularly grateful for the GDR's willingness to intensify its scientific/technical support precisely in those areas that are of great importance for developing North Korea's own raw material resources, such as, for instance, calcium carbide chemistry and upgrading coal. He requested that the GDR provide good support in developing microelectronics for automation.

Comrade Kim Il Sung accepted the invitation Comrade Erich Honecker extended to visit the GDR and agreed to prepare an Agreement on Friendship and Cooperation and to enter into a long-term trade agreement.

IV.

In preparing for the visit, negotiations on communiqués were held that resulted in joint statements on a few issues of international development and on how relations should proceed. The communique contained positive statements on international relations, the Great October Socialist Revolution, the unity and solidarity of Socialist countries and the Communist and workers parties, developments in Europe, for peace and cooperation in Asia, and on the importance of peaceful coexistence between the GDR and the FRG.

The Korean side praised the existence of the GDR as an important contribution to strengthening the forces of socialism in the world. The negotiations resulted in an agreement that the visit would contribute to deepening the friendship and cooperation between the GDR and the DPRK and would thereby strengthen the solidarity of socialist states.

[...]



DOCUMENT No. 3

[Source: SAPMO-BA, DY 30, 2460. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Bernd Schaefer].

Memorandum on the Conversation between Erich Honecker and Kim Il Sung on 1 June 1984

Personal confidential matter
Central Committee 02 ... 311

Signed "EH [Erich Honecker], 1.6.84"

Beginning the conversation, Erich Honecker thanked for the lively exchange of opinions during the days of Kim Il Sung's visit. "During your stay in Berlin, Wolzow, Frankfurt (Oder) and Eisenhüttenstadt, as well as in the talks of your delegation members' visit to the semi-conductor plant and the [chemical] Buna Plant," Erich Honecker stated [addressing Kim Il Sung], "you were able to obtain a clearer picture of the policy of our party and government. It showed throughout that this policy is supported by the masses."

"I am delighted about the wide agreement on the questions that matter," E. Honecker noted. "I was convinced of this already back in 1977 when we agreed to conclude a treaty on friendship and cooperation. Today we will sign it. At the same time, both heads of government will sign an agreement on economic and technological cooperation of our two states. Evidently all this is of extraordinary and large importance. It is, as you [Kim Il Sung] stated, an encouragement to our peoples.

"As you know, the GDR is developing due to a major division of labor within the context of Comecon, the cooperation with the other socialist countries. Seventy percent of our foreign trade goes to the socialist world, 30 percent to the non-socialist [world]. This large extent of our trade is a result of our industry's dynamic development. We have obligations to fulfill towards the socialist countries as a result of cooperation and specialized division of labor, as

well as with the capitalist world in the context of trade. It is noteworthy here that trade with capitalist countries has been suffering for four years due to the credit embargo that the Reagan Administration imposed on its allies. The same applies to, as they say, to "strategic goods". Notwithstanding the difficult conditions created by all this to our balance of payments we rely on our own potential, and the power of the Soviet Union and the socialist community. One can say that our confidence in our own self-reliant efforts is justified.

"Over the course of recent years the GDR has turned into a powerful industrial complex, to an industrial nation, as they say in the Western world. It belongs to the ten largest industrial nations of the world. We have made major progress in the areas of microelectronics and the refinement of our own resources. It has paid off to organize our industry in combines that work in full consideration of the autonomy of factories. Combines are capable to react flexibly to demand. They are eager to maintain, or contest, the leading positions in decisive fields.

"We pay major attention to the refinement of coal. Lignite is the main source of gas production in the GDR. The use of pulverized coal in factories that used to work with heating oil, such as the cement industry, is important. Currently we are in the process to change the trains from diesel engines to electrical ones."

Concerning bilateral relations between GDR and DPRK E. Honecker recognized their good development. "One could note with satisfaction that the economic and scientific-technological cooperation had made stable and dynamic progress since 1977. The foremost expression of this positive development is the continuous increase of the trade volume. Based on the long-term trade agreement it will grow to about 160 percent in 1984.

"I want to emphasize the cooperation in building an automation equipment plant in Pyongyang which opened in 1983, and also the construction of a new Anilon textile plant and the reconstruction of an existing textile plant," E. Honecker said. "The GDR delivered equipment in the context of government credits. Efforts are made for scientific-technological cooperation between both countries, in particular in the areas of chemical industry, ore mining and metallurgy. We are of the opinion that it would be useful to both our countries if we tie our scientific-technological cooperation in the future even more to the main areas of economic cooperation.

“We think the time has come to prepare actions to develop a mutually beneficial economic and scientific-technological cooperation for the years following 1985, reach an agreement and thus create a solid foundation for our cooperation in the period up to 1990. Talks of economic delegations from both countries in March this year have already resulted in a number of good ideas. During the last meeting of the Consultative Committee first steps have been taken.

“It would make sense to conclude between GDR and DPRK an agreement about the economic and scientific-technological cooperation for the period up to 1990. We accept the assumption that the long-term agreement from 1977 has proved its value, and our further cooperation can become more targeted when we act according to a joint concept. For those reasons, we prepared and discussed in recent days a draft of an agreement for the period up to 1990.

“Economic efficiency of our cooperation should increase further when we focus even more on the basic tasks to solidify the economic potential of both countries. We are of the opinion that good preconditions exist to improve cooperation in the areas of extraction, processing and delivery of resources, raw materials and sources of energy. We are willing to expand and modernize the capacities of the DPRK’s extractive industry through the supply of machines and equipment, and expect to receive in return products from these capacities in increased quantities. Here we certainly take into consideration that your country does not exclusively intend to deliver resources at the primary processing level but it also aims to some extent at exports in upgraded form. We could also conceive of such a procedure.

“In the areas of processing industries as well, in particular regarding mechanical engineering and electric technology/electronics, we view the preconditions for further cooperation as positive. We welcome the beginning of contacts between the respective expert ministers, and the preparation of proposals for potential mutual-benefit cooperation over the next years by leading comrades from combines and factories from both countries. Also we are willing and capable to provide certain equipment for the production of nutrient Agar, and also other objects if we can import in return products essential for the economy of the GDR.

“We like to propose to you that the central planning organs of our countries discuss in detail the implementation of the main tasks of economic cooperation on the basis of the signed agreement up to 1990. They are supposed to agree on the concrete basis of cooperation as a precondition for the preparation of a long-term trade agreement.

“The comrades from Foreign Trade have agreed to extend the long-term trade agreement until 1984 by one year and to prepare a new long-term trade agreement for the period until 1990. We would really welcome such since it matches our rhythm of planning.

“I want to especially emphasize our interest to contribute to the overcoming of imports from capitalist states through even further cooperation of our countries. We should include concrete agreements on this issue in the long-term trade agreement. Given the economic war conducted through all means by the U.S. and other imperialist countries against the countries of the socialist community, we rate this task as of extraordinary high importance.

“Our party and our state will also be guided in the future by the development of our economic cooperation on the basis of mutual benefit with a high degree of reliability as an effective factor for growth.”

Kim Il Sung thanked E. Honecker for the overview given on the development of the GDR since 1977 and addressed two questions: the results of visits to some GDR production sites, and relations with the non-aligned states.

He said, “it is very encouraging that we could agree on the delivery of a semi-conductor plant from your side. We are going to send specialists soon to solve all concrete questions, including the joint ordering of certain parts in third countries. We have already bought a semi-conductor plant through unofficial channels from Japan. However, it is incomplete. We had not been informed about the status of electronic development in the GDR. Only when preparing for this visit I learned that you have such a plant. Our Central Committee has approved the funds for the purchase of a semi-conductor plant a long time ago. Yet it has not been realized so far since, e.g., we did not have information about your electronics. When I recently stayed at our Embassy [in Berlin], I criticized the comrades because they had incorrectly informed us about the GDR industry. Also we did not know, for example, that you

produce good synthetic rubber and herbicides. Up until now we have bought all that from capitalist countries. This has to change.

“In our country we have very rich non-ferrous metal deposits, lead, zinc etc. We have so much sintered magnesite that you can rely on us long-term. Also for the delivery of non-ferrous metals there are the very best long term opportunities. I have criticized the comrades in the Embassy for the lack of information. Yet I have to say that from the top we have also insufficiently prepared our cadres to exploit opportunities with the GDR and other socialist countries in this regard.

“I ask you to please interpret the agreement on long-term economic cooperation agreed upon by our specialists, and which we will sign today afternoon, as having the potential to be complemented in many regards. We are insufficiently informed about the options of cooperation. Many opportunities are supposed to be examined by specialists in more details to expand the agreement.

“Since 1975 we had been a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) but as of recently we no longer are,” said Kim Il Sung. “The movement formulated great slogans but it is unable to solve the basic questions. In particular it is incapable to fulfill the demand for a new economic order. Its member states are politically independent but they have no self-reliant national economies. Therefore the danger of an expansion of neocolonialism is growing. The U.S. and Japan reach again out to dominate the countries of the Third World. The problems of developing countries cannot not be solved just through their cooperation. Obviously something has to be done. For agriculture and health systems one can certainly achieve certain success through mutual cooperation. Yet the industrialization of countries cannot be obtained through cooperation within the NAM. The best solution for them would be a tight coordination of the socialist market with the market of the developing countries. We all have to think about this thoroughly. Also in our efforts for the Third World we have to contest capitalism.

“In my opinion there are two options for economic cooperation: 1. You can expand the socialist market through inclusion of individual developing countries. 2. Individual socialist countries can develop bilateral economic relations with specific developing countries. We can offer them specialists and technical blueprints at lower rates than the capitalist countries. In

return the socialist countries can obtain cheaper resources from them. If we help them to secure their political independence through economic self-reliance, they will be able to liberate themselves from the pressure of former colonial powers.

"It is primarily important to develop this kind of cooperation with the African countries. Almost all the African heads of state have already visited our country, with the exception of Kenya and Morocco. We know that you, Comrade Honecker, have visited a couple of African countries and attributed great importance to the development of Africa. We have agricultural specialists in almost all the African countries. Our experiences in Sudan demonstrate that, even with the delegation of only a small number of specialists, you can help to increase agricultural production multiple times and thus solve their main problem - the food question. If all socialist countries jointly engage in greater activity towards the African countries, we will succeed to drag all of Africa away from Imperialism and to lead many countries on the path of socialist orientation.

"Political forces and emerging vanguard parties in these countries are very different. The highest level of consolidation of a Marxist party has apparently been reached in Ethiopia. In spite of these differences we can, however, strengthen the anti-imperialist forces in all countries through economic cooperation. I am very delighted that we completely share the same opinion on this question as well."

Because Erich Honecker visited the non socialist world, Kim Il Sung asked him about his impressions concerning non-aligned countries, in particular those with a socialist orientation. Here he [Kim] emphasized that the DPRK maintains relations with all of them to support the path to further decolonization and to prevent neocolonialism. E. Honecker especially referred to the tense situation in Latin America, the interference of the U.S. into the internal affairs of Nicaragua, El Salvador and other countries, the continuing threats against the socialist Cuba, and to the situation in Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia.

In conclusion, the requirement was stated to further actively support these countries in the fight against Imperialism, emanating in particular from the United States but also from the FRG [Federal Republic of Germany].

NOTES

¹ See Barry K. Gills, *Korea versus Korea: A Case of Contested Legitimacy* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 98 – 144.

² Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, Memorandum: “North Korea’s Foreign Trade,” 26 January 1968, p. 1. CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), CIA-RDP85T00875R001500220012-5. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration.

³ Chŏng Kyusŏp, *Puk Han wegyoyŭi ŏje wa onŭl* [North Korea Foreign Relations Yesterday and Today] (Seoul: Ilsinsa, 1977), p. 121.

⁴ North Korea first began to trade with Japan through the Bank of China (BOC) in the late 1950s. The BOC also facilitated North Korean trade with Britain and France beginning in 1957, and with West Germany and Switzerland in 1958. Direct trade with Japan and Western Europe was not established until the mid-1960s. Natalia Bazhanova, *Kiroe sŏn Pik Han kyŏngje* [North Korean Economy at the Crossroads] trans. Yang Chunyong (Seoul: Korea Economic Daily, 1992), pp. 247 – 249.

⁵ CIA, “North Korea’s Foreign Trade,” p. 3.

⁶ See “Talk with Journalists of the US Newspaper, New York Times,” in Kim Il Sung, *For the Independent Peaceful Reunification of Korea* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), pp. 157 – 172.

⁷ Central Intelligence Agency Memorandum, “North Korean Payments Problem with the West,” June 1975. CREST, CIA-RDP86T00608R000600050021-9. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Bazhanova, *North Korea’s Economy*, p. 255. See also Sheena Chestnut, “Illicit Activity and Proliferation in North Korean Smuggling Networks,” *International Security* vol. 32, no. 1 (Summer 2007), pp. 80 – 111.

¹⁰ “Swedes Convinced North Korea Directed Smuggling,” *The New York Times* October 22, 1976, p. 6.

¹¹ Kim Il Sung, “On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing Juche in Ideological Work,” *Kim Il Sung’s Works* vol. 9, p. 395.

¹² Jon Halliday, “The North Korean Model: Gaps and Questions,” *World Development* vol. 9, no. 9/10 (1981), pp. 889 – 905.

¹³ Byung-chul Koh, *The Foreign Policy Systems of North and South Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 148-9.

¹⁴ Byung-Chul Koh, *The Foreign Policy Systems of North and South Korea*, p. 11

¹⁵ The term “Third World” (*le Tiers-monde*) was invented by Sauvy in the 1950s, referring to the newly independent countries belonging neither to the “First World” (the advanced capitalist countries) nor the “Second World” (the Soviet Union and other socialist countries). Sauvy’s analogy was that of the “Third Estate” (*le Tiers Etat*), or common people, in the French revolution. His concept was further elaborated by the sociologist George Balandier in his book *Le Tiers du monde, sous-développement et développement* (Paris: PUF, 1956), which popularized the term around the world. The DPRK itself rarely used the term “Third World” in referring to what it preferred to call non-aligned or developing countries.

¹⁶ *Chosŏn chungang nyŏngam*, 1955.

¹⁷ Gills, *Korea versus Korea*, p. 60.

¹⁸ Che Guevara visited the DPRK twice in the early 1960s.

¹⁹ Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, 9 March 1967. MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1967, 61. doboz, 1, 002130/1967. Translated by Balazs Solantai for the Cold War International History Project.

²⁰ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, “North Korean Subversive Diplomacy,” June 1971. CIA-RDP79-01194A000300090001-4.

²¹ Kim Il Sung, *On the Juche Idea* (New York: The Guardian, 1980), p. 262.

²² George Ginsburgs and Roy U.T. Kim, *Calendar of Diplomatic Affairs, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, 1945 – 1975* (Moorestown, NJ: Symposia Press, 1977), p. 71.

²³ GDR Embassy in Pyongyang, “Action Report on a Talk with Comrade Pak Kwang-chŏl, Section Chief for Middle Eastern and North African Countries,” 27 July 1967. MfAA C 1028/73.

²⁴ *Chosŏn chungang nyŏngam* [Korea Central Yearbook] (Pyongyang, 1964), pp. 34 – 35; GDR Foreign Ministry, Extra-European Department, Korea Section. “Information on Conversations with the Chairman of the Supreme People’s Assembly, Ch’oe Yong-gŏn, regarding Several African and Asian States, 19 November – 22 December 1964.” MfAA C 1028/73.

²⁵ For example, there is a lengthy reference to Kim Jong Il assisting his father on this visit at <http://www.uriminzokkiri.com/Newspaper/English/bio/B2-3.htm>. Accessed May 12, 2007.

²⁶ “Chosŏn minjuuŭi konghwaguk esŏ ŭi sahoejuŭi kŏnsŏlgwa Namchosŏn jyŏngmyŏnge dae ha yŏ,” *Kim Il-sŏng chŏngjip* [Complete Works of Kim Il Sung] (Pyongyang: Chosŏn nodongdang ch’ulp’ansa, 2001), pp. 139 – 190.

- ²⁷ Pak T’ae-ho, *Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk taoe kwangyesa* [Diplomatic History of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea], vol. 2 (Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahaksa, 1987), pp. 14 – 18.
- ²⁸ Dae-sook Soh, *Kim Il Sung, the North Korean Leader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 308.
- ²⁹ *On Socialist Construction*, p. 167.
- ³⁰ At least, DPRK sources claim this. See footnote 12 above.
- ³¹ GDR Embassy in Pyongyang, “On the Position of the DPRK at the Second Bandung Conference,” 26 July 1965. MfAA C 1028/73.
- ³² Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); James Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).
- ³³ Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 20.
- ³⁴ See Charles K. Armstrong, “America’s Korea, Korea’s Vietnam,” *Critical Asian Studies* vol. 33, no. 4 (December 2001), pp. 527 – 539.
- ³⁵ Gills, *Korea versus Korea*, pp. 109-110.
- ³⁶ *Renmin Ribao*, 19 April 1975. Cited in Chen Jian, “Limits of the ‘Lips and Teeth Alliance’: A Historical Review of Chinese-North Korean Relations,” paper presented at Cornell University, 29 September 2006.
- ³⁷ Samuel S. Kim, “Pyongyang, The Third World and Global Politics,” in Tae-Hwan Kwak et al eds. *The Two Koreas in World Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1984), p. 73.
- ³⁸ See Kim Il Sung, *The Non-Alignment Movement is a Mighty Anti-Imperialist Revolutionary Force of Our Times* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1976).
- ³⁹ Adrian Buzo, *Guerilla Dynasty: Politics and Leadership in North Korea* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), p. 99.
- ⁴⁰ Kim, “Pyongyang, The Third World and Global Politics,” p. 78.
- ⁴¹ Marina and David Ottaway, *Afro-Communism*, second edition (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1981), p. 5.
- ⁴² Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the making of Our Times* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 227.
- ⁴³ Jon Halliday, “The North Korean Enigma,” *New Left Review* I no. 127 (May-June 1981), p. 49.
- ⁴⁴ Young C. Kim, “North Korea and the Third World,” in Robert A. Scalapino and Hongkoo Lee, eds. *North Korea in a Regional and Global Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 338.
- ⁴⁵ Cited in Ralph N. Clough, *Embattled Korea: The Rivalry for International Support* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), p. 296.
- ⁴⁶ Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959 – 1976* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 187, p. 477 n. 76.
- ⁴⁷ Chongwook Chung, “North Korea and the International Community: The Search for Legitimacy in the United Nations and Elsewhere,” in Scalapino and Lee, *North Korea in a Regional and Global Context*, p. 359.
- ⁴⁸ Westad, *Global Cold War*, pp. 277, 279.
- ⁴⁹ Benno-Eide Siebs, *Die Aussenpolitik der DDR 1976 – 1989: Strategien und Grenzen* (Paderborn: Sheoningh, 1999), pp. 211-2.
- ⁵⁰ Central Committee, German Socialist Unity Party, “Memorandum of Conversation between Erich Honecker and Kim Il Sung,” 1 June 1984. SAPMO-BA, DY 30, 2460.
- ⁵¹ Charles K. Armstrong, “‘Fraternal Socialism’: The International Reconstruction of North Korea, 1953-1962,” *Cold War History* vol. 5, no. 2 (May 2005), pp. 161 – 187.
- ⁵² Donald L. Donham, *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 14. Donham remarks that the Mengistu regime spent US \$50 million dollars on the anniversary celebration just as the historic Ethiopian famine was emerging.
- ⁵³ Author’s interview with Dr. Min Chul Yoo, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, November 30, 2004.
- ⁵⁴ Author’s interview with Assefe Medhanie, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, December 1, 2004.
- ⁵⁵ Gills, *Korea versus Korea*, p. 73.
- ⁵⁶ *Chosŏn Chungang Nyŏngam* 1976, pp. 500-1. See also Gills, *Korea versus Korea*, pp. 141-3.
- ⁵⁷ Kim Kisu, “North Korea’s Foreign Economic Policy,” in Yang Sŏngch’ŏl and Kang Sŏnghak, eds. *Puk Han wegyo chŏngch’aek* [The Foreign Relations of North Korea] (Seoul: Seoul Press, 1995), p. 119.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 121.
- ⁵⁹ Joseph S. Chung, “Foreign Trade of North Korea: Performance, Policy and Prospect,” in Robert A. Scalapino and Hongkoo Lee, eds. *North Korea in a Regional and Global Context* (Berkeley: Center for Korean Studies, Institute of East Asia Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1986), p. 107.
- ⁶⁰ Central Committee, German Socialist Unity Party, “Report on the Official Friendship Visit to the DPRK by

the Party and State Delegation of the GDR, Led by Com. Erich Honecker, 8 -11 December 1977.” Trans. Grace Leonard. *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* No. 14/15 (Winter 2003 – Spring 2004), p. 51.

⁶¹ For example, a late-1980s official history of DPRK foreign relations stressed that the period since the beginning of the 1970s was “the era of advancing the all-round victory of socialism.” Pak T’aeho, *Chosŏn Minjujuŭi Inmin Konghwaguk taeye kwangyesa* [History of DPRK Foreign Relations] (Pyongyang: Sahe kwahak ch’ulp’ansa, 1987), p. 85

Charles K. Armstrong is The Korea Foundation Associate Professor of Korean Studies in the Social Sciences and director of the Center for Korean Research at Columbia University in New York. He has published numerous books and articles on modern Korean, East Asian and international history, including *The North Korean Revolution, 1945 – 1950* (Cornell University Press, 2003) and *The Koreas* (Routledge, 2007). He is currently completing a book on North Korea's foreign relations during the Cold War.