

北朝鮮の強靱さの源

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朝鮮民主主義人民共和国(北朝鮮)の朝鮮労働党による一党独裁の全体主義体制は強靱である。国連安保理や西側諸国からの制裁にもかかわらず、体制が揺らぐ様子もない。それは、北朝鮮の多くの国民が、最高指導者や党など政権への忠誠心を持ち、国家の誇りを抱いているからである。多くの人はこれに疑問を抱くだろうが、これは北朝鮮に限ったことではない。

近年、政治学では、アメリカやイギリスなどの強靱な民主主義体制と考えられてきた国々での「民主主義の後退」が議論されている。それと共に、いずれ民主化するであろうと想定されていた権威主義・全体主義体制にむしろ強靱性が見られることが注目を集めている。

中国のように高度な経済発展や国際的な大国化による国家の誇りが中国の体制の強靱性の要因であることはよく知られている。しかし、経済発展や大国化といった条件を満たしていなくても強靱性が見られる場合がある。北朝鮮もその一つである。北朝鮮は、高度な経済発展も国際的な大国化も成功していない。

北朝鮮の強靱性と持続性を可能にした要因の一つが国際ネットワークにあると考えられる。北朝鮮は、安全保障を中心とした技術や人的サービスの交流などを利用してアジア・アフリカ諸国などと国際ネットワークを構築してきた。北朝鮮は、体制の強靱性と持続性に必要な資源を国際ネットワークから獲得し、アジア・アフリカ諸国を中心にした国際的な支持を取り付けてきたと考えられる。

西側諸国において、北朝鮮は国際的に孤立している異様な国家または地域という印象があるが、実際には、北朝鮮は2024年1月の時点で、国連加盟国193カ国のうち159カ国と国交がある。北朝鮮に対する経済制裁に効果が見られなければ、時折「中国やロシアが援助しているからだ」という弁明が見られたが、ことの真偽はともかく、その弁明は北朝鮮が中国やロシアと関係が深く、国際的に孤立していないことを認めているのである。

では、北朝鮮は実際にはどのような国際ネットワークを構築してきたのであろうか。それを調べたのが、研究プロジェクトである科研費基盤(B)「北朝鮮の体制の持続性の根拠：中東・東南アジア・アフリカとの国際的ネットワーク」である。この特集号は、この研究プロジェクトに参加した7名の研究者がそれぞれの研究対象国と北朝鮮の関係について調査した成果を論じたものである。

北朝鮮とアジア・アフリカ諸国とのネットワークは、経済的なネットワークではなく、血や信念のネットワークともいえるものであった。経済的なネットワークしかなければ、その関係は脆いものである。金の切れ目が縁の切れ目である。しかし、米国やその同盟国に対して、共に戦ってきた血や信念のネットワークはなかなか切れるものではない。それが今でも北朝鮮の体制を支えているのである。

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Sources of North Korea's Resilience

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The totalitarian one-party dictatorship by the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK: North Korea) remains remarkably tough. Despite sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council and Western countries, the regime shows no signs of weakening. This resilience can be attributed to the loyalty of many patriotic North Koreans to the regime, including the supreme leader and the ruling party. While this loyalty may be questioned by some, it is not unique to North Korea.

In recent years, political science has observed the "retreat of democracy" in countries once considered strong democratic regimes, such as the United States and the United Kingdom. At the same time, attention has turned to the resilience of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes that were once expected to collapse or democratize over time. It is well known that Chinese patriotism in high economic development and international superpower status contributes to the resilience of the Chinese regime. However, we can observe a resilience in the absence of economic development and the status of a superpower. North Korea is a case in point.

One factor contributing to North Korea's resilience and sustainability is its international network. North Korea has cultivated relationships with Asian and African countries through the exchange of technology and personnel, particularly in the security sector. This international network has provided North Korea with resources essential to the regime's resilience and sustainability and has garnered support, particularly from Asian and African countries.

There is a common perception in Western countries that North Korea is an isolated country. However, as of January 2024, North Korea has diplomatic relations with 159 of the 193 member states of the United Nations.

What kind of international network has North Korea built? The research project "Grounds for Sustainability of North Korea's Regime: International Networks with the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Africa," funded by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B). This special issue publishes the findings of seven scholars who participated in this project, examining the relationship between their countries of study and North Korea.

The network between North Korea and its Asian and African partners is not just an economic one, but one based on blood and ideology. Economic networks are fragile, but the network forged by common struggle against the United States and its allies is much more solid. This strong solidarity is a key factor that continues to sustain the North Korean regime.

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North Korea's Overseas Troop Deployments and Weapons Exports¹

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1. Introduction

North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea: DPRK) is said to have participated in many wars in Asia and Africa. Not only did North Korea start the Korean War in 1950, but it also sent its troops or weapons to the Chinese Civil War (second phase), the Vietnam War, the October War (Yom Kippur War), the Rhodesian Bush War and Gukurahundi, the Ogaden War, the Iran-Iraq War, the Angolan Civil War, and so on. More recently, on March 23, 2016, the Russian state news agency TASS reported that North Korea had deployed two military units, named Chalma-1 and Chalma-7, to the Bashar al-Assad administration during the Syrian civil war.²

North Korea has also officially admitted to sending troops overseas and exporting weapons. The *Choson Sinbo*, published by the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, a pro-North Korean organization, reported the following on April 3, 2000:

"From August 1945 to July 1994 the DPRK helped four countries to wage revolutionary wars and provided military assistance to 53 countries to build national armies. Recently, the DPRK opened the Hall of Internationalism at the Museum of Historic Sites of the Revolution of the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces in order to publicize these facts in full. The fact that the DPRK helped other countries in their revolutionary wars and helped them build national armies has been rumored in the past, however this is the first time it has been confirmed as a fact and made public in full. From August 1945 to April 1950, during the liberation struggle in China after the end of the Second Sino-Japanese War and before the establishment of the new Chinese government, Korea supplied 100,000 weapons, one million pairs of shoes, 3,000 rolls of cloth and thousands of tons of explosives. Korea also fought in the wars in northeast China and elsewhere and contributed greatly to the liberation of China. During the Vietnam War from 1964 to 1969, Korea

¹ This article is a revised version of one originally published in Singapore in 2023, as the following information indicates. Satoru Miyamoto, "North Korea and Wars in Africa and Asia," Kumiko Haba, Alfredo Canavero, Satoshi Mizobata eds., *100 Years of World Wars and Post-War Regional Collaboration: How to Create 'New World Order'?*, (Singapore: Springer, 2023), pp. 131-139.

² TASS news agency, March 23, 2016.

supplied 100,000 weapons and one million uniforms to Vietnam and sent combat and engineering units to the front to help win the war by overwhelming Hanoi's territorial air sovereignty. On the other hand, Korea wholeheartedly supported the struggle of the Syrian and Egyptian people against the Israeli invaders during the 1973 Middle East war.”³

Historically, North Korea has participated in many wars. The question is, “Why did they have to send their troops abroad so many times?” Some people may say that North Korea, as a socialist country, is “exporting revolution like Cuba.” Cuba sent its troops to many countries and exported revolution. It is not surprising that North Korea has also taken part in wars, in effect doing the same thing.

However, North Korea has sent its troops and weapons not only to socialist countries but also to non-socialist countries. North Korea would have different reasons than Cuba for participating in wars. Exporting revolution is inexplicable as a motive of North Korea because some refugees from North Korea confessed that the country exported weapons and sent troops to countries that have friendship with the U.S., such as Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), Zimbabwe, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. ⁴

North Korea has friendships with former and present socialist and non-socialist countries. It is said that North Korea is an isolated country, but this is not true. We need to rethink the image of North Korea. At present, it has diplomatic relations with 159 countries that are members of the United Nations. During the Cold War, North Korea signed alliance treaties not only with the Soviet Union and China but also with Libya and Cuba. Contrary to what many people think, North Korea is friendly with many countries worldwide.

However, the growing number of friendly countries is the reason why North Korea has sent troops and weapons to numerous wars. To which friendly countries has North Korea sent troops and weapons? I want to clarify this by examining the chronology of North Korea's foreign policy.

1. Changes in North Korea's Foreign Policy

First, I should emphasize that North Korea currently has diplomatic relations with many members of the United Nations (UN). At the end of 2023, North Korea had diplomatic relations with 159

³ *Choson Sinbo*, April 3, 2000 (Korean).

⁴ RI Bok-gu, *The Top Secret of North Korean Ballistic Missiles*(北朝鮮弾道ミサイルの最高機密), translated by KIM Chan (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 2006), pp.109-111 (Japanese); KOH Chong-Son, *Kim Jong Il's Secret Arms Factories*(金正日の秘密兵器工場), Translated by Yu Nakane (Tokyo: Business-sha, 2001), p.75 (Japanese).

of the 193 members of the UN. In addition, North Korea has diplomatic relations with three non-members of the UN: Palestine, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (Western Sahara), and the European Union (EU). In all, North Korea has diplomatic relations with 162 countries.

However, North Korea did not intend to expand its diplomatic relations beyond those with socialist countries when it was founded. When North Korea was established, it had diplomatic relations with only 11 socialist countries. Its foreign policy prioritized the Eastern Bloc until the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s.

Table 1 shows the number of foreign countries with which North Korea has established diplomatic relations. In the 1940s and 1950s, North Korea had diplomatic relations only with socialist countries. However, since the Sino-Soviet split, the number of countries with which it has established diplomatic relations has increased.

1940s	11
1950s	3
1960s	21
1970s	66
1980s	15
1990s	32
2000s	24
2010s	1

North Korea established diplomatic relations with 66 countries in the 1970s because of the Sino-Soviet split. The Sino-American rapprochement changed North Korea's foreign policy from Communist bloc diplomacy to Third World diplomacy.

Therefore, North Korea's participation in the war is in line with two objectives. One is to export revolution as a member of the Eastern Bloc and the other is "anti-imperialism" as a member of the Third World. I realize that it is difficult to make a clear distinction between the two objectives. However, based on these two objectives, I will try to explain several cases of North Korea's

⁵ Satoru Miyamoto, "North Korea's Foreign Policy: A Non-isolated Country with Expanding Relations," *The SAGE Handbook of Asian Foreign Policy* (Los Angeles: Sage Publishing, 2020), pp. 636-656.

participation in overseas wars.

2. Wars for the Eastern Bloc

North Korea was founded as a member of the Eastern Bloc. Therefore, it could only send arms and troops to foreign communist parties (i.e., export revolution). Until the end of the 1960s, North Korea's foreign activities were mostly cases of exporting revolution as a communist country. I will present two cases.

A. Chinese Civil War (second phase)

Almost half of the early leaders in North Korea were members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) before the liberation of the Korean peninsula from the Japanese Empire in 1945. Naturally, they supported the CCP when the Chinese Civil War began in Manchuria (later called Northeast China) in 1945.

The Chinese Civil War is generally considered to have broken out in 1946. However, in November 1945, Chinese Nationalist Party (CNP) soldiers clashed with CCP soldiers at the Shanhai Pass, an entrance to Manchuria from mainland China.

The CCP organized the Northeast People's Self-Governing Army—led by Lin Biao—in Manchuria in November 1945. While Lin Biao brought many Korean communists to Manchuria from Yan'an, the home base of the CCP, he regimented many Korean partisans supported by the Soviet Union. It is believed that his actions reflected Stalin's will. The Soviet-backed Korean leaders had two choices: help North Korea build a new country or fight against the CNP for the CCP and the Soviet Union. KIM Il-sung was a member of the group that chose to return to North Korea.

Therefore, the early leaders in North Korea, including KIM Il-sung, supported Lin Biao and his army because they felt it was their duty as communists and Koreans under the control of the Soviet Union. When Lin Biao's army was defeated in late 1945, his army was sheltered in North Korea. The North Korean leaders also provided Lin Biao with weapons confiscated from the defeated Japanese army. They supplied 100,000 weapons, one million pairs of shoes, 3,000 rolls of cloth, and thousands of tons of explosives.⁶

The North Korean leaders sent not only arms and ammunition to Lin Biao's army but also soldiers.

⁶ *Choson Sinbo*, April 3, 2000.

It is said that several thousand soldiers from North Pyongan Province (northwest Korea) participated in the Chinese civil war.⁷

Korean soldiers in the CCP fought against the CNP in Manchuria, but some pursued the CNP as far as Hainan (the southernmost area of China). Korean soldiers supported North Korea after the Chinese Civil War and participated in the Korean War. Therefore, I can safely say that the Korean War was an additional competition to the Chinese Civil War for the Korean communists.

B. Vietnam War

North Korea sent its air force to North Vietnam to fight against U.S. and South Korean forces in Vietnam during the Vietnam War. One of North Korea's goals in participating in the Vietnam War was to defend North Vietnam as a member of the Eastern Bloc. This can be seen as another revolutionary export.

However, this was also for the purpose of defending North Korea. For North Korea, which was at odds with the United States, it was desirable to have a unified Eastern Bloc to defend North Korea. The Eastern Bloc was on the verge of collapse due to the Sino-Soviet split, an undesirable outcome for North Korea's national security interests.⁸

During the Vietnam War, both China and the Soviet Union sent auxiliary troops and substantial aid to North Vietnam. The Supreme Leader of North Korea, KIM Il-sung, believed that joining with North Vietnam to participate in the Vietnam War was symbolic of a solid Eastern Bloc. Therefore, North Korea decided to send auxiliary troops to North Vietnam as a member of the Eastern Bloc.

First, North Korea sent tunnel workers and other noncombatants to North Vietnam in 1965. Then, on October 5, 1966, at the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) conference, KIM Il-Sung declared the need to send North Korean troops into North Vietnam. He believed forming a united front against "American imperialism" would solidify the Eastern Bloc. North Korea was trying to fight against American imperialism and its South Korean "puppet" in Vietnam.

North Korea dispatched the air force's 203rd Unit in October 1966 to North Vietnam. The 203rd

⁷ Satoru Miyamoto, "The Influence on the Process in the Foundation of the Korean People's Army by China-North Korea Relations (북중관계가 조선인민군 창설 과정에 미친 영향)," *Modern Korean History*, Vol.1, No. 1 (March 2013), pp. 7-29 (Korean).

⁸ Satoru Miyamoto, "The Dispatch of DPRK Troops to Vietnam (朝鮮民主主義人民共和国のベトナム派兵)," *The Journal of Contemporary Korean Studies*, No. 2 (February 2003), pp. 58-67 (Japanese).

Unit consisted of approximately 150 members, including 24 pilots (There is another report. See "North Korea and the Vietnam War"). Fourteen of them—12 pilots and two ground staff—died during the war. The unit then changed its name to the 923rd Regiment under the North Vietnamese Air Force commander and shot down 26 U.S. Air Force planes during the war. It was estimated that they would withdraw from North Vietnam in 1969.⁹

North Korea fought against American imperialism and its puppet in a vain effort to consolidate the Eastern Bloc. Despite KIM Il-sung's wishes, the Eastern Bloc could not renew its past ties. In March 1969, the Soviet Union and China clashed militarily on Damansky Island (on the border between the Soviet Union and China). The leaders of North Korea were shaken. We can see it from the fact that this incident was not reported in North Korea. Therefore, North Korea gave up its Eastern Bloc diplomacy.

3. Wars for the Third World

North Korea had to change its foreign policy from Communist bloc diplomacy to Third World diplomacy in the 1970s because of the Sino-Soviet split and the Sino-American rapprochement. After the Damansky Island clash, North Korea was able to heal its relations with China, but China moved closer to the United States, which North Korea had hated for its imperialism. North Korea had to find other friendly countries to oppose the United States. The friendly countries North Korea found were members of the Third World. Therefore, North Korea, as a member of the Third World, began to participate in wars for anti-imperialism. I will present two cases.

A. October War (Yom Kippur War)

Egyptian President Muhammad Anwar el-Sadat, who had been preparing to fight Israel with Soviet assistance, suddenly announced on July 18, 1972, that the Soviet military advisory group was withdrawing at the request of the Egyptian government. This certainly prevented the Egyptian armed forces from continuing their preparations for war. Saad el-Shazly, the chief of staff of the Egyptian armed forces, noted that the shortage of MIG pilots remained unresolved.

⁹ Satoru Miyamoto, *Why doesn't Coup d'Etat Happen in North Korea?: Civil-military Relations and Foreign Military Assistance* (北朝鮮ではなぜ軍事クーデターが起きないのか?: 政軍関係論で読み解く軍隊統制と対外軍事支援), (Tokyo: Ushiosyobo Kojinsha, 2013), pp. 121-125(Japanese); Satoru Miyamoto, "The DPRK and the Vietnam War (1)(朝鮮民主主義人民共和国とベトナム戦争(1))," *Bulletin, Seigakuin University General Research Institute*, Number 55 (March 2013), pp.292-310 (Japanese); Satoru Miyamoto, "The DPRK and the Vietnam War (2) (朝鮮民主主義人民共和国とベトナム戦争(2))," *Bulletin, Seigakuin University General Research Institute*, Number 57 (March 2014), pp.211-237(Japanese).

In March 1973, Shazly asked JANG Jong-hwan, a North Korean government representative in Egypt, to send North Korean troops to train Egyptian pilots. After repeated negotiations, Shazly visited North Korea for a week, from April 6 to April 13, and met with KIM Il-sung. In the end, his visit appeared to be decisive in securing the dispatch of North Korean troops to Egypt.

North Korea aimed to establish a friendship with Egypt, the great power of the Middle East, and the Third World. Supporting Egypt was in line with North Korea's anti-imperialist ideas because Egypt was fighting against Israel, which North Korea considered to be a puppet of American imperialism.

The North Korean Air Force units, consisting of 30 pilots, eight flight controllers, five interpreters, three administrators, a doctor, and a cook—arrived in Egypt in June and were deployed in July.¹⁰

The October War immediately broke out, led by the allied forces of Egypt. Syria attacked the Israeli military on October 6 but suffered an early defeat. After Israel launched a counterattack, KIM Il-sung announced on October 17 that he would support all Arab countries. He seemed to be hoping to strengthen relations between the Arab countries and North Korea by announcing military support. The U.S. government announced that Israel had fought the North Korean air force on the same day. The whole world knew that North Korean pilots were fighting the Israeli air force in the skies of the Middle East.¹¹ North Korean pilots shot down four Israeli fighter jets early in the war.¹²

In addition, during the second half of the war, North Korea sent air force personnel to Syria at the Syrian government's request. North Korea succeeded in winning the friendship of Egypt and Syria. As a result, North Korea won many supporters in the UN General Assembly and became a member of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1975. Therefore, participation in the October War made North Korea a member of the Third World.

B. Angolan Civil War

It has been reported that North Korea was involved in the Angolan civil war (1975-2002) among

¹⁰ IKEUCHI, Satoshi(池内恵) and Satoru Miyamoto, "The Origin of North Korea's Ballistic Missile Development: From the Memoirs of Egyptian Army General Staff Saad el-Shazly (北朝鮮の弾道ミサイル開発の起源 : シャーヅィリー・エジプト軍参謀総長の回顧録から)", *The Monthly Journal Ta (East Asia)*, Number 553 (July 2013), pp.82-86 (Japanese).

¹¹ Satoru Miyamoto, "DPRK Troop Dispatches and Military Support in the Middle East: Change from Military Support to Arms Trade in the 1970s," *East Asia*, Volume 27, Number 4 (November 2010), pp.349-352.

¹² *Rodong Sinmun*, February 12, 2012.

the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), and the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA). The MPLA has controlled the capital since 1975, when Angola gained independence from Portugal. While the Soviet Union and Cuba supported the MPLA, China and South Africa supported UNITA, and the United States supported the FNLA.

It has been reported several times - mainly by the South African press - that North Korea sent troops to the Angolan civil war in 1984. According to these reports, North Korea sent several thousand troops to fight against UNITA.¹³ W. Martin James, a professor at Henderson State University, estimated that North Korea sent 1,500 to 3,000 troops to Angola.¹⁴ It has also been reported that North Korea has sent twenty-five thousand troops to Angola.¹⁵ North Korea denied these reports on December 3, 1984.¹⁶ However, the South African press reports would be considered accurate to a certain extent based on contemporary circumstantial evidence.

Foreign information about North Korea during the Angolan civil war is confusing. John Stockwell, a former CIA officer during the Angolan civil war, reported that North Korea supported UNITA.¹⁷ Humio Nakagawa, a retired professor at Tsukuba University, reported that North Korea supported the FNLA and UNITA.¹⁸

What I can say with certainty is that North Korea has consistently supported the MPLA, according to contemporary news in North Korea. Angola's first president, Agostinho Neto, the leader of the MPLA, visited North Korea in 1968 and 1971 before Angola's independence. When he died in 1979, North Korea sent a condolence telegram to the Angolan government and the MPLA.¹⁹ I cannot imagine that North Korea supported the FNLA and UNITA.

Of course, I do not yet know the details of North Korea's participation in the Angolan civil war because they have not been made public. North Korea has announced that it helped liberate Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, Madagascar, and Angola.²⁰ Therefore, if this is true, the

¹³ *Asahi Shimbun*, September 15, 1984 (Japanese: quoted from the article of the Star, a newspaper in South Africa).

¹⁴ W. Martin James III, *A Political History of the Civil War in Angola, 1974-1990*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp.212-218.

¹⁵ *Mainichi Shimbun*, November 30, 1984(Japanese).

¹⁶ *Rodong Sinmun*, December 3, 1984(Korean).

¹⁷ John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, (London: André Deutsch Limited, 1978), p.52.

¹⁸ Humio Nakagawa (中川文雄), "Cuba and the Angolan Civil War (キューバとアンゴラ内戦)," Humio Nakagawa ed., *Modern Latin America's relations with Asia and Africa(現代ラテンアメリカの対アジア・アフリカ関係)*, (Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, 1980), p.43(Japanese).

¹⁹ *Rodong Sinmun*, September 15, 1979.

²⁰ KIM Hyok-mo and RI Kwang-sam, *Comrade KIM Il-sung, the Great Head of the Great Work of*

participation in the Angolan civil war was part of North Korea's anti-imperialist activities in Africa. Moreover, North Korea did not cooperate with China but with the Soviet Union as a member of the Eastern Bloc in the Angolan civil war. North Korea's participation in the war reflected two objectives: exporting revolution and anti-imperialism.

As a result, the MPLA still maintains power in Angola and has a good friendship with North Korea. Namibia gained its independence in the Angolan civil war and also holds a friendship with North Korea. After the war, North Korea built many artistic buildings and works of art in Angola and Namibia. I do not know the details yet, but it seems fairly certain that North Korea participated in the Angolan civil war.

4. Conclusion

North Korea has participated in numerous wars in Asia and Africa with two objectives: exporting revolution as a member of the Eastern Bloc and anti-imperialism as a member of the Third World.

North Korea participated in wars to export revolution as a member of the Eastern Bloc until the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s. North Korea participated in the Chinese Civil War and the Vietnam War for the purpose of exporting revolution.

However, after the Damansky Island incident and the Sino-American rapprochement, North Korea began to participate in anti-imperialist wars as a member of the Third World. North Korea began to find friendly countries in the Third World that clashed with the U.S. instead of the Eastern Bloc. Because of its anti-imperialist objective, North Korea participated in the October War and the Angolan Civil War.

The two objectives sometimes coexisted when North Korea supported pro-communist parties or countries. While North Korea supported the MPLA, which the Soviet Union supported, it was in conflict with UNITA and FNLA, which China and the United States supported in the Angolan civil war. North Korea's support for the MPLA fulfilled its goals of exporting revolution and anti-imperialism.

North Korea has strengthened its friendship with other countries by participating in many wars around the world. This is one of the reasons why the North Korean regime survived after the Cold War, although many scholars expected it to collapse like the regimes in the Eastern European

Independence (자주위업의 위대한 수령 김일성동지), Vol. 8 (Pyongyang: Social Science Press, 2011), p. 266(Korean).

countries. I want to emphasize that the Eastern European countries were members of the Eastern Bloc, but North Korea is a member of the Third World. Therefore, North Korea is not an isolated country; it has surprisingly developed friendships with countries that oppose the United States. North Korea has sent troops and exported weapons to numerous wars around the world in order to establish friendly relations with countries fighting against the U.S., thereby weakening U.S. power and increasing North Korea's ability to survive. Therefore, as a member of the Third World, North Korea will continue to fight against the USA for anti-imperialism.

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North Korea and the Vietnam War: Air Force Deployment and Post-War Implications

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1. Introduction

The Vietnam War was a war that began around 1960 and lasted until 1975, triggered by a military conflict between South Vietnam (Republic of Vietnam), which governed the area of southern Vietnam of the Vietnamese Demilitarized Zone based on the 17th parallel north, and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLFSV), which opposed that government. North Vietnam (Democratic Republic of Vietnam), which governed the area of northern Vietnam of the Vietnamese Demilitarized Zone, also fought against South Vietnam and supported the NLFSV. The Vietnam War ended with the fall of Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, by North Vietnam and the establishment of what is now the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

The Vietnam War was not just a war between North and South Vietnam. The Vietnam War spread to Laos and Cambodia, further complicating the Laotian Civil War and contributing to the outbreak of the Cambodian Civil War. Also, during the Cold War, when the world was divided into two opposing blocs, the US and the Soviet Union, various nations sent aid and troops to North and South Vietnam. North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea: DPRK) was one of them. Not only North Korea but also other countries in the Eastern bloc, such as the Soviet Union and China, dispatched troops to North Vietnam.

From June 1965 to July 1970, China (People's Republic of China) sent more than 320,000 troops into Vietnam, including railway soldiers, air defense operation units, defense repair units, and road construction units. From May 1972 to August 1973, China sent troops into Vietnam, mainly to clear mines and transport troops by land and sea. More than 1,100 Chinese military personnel were killed and more than 4,200 seriously wounded in Vietnam.¹

The Soviet Union sent 6,359 Soviet officers and soldiers to Vietnam between July 11, 1965 and

¹ Shu, Ken'ei (朱建榮), *Mao Zedong's Vietnam War*(毛沢東のベトナム戦争), (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2001), p. 381 (Japanese).

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December 31, 1974, including military advisers, military experts, surface-to-surface missile units, combat units, and technical personnel, resulting in 13 deaths.²

Against North Vietnam and the NLF/SV, countries in the Western bloc, such as the United States, South Korea, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines, deployed troops to South Vietnam. North and South Korea fought in the Korean War with the support of the Eastern and Western bloc on the Korean peninsula, and each side was divided into two blocs in the Vietnam War, too. The Vietnam War was the first time since the Korean War armistice in 1953 that North and South Korea deployed troops overseas and confronted each other on the battlefield.

This article discusses why North Korea participated in the Vietnam War and then discusses the effects of the Vietnam War on North Korea afterward. Regarding North Korea's participation in the Vietnam War, the declassification of materials in North Korea and Vietnam began gradually in 2000. As a result, research has been conducted in Japan, South Korea, the United States, and Vietnam. In this article, I will discuss the situation as far as I know about North Korea's participation in the Vietnam War based on these studies and materials.

2. Public Access to Materials and Research

Since the time of the Vietnam War, there have been reports in the United States and South Korea that North Korea was involved in the Vietnam War.³ In 1992, KOH Young-hwan, a former North Korean diplomat who defected to South Korea, wrote about North Korea's participation in the Vietnam War in his memoirs.⁴ Despite this, North Korea's participation in the Vietnam War was not well known in Japan, South Korea or the United States, even among experts. It was treated only as a rumor.

This may be because the reality of North Korea's participation in the Vietnam War is not well known. Neither North Korea nor Vietnam publicly acknowledged North Korea's involvement in the Vietnam War until the early 2000s. The 31st volume of the *Complete History of Korea*, which covers the period from October 1966 to November 1970 and is a representative textbook for learning the history of the Korean peninsula in North Korea, states that North Korea expressed its determination to deploy its troops to Vietnam but made no mention of the actual deployment of

² V.A., Zolotarev (B.A., Золотарева) ed., *Russia (USSR) in Local Wars and Military Conflicts of the Second Half of the 20th Century (Россия (СССР) в локальных войнах и военных конфликтах второй половины XX века)*, (Москва: Кучково поле: Полиграфресурсы, 2000). с. 98, с.481 (Russian).

³ *The New York Times*, December 22, 1966; *Chosun Ilbo*, December 23 1966 (Korean); Dong-A Ilbo, September 18, 1967 (Korean).

⁴ KOH Young-hwan, *Pyongyang 25 Hours (평양 25 시)*, (Seoul: Koryowon, 1992), p.177 (Korean).

troops to Vietnam.⁵

Volume 2 of the *History of Foreign Relations of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)*, which covers the diplomatic history of the DPRK, also describes the DPRK's announcement of its decision to deploy troops to Vietnam but does not mention actual deployment.⁶ The *Brief History of the Workers' Party of Korea* and the *History of the Workers' Party of Korea*, which are the basic historical teaching materials of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), the ruling party in North Korea, also made no mention of the actual deployment of troops to Vietnam.⁷

Neither the *Selected Works of Kim Il Sung*, published since 1967, nor the *Collected Works of Kim Il Sung*, published since 1979, contain articles and speeches of KIM Il-sung, the then-supreme leader. Even the *Rodong Sinmun*, the organ of the Central Committee of the WPK, did not reveal that North Korea had deployed troops in Vietnam.

In 2000, however, the dignitaries of the DPRK began to take steps to give external recognition to the deployment of North Korean troops in the Vietnam War. On March 26, 2000, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* reported that DPRK Foreign Minister PAEK Nam-sun, who was visiting Vietnam, visited the cemetery of 14 Korean People's Army (KPA) soldiers in Bac Giang province, about 60 km northeast of the Vietnamese capital Hanoi.⁸ It was also reported in the *Yonhap News* in South Korea and the *BBC* in the United Kingdom, making it known to the outside world.⁹

On April 3 (in Korean) and April 7 (in Japanese), the *Choson Sinbo*, the organ of the Central Standing Committee of the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, reported that from 1964 to 1969, the DPRK supplied 100,000 weapons and one million military uniforms to Vietnam

⁵ The Institute of History of Academy of Social Sciences, *Complete history of Korea(조선전사)*, Vol. 31, (Pyongyang: Science Encyclopedia Publishing House, 1982), pp. 514-517 (Korean).

⁶ RI Chun-hui ed., *History of Foreign Relations of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (조선민주주의인민공화국 대외관계사)*, Vol. 2, (Pyongyang: Social Science Publishing, 1987), pp.27-36 (Korean).

⁷ The Workers' Party of Korea Publishing, *The Brief History of the Workers' Party of Korea(조선로동당략사)*, (Pyongyang: The Workers' Party of Korea Publishing, 1979) (Korean); The Workers' Party of Korea Publishing, *The History of the Workers' Party of Korea (조선로동당력사)*, (Pyongyang: The Workers' Party of Korea Publishing, 1991) (Korean).

⁸ *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 27, 2000 (Japanese). Place names, distances, and directions have been changed by the author according to the map.

⁹ *BBC*, 31 March 2000, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/696970.stm> (Accessed on December 10, 2012); *JoongAng Ilbo*, March 30, 2000 (Korean).

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and deployed air force and engineering units there.¹⁰

Moreover, during a visit to the United States in October 2000, JO Myong-rok, first vice chairman of the DPRK National Defense Commission, surprised U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright by entering the White House wearing a Vietnam War medal.¹¹

Although PAEK Nam-sun's visit to the cemetery and JO Myong-rok's awarding of the Medal of Honor were not reported in North Korea, North Korea began to disseminate information to the outside world about the deployment of troops to Vietnam. In April 2001, Volume 37 of the *Complete Works of Kim Il Sung* was published, containing KIM Il-sung's speeches to the soldiers of the 203rd Division sent to Vietnam.¹² In addition, the 38th volume of the *Complete Works of Kim Il Sung*, published in June 2001, included a congratulatory letter to the 203rd for its achievements in Vietnam.¹³ On July 6, 2001, the *Korea Central Broadcasting* reported the fact that North Korean troops had been participants in the Vietnam war.¹⁴ KIM Yong-nam, chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK, also visited the cemetery of the KPA in Bac Giang Province, Vietnam, on July 12, 2001, as reported in the *Rodong Sinmun*.¹⁵ The remains of the officers and soldiers of the KPA killed in the Vietnam War were returned to North Korea on September 20, 2002, by KIM Yang-chom, vice-director of the DPRK's Ministry of the People's Armed Forces, and laid to rest at the Heroic Martyrs' Cemetery of the KPA.¹⁶

It is believed that North Korea began disseminating information to the outside world about its participation in Vietnam in tandem with Vietnam. According to research by Merle Pribbenow, an expert on the Vietnam War, it was not until 2001 that Vietnamese government authorities acknowledged that North Korean air force pilots had entered the Vietnam War in 1967.¹⁷ North

¹⁰ *Choson Sinbo*, April 3, 2000 (Korean); *Choson Sinbo*, April 7, 2000 (Japanese).

¹¹ Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary: A Memoir*, (New York: Miramax, 2003), p.584.

¹² KIM Il-sung, "Supporting the Struggle of the Vietnamese People Becomes a Noble Internationalist Duty of the Communists. Talk with soldiers of the 203rd unit of the Korean People's Army, October 19, 1966 (월남인민의 투쟁을 지원하는것은 공산주의자들의 숭고한 국제주의적의무로 된다. 조선인민군 제 203 부대 군인들과 한 담화, 1966 년 10 월 19 일)," *The Complete Works of Kim Il Sung*, Vol. 37 (Pyongyang: The Workers' Party of Korea Publishing, 2001), pp.373-384 (Korean).

¹³ KIM Il-sung, "Congratulatory Letter: To the Combatants of Unit 203 of the Korean People's Army, May 30, 1967 (축하문 조선인민군 제 203 부대 전투원들에게 1967 년 5 월 30 일)," *The Complete Works of Kim Il Sung*, Vol. 38 (Pyongyang: The Workers' Party of Korea Publishing, 2001), pp.462-465 (Korean).

¹⁴ Radiopress, *North Korea Policy Trends*, 2001, No.10 (August 2001), p.80 (Japanese).

¹⁵ *Rodong Sinmun*, July 13, 2001 (Korean).

¹⁶ *Rodong Sinmun*, September 21, 2002.

¹⁷ Merle L. Pribbenow, "The 'Ology War: Technology and Ideology in the Vietnamese Defense of Hanoi, 1967," *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 67, No. 1, (January 2003), p.185, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/40492/pdf> (Accessed on February 10, 2024).

Korea probably began disseminating information to the outside world accordingly. North Korea's participation in the Vietnam War was the first overseas deployment of the KPA and an important event in understanding North Korea's subsequent overseas military cooperation.

Satoru Miyamoto began researching North Korea's troop deployment to Vietnam as soon as it became public knowledge. Miyamoto published an article in 2003.¹⁸ According to LEE Sin-jae's research, this was the first research article published on North Korea's troop deployment to Vietnam.¹⁹ Miyamoto has since researched North Korea's troop deployment in Vietnam.²⁰

Pribbenow also published his article and English translation of material from Vietnam in 2011 as part of the Woodrow Wilson Center's North Korea International Documentation Project.²¹ Pribbenow has published two more papers by 2019.²² James F. Durand published an article in 2019 that used newly obtained documents from Russia and other sources to examine the North Korean air force and psychological operations groups that North Korea sent to North Vietnam, as well as South Korean prisoners of war sent to North Korea.²³ Balázs Szalontai discusses the impact of the Vietnam War on North Korea's policy toward South Korea.²⁴

LEE Sin-jae of the Institute of Military History, MND in South Korea, has also published excellent research articles and a book on North Korea's participation in the Vietnam War, using

¹⁸ Satoru Miyamoto(宮本悟), "The Dispatch of the DPRK Troops to Vietnam (朝鮮民主主義人民共和国のベトナム派兵)," *The Journal of Contemporary Korean Studies*, No. 2 (February 2003), pp. 58-67, <http://www.ackj.org/wp/jcks/002/007.pdf> (Accessed on February 10, 2024) (Japanese).

¹⁹ LEE Sin-jae, "The North Korean Air Force's Participation on Vietnam War (북한 공군의 베트남전쟁 참전)," *Review of North Korean Studies*, Vol. 19, No.3, (December 2016), p. 9 (Korean).

²⁰ Satoru Miyamoto, "The DPRK and the Vietnam War (1) (朝鮮民主主義人民共和国とベトナム戦争(1))," *Bulletin, Seigakuin University General Research Institute*, No. 55 (March 2013), pp. 292-310 (Japanese); Satoru Miyamoto, "The DPRK and the Vietnam War (2) (朝鮮民主主義人民共和国とベトナム戦争(2))," *Bulletin, Seigakuin University General Research Institute*, No. 57 (March 2014), pp. 211-237 (Japanese).

²¹ Merle Pribbenow, "North Korean Pilots in the Skies over Vietnam," *The North Korea International Documentation Project*, E-DOSSIER #2, November 2011, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/NKIDP_eDossier_2_North_Korean_Pilots_in_Vietnam_War.pdf (Accessed on January 30, 2024).

²² Merle Pribbenow, "North Korean Psychological Warfare Operations in South Vietnam," *The North Korea International Documentation Project*, March 19, 2018, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/north-korean-psychological-warfare-operations-south-vietnam> (Accessed on January 30, 2024); Merle Pribbenow, "North Korean Military Engineer Regiment Helped Build Secret Underground Headquarters Complex during the Vietnam War," *The North Korea International Documentation Project*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/north-korean-military-engineer-regiment-helped-build-secret-underground-headquarters> (Accessed on January 30, 2024).

²³ James F. Durand, "Partisans, Pilots, PSYOPS, and Prisoners: North Korea's Vietnam Odyssey," *International Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. 23, Issue 1, (Spring/Summer 2019), pp.43-70.

²⁴ Balázs Szalontai, "In the Shadow of Vietnam: A New Look at North Korea's Militant Strategy, 1962-1970," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Fall 2012), pp. 122-166.

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Vietnamese and Korean documents and papers.²⁵ Do Thanh Thao Mien of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam has also published articles and a book in Korean on North Vietnam-North Korea relations, using Vietnamese materials.²⁶ KIM Sang-beom, a professor of the Kyungnam University Institute for Far Eastern Studies, published articles on Vietnamese students who studied in North Korea during the Vietnam War and on North Korean foreign policy through North Korean statements.²⁷ HK Research Professor of the Institute of Humanities for Unification at Konkuk University (currently Professor of the National Institute for Unification Education), KIM, Jin-hwan, discusses North Korea's foreign policy during the Vietnam War.²⁸

In Vietnam, as well as history books from official institutions, Nguyễn Thị Mai Hoa, associate professor at Vietnam National University, Hanoi, and Dr. Nguyễn Văn Quyền have published history books and research papers.²⁹

²⁵ LEE Sin-jae, "The North Korean Air Force's Participation on Vietnam War," pp. 6-51; LEE Sin-jae, *The participation of North Korea in the Vietnam War (북한의 베트남전쟁 참전)*, (Seoul: Institute for Military Compilation, MND, 2017) (Korean); LEE Sin-jae, "Battle between the Two Koreas in Vietnam: An Analysis of Participation in the Vietnam War by the North Korean Psychological Warfare Unit and Propaganda Leaflets," *S/N Korean Humanities*, 4(1), (February 2018), pp.75-97.

²⁶ Do Thanh Thao Mien, *Red Blood Pledge. Pyongyang, Hanoi and the Vietnam War* (붉은 혈맹. 평양, 하노이 그리고 베트남전쟁), (Seoul: Seoul National University Press and Culture Center, 2022) (Korean); Do Thanh Thao Mien, "The End of the Vietnam War in 1975 and the North Korea's Strategic Responses: Focusing on Vietnamese Materials (1975 년 베트남전 종전과 북한 정부의 대응: 베트남자료를 중심으로)," *Ewha History Research(이화사학연구)*, Vol. 48 (January 2014), pp.93-133 (Korean); Do Thanh Thao Mien, "The Vietnamese Sources of Materials Related to North and South Korea, focusing on the Vietnam War period(1954-1975) (베트남 소재 남-북한 관련 자료: 베트남전쟁기(1954-1975)년을 중심으로)," *The Military History(군사)*, No. 96 (May 2015), pp.323-362 (Korean); Do Thanh Thao Mien, "Vietnam's Academic Research Trends and Issues on North and South Korea during the Vietnam War (1954-1975) (베트남 학계의 남-북한 연구 동향 및 쟁점: 베트남전쟁 시기(1954-1975)년을 중심으로)," *Ewha History Research(이화사학연구)*, Vol.50 (January 2015), pp.307-350 (Korean); Do Thanh Thao Mien, "North Korean Support for the War in Vietnam in the 1960s - Revelations from the Vietnamese Archives - (1960년대 북한의 베트남전 지원과 공군 · 심리전 전문가 파병: 새로 발굴한 베트남자료를 중심으로)," *Ewha History Research(이화사학연구)*, Vol. 59 (January 2019), pp.225-263 (Korean).

²⁷ KIM Sang-bum, "A Study on North Korea's Social and Cultural Exchange with Vietnam in the 1960s: Focusing on solidarity events and supporting international students and trainees (1960년대 북한의 대베트남 사회·문화 교류에 대한 연구: 연대 강화 행사와 유학생·실습생 교육을 중심으로)," *Reunification and peace(통일과 평화)*, Vol.13, No.1, (June 2021), pp.163-206 (Korean); KIM Sang-bum, "A Study on the Statement Diplomacy of North Korea(1964-1972) (베트남전쟁기 북한의 성명서교 연구(1964-1972)), " *The Military History(군사)*, Vol.127, (June 2023), pp.179-230 (Korean).

²⁸ KIM Jin-hwan, "North Korea's Diplomatic Policy during the Vietnam War Era (베트남전쟁 시기 북한의 대외정책)," *Society and History(사회와역사)*, Volume 105, (January 2015), pp. 41-70 (Korean).

²⁹ The Military History Institute of Ministry of National Defense Vietnam (Bộ Quốc Phòng Viện Lịch Sử Quân Sự Việt Nam), *History of the resistance war against America to save the country 1954 - 1975, Tap.5 - General attack and uprising in 1968 (Lịch sử kháng chiến chống Mỹ cứu nước 1954 - 1975, Tap.5 - Tổng tấn công và nổi dậy năm 1968)*, (Hà Nội: Chính trị Quốc gia, 2015) (Vietnamese); Nguyễn Văn Quyền,

By 2022, researchers in Japan, South Korea, the United States, and Vietnam will have developed their own research on North Korea's participation in the Vietnam War through new materials. In this article, in addition to the accumulation of numerous studies, we will also use new Vietnamese sources to provide a more complete picture of North Korea's participation in the Vietnam War, with a focus on North Korean air force units.

3. Factors that led North Korea to send troops to Vietnam.

In this chapter, we will examine the factors that led North Korea to send troops to Vietnam at three levels. These are (1) factors of the Cold War structure, (2) bilateral factors, and (3) factors of South Korea's deployment of troops to South Vietnam. These have been discussed in many studies. Here, I would like to organize the results of these studies.

(1) The factors of the Cold War structure

A major factor in North and South Korea's decision to send troops to Vietnam was the Cold War structure of the U.S.-Soviet conflict. North Korea was a member of the Eastern Bloc, led by the Soviet Union, in conflict with the U.S. and South Korea. South Korea was a member of the Western bloc, led by the U.S., in conflict with the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea.

As members of their respective Cold War blocs, North and South Korea needed to increase their value by cooperating in the war between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Their value in the blocs was also a guarantee that the Eastern Bloc would defend North Korea and the Western Bloc would defend South Korea. In addition, South Korea was promised massive economic aid by the U.S. for sending troops to Vietnam. North and South Korea were not under orders or pressure from the U.S., China, or the Soviet Union but were forced to enter the Vietnam War for their survival within the Cold War structure.

Vietnam took advantage of military aid from socialist countries in the war of resistance against the US to save the country (1954 - 1975)(Việt Nam tranh thủ nguồn viện trợ quân sự của các nước xã hội chủ nghĩa trong cuộc kháng chiến chống Mỹ, cứu nước (1954 - 1975)), (Hà Nội: Chính trị Quốc gia, 2022) (Vietnamese); Nguyễn Văn Quyền, *Vietnam took advantage of support and help from socialist countries in the years 1954 - 1968 (Việt Nam tranh thủ sự ủng hộ, giúp đỡ từ các nước xã hội chủ nghĩa những năm 1954 - 1968),* (Hà Nội: Quân đội nhân dân, 2020); Nguyễn Thị Mai Hoa, *Socialist countries supported Vietnam's resistance against the US to save the country (1954-1975)(Các nước xã hội chủ nghĩa ủng hộ Việt Nam kháng chiến chống Mỹ, cứu nước (1954-1975)),* (Hà Nội: Chính Trị Quốc Gia Sự Thật, 2013) (Vietnamese); Nguyễn Thị Mai Hoa, "Contribute to learning more about the aid provided by socialist countries to Vietnam in the resistance war against the US and to save the country (Góp phần tìm hiểu thêm về chi viện của các nước xã hội chủ nghĩa cho Việt Nam trong kháng chiến chống Mỹ, cứu nước)," *Tạp chí Lịch sử Quân sự*, 5 (281),(May 2015), pp.38-42 (Vietnamese).

In the case of North Korea, the split in the Eastern bloc that began in the late 1950s as a result of the Sino-Soviet split was a significant factor in the country's decision to enter the Vietnam War. For North Korea, whose neighbors were the Soviet Union and China, both major powers in the Eastern bloc, it was desirable to have good Sino-Soviet relations and for China and the Soviet Union to work together to protect North Korea. For North Korea, Sino-Soviet support for North Vietnam was part of the communist movement and a symbol of Sino-Soviet cooperation in the anti-American struggle. North Korea also supported Sino-Soviet cooperation in supporting North Vietnam and sent its troops to North Vietnam to maintain the Eastern Bloc.³⁰

(2) Bilateral factors

The bilateral relationship between North Korea and North Vietnam is another factor in North Korea's decision to send troops to North Vietnam. North Korea and North Vietnam first became close in the 1950s, before the Sino-Soviet split began. Initially, however, North Vietnam was just one of many states in the Soviet Union-led Eastern bloc for North Korea. Diplomatic relations between North Korea and North Vietnam were established on January 31, 1950. This was also when diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and North Vietnam were established. However, diplomatic relations between China and North Vietnam were established on January 18. North Korea established diplomatic relations with North Vietnam not because China recognized North Vietnam but because the Soviet Union recognized North Vietnam.

Bilateral relations between North Korea and North Vietnam developed after Ho Chi Minh, president of North Vietnam, visited Pyongyang from July 8 to 12, 1957.³¹ He was the first foreign leader to visit North Korea. KIM Il-sung, prime minister of the DPRK, also led a North Korean government delegation to North Vietnam from November 28 to December 2, 1958.³²

North Korean support for North Vietnam also began with a visit by Ho Chi Minh, who was so impressed by the collective housing complexes during his 1957 visit that he asked KIM Il-sung to build them in Hanoi. Kim Liên City was designed by North Korean engineers and built in Hanoi between 1959 and 1965. The Kim Liên Collective Housing Complex had 38 buildings, from Building Group A to Building Group C.³³ Although North Korean engineers designed the

³⁰ Miyamoto, "The DPRK and the Vietnam War (1)," pp. 211-215. LEE Sin-jae also cites Indonesia's transition from a pro-communist to an anti-communist regime through a military coup as a factor (LEE Sin-jae, *The participation of North Korea*, pp.62-64).

³¹ *Rodong Sinmun*, July 9, 1957; *Rodong Sinmun*, July 13, 1957.

³² *Rodong Sinmun*, November 29, 1958; *Rodong Sinmun*, December 3, 1957.

³³ Phan Dương, "Korean imprint in a 60-year-old dormitory in Hanoi (Dấu ấn Triều Tiên trong khu tập thể 60 năm ở Hà Nội)," *VnExpress*, 02/03/2019, từ <https://vnexpress.net/dau-an-trieu-tien-trong-khu-tap-the>

Kim Liên Collective Housing Complex, its construction was paid for out of the North Vietnamese state budget.³⁴ Although the Kim Liên Collective Housing Complex is aging and has been partially rebuilt, it can still be seen in the past in Kim Liên City, Dong Da District, Hanoi, in 2024.

In 1958, North Vietnamese students also began to study in North Korea. The first students were only two.³⁵ From 1958 to 1967, 684 students were sent to North Korea.³⁶

Nevertheless, in the 1950s, North Korea could hardly be said to have had particularly close relations with any of the Eastern Bloc states other than the Soviet Union and China. When China and the Soviet Union began to confront each other in the late 1950s, North Korea was forced to balance between them. For this reason, it signed the Mutual Aid and Cooperation Friendship Treaty with the Soviet Union and China in July 1961.

When the Cuban missile crisis erupted in October 1962, the WPK, perhaps convinced that the Soviet Union would abandon a small country like Cuba, criticized the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1963 and deepened its relations with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

The value of North Vietnam and its ruling party, the Workers' Party of Vietnam (WPV), became more valuable to the WPK, which sought to include the WPV in its criticism of the CPSU's leadership.

The WPV also criticized the CPSU's leadership at the 9th Plenary Session of the Third Central Committee on December 19, 1963.³⁷ However, there were signs of Sino-Soviet rapprochement when Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and supreme leader of the Soviet Union during the Cuban crisis, who was dismissed on October 14, 1964.

In November, KIM Il-sung visited China to discuss his policy toward the Soviet Union. During his visit to China, KIM Il-sung also visited North Vietnam, so it is believed that he also discussed

60-nam-o-ha-noi-3887895.html (Accessed on January 30, 2024) (Vietnamese).

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ Nguyễn Thuý Quỳnh, "Socialist countries with the reception of education and training of Vietnamese international students in the resistance war against America and national salvation (1954 - 1975) (Các nước xã hội chủ nghĩa với việc tiếp nhận giáo dục và đào tạo lưu học sinh Việt Nam trong kháng chiến chống Mỹ, cứu nước (1954 - 1975))," *Historical Research (Nghiên cứu Lịch sử)*, Vol.11, No.475, (November 2015), p. 52 (Vietnamese).

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.56.

³⁷ Miyamoto, "The DPRK and the Vietnam War (1)," pp. 302-306.

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policy toward the Soviet Union there.³⁸ KIM Il-sung's second visit to North Vietnam was on November 11, 1964, but we do not know when he left North Vietnam.³⁹ This is because KIM Il-sung's second visit to North Vietnam was not reported then. He was in China on November 16 and said he returned to Hanoi from the Vietnamese countryside on November 14, indicating that KIM Il-sung returned to China on November 14 or 15.⁴⁰

According to Nguyễn Văn Quyền, North Korea was reluctant to support North Vietnam until 1964. KIM Il-sung's second visit to North Vietnam was the catalyst for North Korea to begin actively supporting North Vietnam. He said this was because he found a commonality between North Korea's struggle against the U.S. and South Korea and North Vietnam's struggle against the U.S. and South Vietnam.⁴¹ North Korean aid to North Vietnam from 1954 to 1964 totaled 442 tons (442 tons of industrial products) for only 120,000 rubles, while North Korean aid to North Vietnam from 1965 to 1975 totaled 842 tons (12 tons of raw materials and 830 tons of industrial products) for 18,842,000 rubles.⁴² However, some data show 33,500,000 rubles from 1965 to 1968 (not including military aid).⁴³ Since it depends on the calculation of exchange rates, it is difficult to say which is closer to the actual situation, but there seems to be no doubt that North Korea's aid increased sharply from 1965. The *Choson Sinbo* reported that the DPRK supplied 100,000 weapons and 1 million military uniforms to North Vietnam from 1964 to 1969, but the figures are vague.⁴⁴

North Korea's and North Vietnam's rapprochement with the Soviet Union may also have been a factor in North Korea's willingness to support North Vietnam. North Korea and North Vietnam reconciled with the Soviet Union when Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin visited North Korea, China, and North Vietnam in February 1965. However, China and the Soviet Union could not reconcile, and North Korea was once again forced to balance between the feuding China and the Soviet Union. North Korea, therefore, turned its attention to supporting North Vietnam in the Vietnam War. Since the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964, the United States had been directly

³⁸ Wu Lengxi, *Ten Years' Controversy: Memoirs of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1956-1966* (十年论战 : 1956-1966 中苏关系回忆录), (Beijing: The Central Party Literature Press, 1999), pp.883-888 (Chinese).

³⁹ Báo tàng Hồ Chí Minh, "President Ho Chi Minh received a delegation of the WPK led by Chairman of the Party Central Committee KIM Il-sung to visit Vietnam (Chủ tịch Hồ Chí Minh tiếp Đoàn đại biểu Đảng Lao động Triều Tiên do Chủ tịch Ban Chấp hành Trung ương Đảng Kim Nhật Thành dẫn đầu sang thăm Việt Nam)," *Báo tàng Hồ Chí Minh*, (November 11, 1964), từ <https://baotanghochiminh.vn/danh-sach-bien-nien-tieu-su/p-868.htm> (Accessed on March 3, 2024) (Vietnamese).

⁴⁰ Wu Lengxi, *Ten Years' Controversy*, pp.883-884.

⁴¹ Nguyễn Văn Quyền, *Vietnam took advantage of support*, pp.149-150.

⁴² Nguyễn Văn Quyền, *Vietnam took advantage of military aid*, pp.273-274.

⁴³ Nguyễn Văn Quyền, *Vietnam took advantage of support*, p.114.

⁴⁴ *Choson Sinbo*, April 3, 2000; *Choson Sinbo*, April 7, 2000.

involved in the Vietnam War, and China and the Soviet Union had cooperated to some extent in supporting North Vietnam despite their mutual antagonism. North Korea sought to maintain friendly relations with both China and the Soviet Union by joining in the aid to North Vietnam.⁴⁵

(3) Factors Caused by South Korea's Deployment of Troops to South Vietnam

After rapprochement with the Soviet Union, North Korea declared in a government statement on March 26, 1965, that it would send aid, including arms, to the NLFV. It also made clear that it would send troops as reinforcements if requested.⁴⁶ The fourth Plenary Session of the Third Supreme People's Assembly was held in North Korea on May 20. It was decided that aid should be sent to North Vietnam and the NLFV.⁴⁷ Since KIM Il-sung later said that he sent people to North Vietnam to build bomb shelters and underground facilities after the Gulf of Tonkin incident, it is likely that the decision to send the engineering troops was made at this meeting.⁴⁸ Weapons and other military supplies were sent not only to North Vietnam but also to Cambodia.⁴⁹ However, North Korea had not yet sent combat troops to Vietnam.

One of the factors that led North Korea to send combat troops to North Vietnam was the deployment of South Korean troops to South Vietnam. South Korea had originally sent non-combat troops to South Vietnam in 1964. On May 9, 1964, the U.S. asked the ROK government to send non-combat troops. In response, on July 31, the 13th plenary session of the 44th National Assembly ratified a request for approval to send non-combat troops. Thus, the decision was made to send South Korean troops to South Vietnam. The first units to be sent were the 1st Mobile Surgical Hospital and the Taekwondo Instructor Corps, dispatched on September 11.⁵⁰

The United States requested the Korean government to send additional personnel on December 18, 1964. As a result, Korea requested approval to send personnel, ratified by the Seventh Plenary Session of the 47th Extraordinary National Assembly on January 26, 1965. The second unit to be sent was the Dove Unit of the Military Assistance Mission, a non-combat unit. The Dove Unit

⁴⁵ Miyamoto, "The DPRK and the Vietnam War (2)," pp. 211-215.

⁴⁶ *Rodong Sinmun*, March 27, 1965.

⁴⁷ *Rodong Sinmun*, May 21, 1965.

⁴⁸ KIM Il-sung, "Supporting the Struggle of the Vietnamese People," p. 375; KIM Hyok-mo and RI Kwang-sam, *Comrade KIM Il-sung, the Great Leader of the Great Work of Independence* (자주위업의 위대한 수령 김일성동지), Vol. 8 (Pyongyang: Social Science Press, 2011), p. 201 (Korean).

⁴⁹ KIM Il-sung, "Talk with the Delegation of the Southwest African People's Organization' on November 23, 1975 (서남아프리카인민조직대표단과 한 담화 1975년 11월 23일)," *The Complete Works of Kim Il Sung*, Vol. 58 (Pyongyang: The Workers' Party of Korea Publishing, 2005), p. 245 (Korean).

⁵⁰ National Institute for Defense Military History, *50 Years of the Founding Military* (건국 50 년사), (Seoul: National Institute for Defense Military History, 1998), pp. 202-205 (Korean).

arrived in South Vietnam on March 16.⁵¹

On June 24, 1965, the South Korean government received a request from the United States to send a division of South Korean troops to South Vietnam.⁵² On July 8, the DPRK issued a government statement opposing the deployment of South Korean combat troops and declaring that it would send to the NLFSV weapons and equipment capable of arming an army equal to the number of South Korean troops.⁵³

The third Korean contingent consisted of the Tiger Division, which consisted of two Army regiments, and the Blue Dragon Division, which consisted of a Marine brigade. The Blue Dragon Division arrived in South Vietnam on October 9, 1965, and the Tiger Division arrived between October 22 and November 2, 1965.⁵⁴ The DPRK Foreign Ministry issued a statement by a spokesman on January 18, 1966, criticizing the PARK Chung-hee administration for sending combat troops to South Vietnam and citing the massacre of Vietnamese villagers by South Korean troops in Vietnam that allegedly had occurred on December 22.⁵⁵

On January 1, 1966, U.S. Vice President Henfrey visited Korea and asked the Korean government to send more Korean troops to South Vietnam.⁵⁶ An agreement was reached on February 25 between Winthrop G. Brown, U.S. ambassador to Korea, and YI Dong-won, minister of foreign affairs, which promised to modernize the ROK military, provide technical assistance for exports, and provide loans as a condition for sending more South Korean troops to South Vietnam.⁵⁷ Brown delivered the agreement to YI Dong-won as an official document on March 7.⁵⁸

On March 7, 1966, North Korea issued a government statement opposing the deployment of South Korean troops to South Vietnam and criticizing the deployment of South Korean troops to South Vietnam as an act of provocation against North Korea.⁵⁹ However, the deployment of South Korean troops to South Vietnam was carried out. The fourth deployment consisted of the 26th Regiment of the Capital Division, which consisted of an army regiment, and the White Horse Division, which consisted of an army division. The 26th Regiment of the Capital Division arrived

⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp.205-207.

⁵² *Chosun Ilbo*, June 27, 1965.

⁵³ *Rodong Sinmun*, July 9, 1965.

⁵⁴ National Institute for Defense Military History, *50 Years of the Founding Military*, p. 212.

⁵⁵ *Rodong Sinmun*, January 18, 1966.

⁵⁶ *Dong-A Yearbook*, 1967 Edition (Seoul: The Dong-A Ilbo Company, 1967), p. 248 (Korean).

⁵⁷ *Chosun Ilbo*, February 26, 1966.

⁵⁸ *Chosun Ilbo*, March 8, 1966.

⁵⁹ *Rodong Sinmun*, March 8, 1966.

in South Vietnam on April 16.⁶⁰ The White Horse Division arrived in Vietnam between September 5 and October 8.⁶¹

North Korea criticized South Korea whenever it sent combat troops to South Vietnam. North Korea began to view the Vietnam War not only as a war between the Eastern Bloc and the West Bloc but also as a war between North and South Korea. In addition, North Korea declared that it would send reinforcements to North Vietnam if North Vietnam requested them. North Korea had to decide to send combat troops to North Vietnam if North Vietnam requested it.

4. North Korean Air Force Deployment

According to North Korean documents, North Vietnamese President Ho Chi Minh requested the air force deployment in a personal letter.⁶² *Destiny*, a North Korean historical novel published in 2012, indicates that KIM Il-sung received Ho Chi Minh's letter of intent on May 5, 1966.⁶³ On August 27, KIM Il-sung told local leaders of the WPK to prepare for war with the US because an escalation of the Vietnam War could lead to a Korean War.⁶⁴ It is believed that by this time, KIM Il-sung had decided to send an air force to North Vietnam.⁶⁵

Representatives of North Korea and North Vietnam signed an agreement to send an air force to North Vietnam on September 30, 1966.⁶⁶ The report's content was as follows (translated by Merle Pribbenow):⁶⁷

⁶⁰ National Institute for Defense Military History, *50 Years of the Founding Military*, p. 215.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.216. The withdrawal of South Korean troops from Vietnam was completed on March 23, 1973.

⁶² KIM Il-sung, "Talks with the Head of the French Socialist Party, February 14-15 1981 (프랑스사회당 당수와 한 담화 1981년 2월 14-15일)," *The Complete Works of Kim Il Sung*, vol. 73 (Pyongyang: Workers' Party Press, 2007), p.76(Korean); JONG Ki-jong, *Destiny (운명)*, (Pyongyang: Literary Art Publishing House, 2012), pp.262-270 (Korean).

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.262.

⁶⁴ KIM Il-sung, "On Some Requirements for Improving Economic Projects in North Pyongan Province. Conclusions of the Meeting of the North Pyongan Provincial Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, August 27, 1966 (평안북도의 경제사업을 개선하기 위한 몇가지 과업에 대하여조선로동당 평안북도위원회 전원회의에서 한 결론 1966년 8월 27일)," *The Complete Works of Kim Il Sung*, vol. 37 (Pyongyang: The Workers' Party of Korea Publishing, 2001), p.175 (Korean).

⁶⁵ LEE Sin-jae also examines in detail the process of North Korea's involvement in the Vietnam War (LEE Sin-jae, *The participation of North Korea*, pp.85-94). In this paper, however, we have chosen to use the Vietnamese and North Korean sources as primary sources and the defectors' testimonies only as a reference.

⁶⁶ Merle Pribbenow, "North Korean Pilots in the Skies over Vietnam," (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, November 2011), http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/NKIDP_eDossier_2_North_Korean_Pilots_in_Vietnam_War.pdf (Accessed on March 21, 2013).

⁶⁷ "Signing of a Protocol Agreement for North Korea to Send a Number of Pilots to Fight the American Imperialists during the War of Destruction against North Vietnam September 30, 1966," *The Wilson Center Digital Archive*, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/signing-protocol-agreement-north>

2. North Korea and the Vietnam War: Air Force Deployment and Post-War Implications

There is an argument that North Vietnam did not ask North Korea to send an air force unit, but North Korea proposed to send an air force unit and North Vietnam accepted.⁶⁸ This is based on the discussion of the Central Military Commission of the Communist Party of Vietnam on September 21, 1966, a matter of public record.⁶⁹ However, this content is false in two respects. First, it is a normal procedure for the sponsored side to ask for support from the sponsoring side. It is unthinkable for the supporting site to request support from the supported site. Second, the date of this meeting was just before the air force's deployment, which is too late to decide on support. The content of the discussion would be considered a procedural matter within the Central Military Commission of the Party.

The 203rd Military Unit, a regiment of the Korean People's Air Force, was to be deployed to North Vietnam.⁷⁰ KIM Il-sung stressed the need to support North Vietnam at the Second Representatives Conference of the WPK held from October 5 to 12, 1966.⁷¹ On October 12 the "Statement of the WPK Representatives' Conference on the Vietnam Question" was issued, revealing the possibility of supporting and deploying troops to North Vietnam.⁷²

KIM Il-sung met the soldiers of the 203rd Military Unit on October 19, 1966.⁷³ The U.S. New York Times reported on December 22 that North Korean pilots had been detected in North Vietnam six weeks earlier. Thus, the U.S. knew of the North Korean air force deployment in 1966.⁷⁴

According to Nguyễn Thị Mai Hoa's article, 384 North Korean military personnel (including 96

korea-send-number-pilots-fight-american-imperialists (Accessed on February 27, 2024); "September 30 Signed Protocol on North Korea sending a number of pilots to fight against US imperialism in the war of sabotage against North Vietnam (Ngày 30 tháng 9 Ký Nghị định thư về việc Triều Tiên cử một số phi công sang chiến đấu chống đế quốc Mỹ trong cuộc chiến tranh phá hoại đối với miền Bắc Việt Nam)," *Vietnam Military History (Lịch sử Quân sự Việt Nam)*, từ <https://www.quansuvn.net/index.php/topic,5366.0.html> (Accessed on February 27, 2024) (Vietnamese).

⁶⁸ LEE Sin-jae, *The participation of North Korea in the Vietnam War*, p.91; Do Thanh Thao Mien, *Red Blood Pledge. Pyongyang, Hanoi and the Vietnam War*, p.170.

⁶⁹ "September 21 General Võ Nguyên Giáp's conclusion on North Korea's proposal to send a number of pilots to fight in Vietnam (Ngày 21 tháng 9 Kết luận của Đại tướng Võ Nguyên Giáp về đề nghị của Triều Tiên cử một số phi công sang Việt Nam chiến đấu)," *Lịch sử Quân sự Việt Nam*, từ <https://www.quansuvn.net/index.php/topic,5366.0.html> (Accessed on February 27, 2024) (Vietnamese).

⁷⁰ KIM Il-sung, "Supporting the Struggle of the Vietnamese People," p. 396; KIM Hyok-mo, *Comrade KIM Il-sung*, p.396. The North Korean air force unit is believed to have been a regiment, as it was commanded by a regimental commander.

⁷¹ KIM Il-sung, "The Current Situation and Our Party's Tasks(현재정세와 우리당의 가업)," *Rodong Simmun*, October 6, 1966.

⁷² *Rodong Simmun*, October 13, 1966.

⁷³ KIM Il-sung, "Supporting the Struggle of the Vietnamese People," pp. 373-384.

⁷⁴ *The New York Times*, December 22, 1966.

pilots) arrived in North Vietnam on October 20, 1966, the day after the meeting with KIM Il-sung, in addition to 35 enemy operations and radio experts. The unit began its combat mission on December 15 with 12 MIG-17C fighters. From the beginning of the combat mission to the end of 1967, the North Korean pilots took off 106 times and fought 99 engagements per aircraft, shooting down 23 enemy aircraft and burning 700 tons of fuel. Ten of them were killed (eight in dogfights). Ten aircraft were shot down and 23 aircraft were damaged on the ground (6 were completely destroyed).⁷⁵ By December 1968, the total number of North Korean military personnel in North Vietnam had been reduced to 185 (including 46 pilots). By December 1968, North Korean troops stationed in North Vietnam had undergone five unit changes, leaving 159 (31 pilots). They eventually shot down 26 U.S. aircraft. However, 12 of them were killed (two of them non-combatants), and 43 aircraft were damaged (25 were totally destroyed).⁷⁶

However, different information was reported in Vietnam. According to the electronic newspaper *Tiền phong*, nearly 150 North Korean air force troops entered North Vietnam in 1966. The troops who entered North Vietnam were placed under the control of the 923rd Regiment under the command of the North Vietnamese Air Force. The regimental commander was KIM Chang-son. The North Vietnamese provided fighter planes, food, medicine, etc. Fourteen men served in Mig 17Bs and 10 in Mig 17Cs. One hundred thirteen men were assigned to support, logistics, administration, etc. From 1966 to early 1969, the North Vietnamese Air Force shot down 222 U.S. aircraft and captured 51 enemy pilots. North Korean pilots shot down 26 U.S. aircraft. Fourteen North Korean officers and soldiers were killed, the youngest of whom was WON Hong-sang, who was 19 years old (East Asian age reckoning, 21 in the year of the count)⁷⁷ He was North Korea's first soldier killed.

Figure 1. Tombstone-shaped monuments of North Korean air force officers and soldiers killed in action (author's photo, August 7, 2019)



There is some common information between the two, such as 26 U.S. aircraft shot down, but there is also different information, so it is impossible for me to determine which is correct. However,

⁷⁵ Nguyễn Thị Mai Hoa, "Contribute to learning more about the aid provided by socialist countries," p.42.
⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ "Korean soldiers' resting place (Nơi các chiến binh Triều Tiên nằm lại)," *Tiền phong*, August 6, 2012, từ <http://www.tienphong.vn/Page/PrintView.aspx?ArticleID=587223> (Accessed on March 03, 2024) (Vietnamese).

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Nguyễn Thị Mai Hoa's article is wrong about the number of dead. The number of dead North Korean officers and soldiers is not 12, but 14, as confirmed by their cemeteries and monuments. Of the 14, 2 were soldiers (ground personnel) and 12 were officers (pilots).⁷⁸ One of the causes of death of the North Korean pilots was that they were not equipped with parachutes or other escape devices. Some had their legs pinned to the seats of their fighter planes.⁷⁹

Their cemetery was located on Hoang Forest Hill (Tân Đình commune, Lạng Giang District, Bắc Giang province), about 60 km northeast of Hanoi. After the remains were repatriated to North Korea on September 20, 2002, the original cemetery now contains tombstone-shaped monuments. The 14 monuments are arranged as follows. The entrance faces northeast, indicating North Korea.⁸⁰

Figure 2: Layout of tombstones (monuments) of the dead of the North Korean air force

Soldier RIM Chun- kon Junghisok- dong, Namp'ho-si, Phyongnam- do, Joson Born on August 15, 1945 Sacrificed on June 26, 1967	Soldier WON Hong- sang Sangjong-ri, Sunchon gun, Phyongnam- do, Joson Born on April 25, 1946 Sacrificed on September 24, 1965	Officer KIM Ki-hwan Ryongan-ri, Songchon gun, Phyongnam- do, Joson Born on January 5, 1937 Sacrificed on February 12, 1968	Officer KIM Kyong'u Sangchang-ri, Anju gun, Phyongnam- do, Joson Born on December 20, 1937 Sacrificed on October 18, 1967	Officer KIM Thaejun Chongjung-ri, Hongon gun, Hannam-do, Joson Born on March 28, 1938 Sacrificed on June 3, 1967	Officer PAK Tong-chun Sohung-dong, Onsong gun, Hambuk-do, Joson Born on January 24, 1939 Sacrificed on May 1, 1967	Officer RI Chang'il Kwanhae- dong, Chongju-ri, Hambuk-do, Joson Born on May 18, 1937 Sacrificed on May 1, 1967	Officer RI Tong-su Chongjung-ri Hungwon gun, Hannam-do, Joson Born on June 4, 1937 Sacrificed on July 21, 1967	Officer KIM Kwang-uk Redong-ri, Haksong gun, Hambuk-do, Joson Born on May 22, 1932 Sacrificed on March 10, 1967
		Officer KIM Won- hwan Mangok-ri, Sunchon gun, Phyongnam- do, Joson Born on October 21, 1936 Sacrificed on April 10, 1967	Officer SIN Tal-ho Unrim-ri, Hoeryong gun, Hambuk-do, Joson Born on February 3, 1938 Sacrificed on May 16, 1967	Officer RI To'in Tongsim-ri, Phyongbuk-do, Joson Born on January 15, 1938 Sacrificed on July 21, 1967	Officer CHA Sun-hae Naekok-ri, Phyongsong gun, Phyongnam- do, Joson Born on January 25, 1938 Sacrificed on April 21, 1967	Officer RIM Jang- hwan Ihang-ri, Kyoungsong gun, Hambuk- do, Joson Born on December 18, 1929 Sacrificed on September 20, 1967		

Entrance

The actual number of North Korean officers and soldiers killed may be higher than 14. On March 26, 2019, the *Choson Sinbo* reported, “The remains of 14 soldiers of the People's Army who died in the Vietnam War were transferred from Vietnam to Korea in September 2002 and laid to rest at

⁷⁸ “Korean Martyrs Cemetery in Bac Giang (Nghĩa trang liệt sĩ Triều Tiên ở Bắc Giang),” *VN Express*, August 6, 2012, từ <https://vnexpress.net/nghia-trang-liet-si-trieu-tien-o-bac-giang-2238967.html> (Accessed on March 3, 2024) (Vietnamese).

⁷⁹ Hà Anh Dương, Văn Hải, “14 Korean soldiers in the sky of Vietnam (14 chiến binh Triều Tiên trên bầu trời Việt Nam),” *Tuổi Trẻ cuối tuần*, August 17, 2008, từ <https://cuoituan.tuoiitre.vn/14-chien-binh-trieu-tien-tren-bau-troi-viet-nam-273979.htm> (Accessed on March 3, 2024) (Vietnamese).

⁸⁰ The author visited the site on August 7, 2019.

the Heroes and Martyrs Cemetery of the Korean People's Army (Soonae-dong, Mangyongdaeguok). In July 2013, the remains were transferred to the Martyrs' Cemetery of the Victory in the Fatherland Liberation War, which was completed on the 60th anniversary of the victory in the Fatherland Liberation War. At present, 27 heroes and martyrs are buried here".⁸¹ It is not known if these 27 were North Korean officers and soldiers who died in the Vietnam War or if they included casualties from other wars. North Korea also sent non-air force units, so it is possible that the dead from those units were also buried here. It is still difficult to determine that only 14 people died in the Vietnam War.

There were three airports where North Korean air force units were based. They were Kep Military Airport (Bac Giang Province), Yen Bai Military Airport (Yen Bai Province), and Sao Vang Airport (Thanh Hoa Province).⁸² It is not clear when the North Korean air force units were withdrawn from North Vietnam. However, Vietnamese reports only record the shooting down of U.S. aircraft by North Korean air force units until early 1969, so it is believed to have been around that time.⁸³ An April 3, 2000, article in the *Choson Sinbo*, which indirectly reported on North Korean materials, also reported that support for Vietnam lasted from 1964 to 1969, so it is believed that North Korean air force units were withdrawn around 1969.⁸⁴ However, according to a former air force pilot who defected from North Korea to South Korea, North Korean air force units were stationed in North Vietnam until 1972.⁸⁵ However, this is not confirmed by North Korean or Vietnamese documents.

North Korea's deployment to North Vietnam was not limited to engineering and air force units. According to LEE Sin-jae, North Korea may have sent the Psychological Operations Group, special operations forces, and Anti-aircraft Artillery to North Vietnam.⁸⁶ Of these, there is no doubt that the Psychological Operations Group was sent from North Korea to North Vietnam. The Psychological Operations Group was advertised as a betrayal to South Korean soldiers, and several documents remain in Vietnam and South Korea.⁸⁷ Nguyễn Thị Mai Hoa's article also

⁸¹ *Choson Sinbo*, March 26, 2019 (Japanese).

⁸² The manager told the author when the author visited the monument on August 7, 2019.

⁸³ "The story of 14 graves of Korean pilots in Bac Giang (Chuyện về 14 ngôi mộ lính phi công Triều Tiên ở Bắc Giang)," *Dân trí*, March 5, 2019, từ <https://dantri.com.vn/xa-hoi/chuyen-ve-14-ngoi-mo-linh-phi-cong-trieu-tien-o-bac-giang-20190220104708906.htm> (Accessed on March 3, 2024) (Vietnamese).

⁸⁴ *Choson Sinbo*, April 3, 2000 (Korean); *Choson Sinbo*, April 7, 2000 (Japanese).

⁸⁵ *Chosun Ilbo*, September 14, 1998.

⁸⁶ LEE Sin-jae, "The participation of North Korea," pp.80-216.

⁸⁷ Do Thanh Thao Mien, "North Korean Support for the War in Vietnam in the 1960s - Revelations from the Vietnamese Archives," pp. 248-253; James F. Durand, "Partisans, Pilots, PSYOPS, and Prisoners: North Korea's Vietnam Odyssey," pp.50-53; Merle Pribbenow, "North Korean Psychological Warfare Operations in South Vietnam,"

mentions the arrival of 35 enemy operations and radio experts in North Vietnam on October 20, 1966, which may refer to the Psychological Operations Group.⁸⁸ There is only fragmentary information about special operations forces and Anti-aircraft Artillery, and no reliable documentation has yet been found.

According to KOH Young-hwan, a former counselor at the North Korean embassy in the Republic of Congo who defected to South Korea in 1991, North Korea sent infantrymen, transport soldiers, chemical soldiers for handling chemical-technical equipment and personnel of the No. 3 Office Building, a department for operations against the South, to North Vietnam in addition to air force troops.⁸⁹ However, these are also unconfirmed by North Korean and Vietnamese documents.

Aid to North Vietnam continued even after the Air Force was deployed, and on August 11, 1967, an agreement was signed in Pyongyang to send military assistance to North Vietnam free of charge.⁹⁰ In addition, an agreement was signed on November 19, 1970, under which North Korea would provide North Vietnam with free economic and military aid, so it is believed that military aid continued for some time after the withdrawal of the air force units.⁹¹

(1) North Korean officers and soldiers after returning to their home country

What Happened to North Korean air force Officers and Soldiers Who Fought in the Vietnam War? JO Myong-rok, who became the first vice chairman of the National Defense Commission in the KIM Jong-il regime, entered the White House during a visit to the United States in 2000 wearing a medal of honor awarded during the Vietnam War and met with U.S. President Bill Clinton and U.S. Secretary of State Albright. He is therefore believed to have been one of the North Korean air force officers and soldiers who participated in the Vietnam War. At the time of his death on November 6, 2010, JO Myong-rok was the first vice chairman of the National Defense Commission, the second most important position after KIM Jong-il. In the KPA, he held the key position of Director General of the General Political Bureau and was one of the heavyweights of the KIM Jong-il regime, having the military title of Vice Marshal.⁹² He was a military officer who rose through the ranks after the Vietnam War.

⁸⁸ Nguyễn Thị Mai Hoa, "Contribute to learning more about the aid provided by socialist countries to Vietnam in the resistance war against the US and to save the country," p.42.

⁸⁹ KOH Young-hwan, *Pyongyang 25 Hours*, p.177.

⁹⁰ *Rodong Sinmun*, August 12, 1970; KIM Hyok-mo, *Comrade KIM Il-sung*, p.205; JONG Ki-jong, *Destiny*, p.429.

⁹¹ *Rodong Sinmun*, November 20, 1970.

⁹² *Rodong Sinmun*, November 7, 2010.

However, little is known about the fact that JO Myong-rok was one of the officers and soldiers who participated in the Vietnam War. The only North Korean publication that showed that JO Myong-rok had anything to do with the Vietnam War was the historical novel *Destiny*.⁹³

There are no known officers and soldiers of the KPA who participated in the Vietnam War. This suggests how North Korean officers and soldiers who participated in the Vietnam War were treated in North Korea.

North Korean officers and soldiers who participated in the Vietnam War were not welcome back home. This is also depicted in the 2009 North Korean film *White Jade*. In this film, an air force regimental commander who participated in the Vietnam War was criticized for failing to retrieve the bodies of the dead.⁹⁴ The real reason, however, may be different. North Vietnam had sent officers and soldiers from China and the Soviet Union, which were in conflict with each other. In addition, after reunification, Vietnam came into conflict with North Korea. North Korean officers and soldiers who participated in the Vietnam War interacted with Chinese, Soviet, and North Vietnamese soldiers and came into contact with their political propaganda may have been treated as political obstacles in North Korea. It was not until 2002, more than a quarter of a century after the end of the Vietnam War, that the bodies of the North Korean war dead and their graves were repatriated to North Korea. This means that along with the restoration of relations between North Korea and Vietnam, the fallen of the Vietnam War were finally treated as heroes.

How did JO Myong-rok, who was involved in the Vietnam War, get ahead? I am not sure. But at least we can assume that his involvement in the Vietnam War did not help his career. Even if the North Korean officers and soldiers who participated in the Vietnam War were not as welcome in North Korea as their service, the success of North Korea's air force units in the Vietnam War had the effect of promoting North Korea's military power to the outside world. It may not have been so recognized in the Western bloc, but it was recognized among some elites in the socialist states and non-aligned countries. In 1973, North Korean air force units were sent to Egypt and Syria to participate in the October War.⁹⁵

⁹³ JONG Ki-jong, *Destiny*, p.440.

⁹⁴ *White Jade* (흰옥), KIM Moon-son, Film Literature, Korea 4.25 Art Movie Studio, 2009, 13:57 to 15:08, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKb0deTel8w> (Accessed on March 3, 2024) (Korean).

⁹⁵ Satoru Miyamoto, "DPRK Troop Dispatches and Military Support in the Middle East: Change from Military Support to Arms Trade in the 1970s," *EAST ASIA*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (August 2010), pp.345-359.

(2) North Korea's relations with Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos after the Vietnam War

North Korea also developed relations with Cambodia and Laos, which U.S. forces had bombed during the Vietnam War. North Korea sent military aid not only to North Vietnam but also to Cambodia and Laos. North Korea also signed an agreement to send military assistance to Cambodia on March 16, 1972.⁹⁶ In addition, to send military aid to Laos, an "Agreement to Restore Peace and Establish Ethnic Reconciliation in Laos" was signed in February 1973.⁹⁷ However, North Korea's relations with Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in the post-Vietnam War era were complex.

The Paris Peace Accords were signed in 1973, and North and South Vietnam were unified in 1976, but war continued in Vietnam. The Cambodian-Vietnamese War broke out in May 1975 when Cambodia attacked Vietnamese territory, and on December 25, 1978, Vietnam invaded and occupied Cambodia with a large military force. With the end of the Vietnam War, socialist ideals were abandoned, and raw nationalism fueled conflict on the Indochina peninsula.

The Soviet Union recognized the Heng Samrin regime established in Cambodia on January 9, 1979, by Vietnam, which occupied Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, as a result of the Cambodia-Vietnam War. However, China and North Korea did not recognize it. On January 12, the WPK published an article in the *Rodong Sinmun* criticizing Vietnam.⁹⁸ Relations between North Korea and Vietnam have cooled, and the DPRK's ambassador to Vietnam has been downgraded to the level of acting ambassador.⁹⁹

It is said that relations between North Korea and Vietnam began to improve in the mid-1980s when the DPRK's new ambassador to Vietnam was sent on June 24, 1984.¹⁰⁰ From September 5 to 11, 1988, Vietnamese head of state Võ Chí Công, chairman of the State Council, visited North Korea to participate in the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the DPRK.¹⁰¹ He met with North Korean President KIM Il-sung on Sept. 6.¹⁰² Even after the end of the Cold War, however, relations between North Korea and Vietnam remained delicate. Vietnam established diplomatic relations with South Korea on December 22, 1992, but North Korea

⁹⁶ KIM Hyok-mo, *Comrade KIM Il-sung*, p. 243; *Rodong Sinmun*, March 17, 1972.

⁹⁷ KIM Hyok-mo, *Comrade KIM Il-sung*, pp.251-252.

⁹⁸ *Rodong Sinmun*, January 12, 1979.

⁹⁹ *Mainichi Shimbun*, June 26, 1984.

¹⁰⁰ *Mainichi Shimbun*, June 26, 1984.

¹⁰¹ *Rodong Sinmun*, September 6, 1988; *Rodong Sinmun*, September 12, 1988.

¹⁰² *Rodong Sinmun*, September 7, 1988.

remained silent.

In the 2000s, the two countries began to recognize North Korea's involvement in the Vietnam War, and the restoration of relations has made significant progress. Since then, relations between North Korea and Vietnam have generally been good, and the visit of Nông Đức Mạnh, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, to North Korea on October 16-18, 2007, the first visit by a Vietnamese supreme leader in 50 years, symbolized the restoration of relations between the two countries.¹⁰³

However, the relationship between North Korea and Vietnam has sometimes been problematic. In 2016, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Sanctions Committee Panel of Experts reported that Vietnam had violated sanctions against North Korea. It said that a Vietnamese police academy had been providing military-related training by North Korean trainers since 2012.¹⁰⁴

Relations between North Korea and Vietnam cooled temporarily after the February 13, 2017, murder of KIM Jong-nam in Malaysia, which was masterminded by a North Korean and led to the arrest of a Vietnamese woman as the perpetrator. However, the restoration of relations between the two countries had begun before the US-North Korea summit, with North Korean Foreign Minister RI Yong-ho visiting Vietnam from November 29 to December 1, 2018.¹⁰⁵ North Korea's supreme leader, KIM Jong-un, will visit Vietnam from February 26 to March 2, 2019, with the U.S.-North Korea summit taking place in Hanoi from February 27-28 and the North Korea-Vietnam summit on March 1.¹⁰⁶ This will be the first visit to Vietnam by a North Korean supreme leader since November 1964, some 54 years ago.

When the 8th WPK Congress convened on January 5-11, KIM Jong-un declared that he would conduct diplomacy in opposition to the United States and defined relations with Vietnam as a “special comradely and strategic relationship.”¹⁰⁷ North Korea treats Vietnam as a friendly nation on the same level as Cuba, after China and Russia. It can be said that North Korea expects Vietnam to be a comrade fighting against the U.S., as it was during the Vietnam War.

The friendship between North Korea and Cambodia was strengthened by the personal friendship between KIM Il-sung and Norodom Sihanouk, Cambodia's head of state. Sihanouk visited North

¹⁰³ *Rodong Sinmun*, October 17, 2007; *Rodong Sinmun*, October 19, 2007.

¹⁰⁴ The Panel of Experts, *Report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 1874 (2009)*, United Nations Security Council, (February 24, 2016), pp.43-44.

¹⁰⁵ *Rodong Sinmun*, December 3, 2018.

¹⁰⁶ *Rodong Sinmun*, March 2, 2019.

¹⁰⁷ *Rodong Sinmun*, January 9, 2021.

Korea 44 times between 1965 and 2006.¹⁰⁸ Sihanouk was the most frequent foreign leader to visit North Korea. The friendship between KIM Il-sung and Sihanouk remained unchanged throughout his life.

Sihanouk is known to have lived in exile for a long time during the Cambodian Civil War. Sihanouk was overthrown by Prime Minister Lon Nol on March 18, 1970, while visiting Beijing. This was the beginning of the Cambodian Civil War, and he returned home on September 9, 1975, after Phnom Penh fell to Pol Pot's forces on April 17, 1975. Soon, however, Sihanouk was stripped of real power and placed under house arrest. The Cambodian-Vietnamese war led him to defect abroad again on January 6, 1979, just before the fall of Phnom Penh to Vietnamese forces. On May 20, 1979, Sihanouk visited North Korea, where he strongly criticized Vietnam at a welcoming banquet held that day.¹⁰⁹ He returned to Cambodia on November 14, 1991, following the signing of the Agreements on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodian Conflict on October 23. Meanwhile, KIM Il-sung continued to protect and support Sihanouk by providing him with a residence in Pyongyang. As a result, Sihanouk was a frequent visitor to North Korea.

Military aid to Cambodia, which had been provided during the Vietnam War, resumed around the time the Cambodian civil war ended. Sihanouk visited Pyongyang from June 19 to August 11, 1990, and after meeting with KIM Il-sung on June 21 and requesting military training, Cambodian military trainees began training in North Korea in July.¹¹⁰ When a high-level delegation from the Ministry of National Defense of the Kingdom of Cambodia visited North Korea from March 21 to 25, 1994, requesting Cambodian military assistance for weapons equipment, royal palace guards, and training for a capital defense force, KIM Il-sung took it on.¹¹¹

Sihanouk supported North Korea after becoming king of the Kingdom of Cambodia with the promulgation of the new constitution on September 21, 1993, and his accession to the throne on September 24 until his death on October 15, 2012. The ceremony of naming a street in the capital Phnom Penh "Generalissimo Kim Il Sung Street" was held on November 12, 1994.¹¹² Cambodia normalized diplomatic relations with South Korea on October 30, 1997. However, even before that, Sihanouk had expressed his opposition, although his real power was weak because he was a

¹⁰⁸ *Rodong Sinmun*, October 16, 2012.

¹⁰⁹ *Rodong Sinmun*, May 21, 1990.

¹¹⁰ *Rodong Sinmun*, June 20, 1990; *Rodong Sinmun*, June 22, 1990; *Rodong Sinmun*, August 12, 1990; KIM Hyok-mo, *Comrade KIM Il-sung*, p.244.

¹¹¹ *Rodong Sinmun*, March 22, 1994; *Rodong Sinmun*, March 26, 1994; KIM Hyok-mo, *Comrade KIM Il-sung*, p.244.

¹¹² *Rodong Sinmun*, November 15, 1994.

constitutional monarch.¹¹³ Cambodia's subsequent relationship with South Korea strengthened under Prime Minister Hun Sen, and North Korea's influence was minimal. Bolstered by the friendship between KIM Il-sung and Sihanouk, relations between the two countries weakened after KIM Il-sung's death on July 8, 1994.

The relationship between North Korea and Laos is less obvious, but like Cambodia, Laos, which was involved in the Vietnam War, has close ties to North Korea. The de facto supreme leader of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, established on December 2, 1975, after the end of the Lao Civil War, was Kaysone Phomvihane, who headed the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. Kaysone died on November 21, 1992. In response, the Lao government procured 20 statues of Kaysone, the work of North Korean sculptors, and placed them as monuments in all provincial capitals and tourist attractions. On December 13, 2000, to commemorate the 80th anniversary of Kaysone's birth, his giant bronze statue made by North Korean sculptors was unveiled in Vientiane, the capital of Laos. The statue was erected in front of the Kaysone Phomvihane Museum, 6 km from the city center.¹¹⁴



¹¹³ *Rodong Sinmun*, March 27, 1996.

¹¹⁴ Kham Vorapheth, *Politics and Economy of Contemporary Laos: 1975-2006* (現代ラオスの政治と経済: 1975-2006), translated by Kazuhiro Fujimura and Mayuko Ishikawa (Tokyo: Mekon, 2010), p. 190 (Japanese). [Original book: Kham Vorapheth, *Laos: La redéfinition des stratégies politiques et économiques (1975-2006)*, (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2007)]. During the author's visit to the Kaysone Museum on August 2, 2019, a museum employee explained that the museum cost US\$7 million to build, US\$4 million of which was supported by Vietnam. He also explained that the Kaysone statue was originally made in North Korea, however it was replaced by a larger Chinese statue in 2002. There is no documentation to support these facts. However, the relief next to the statue is clearly in the North Korean architectural style, and the museum staff confirmed that it was made by North Koreans.

2. North Korea and the Vietnam War: Air Force Deployment and Post-War Implications

In military cooperation with Southeast Asia, since KIM Jong-il took power, relations with Laos have stood out. From March 22 to April 5, 2011, a KPA delegation led by PAK Jae-gyong, vice minister of the People's Armed Forces, visited Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, where North Korea provided military support during the Vietnam War.¹¹⁵ The KPA delegation met with defense ministry delegations and other officials from the three countries to exchange views on friendly relations. Lao Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Douanchay Phichit, who met with the delegation on March 31, went a step further, saying Lao intends to further develop exchanges and cooperation with the KPA.¹¹⁶

A delegation of the General Staff of the Lao People's Army visited North Korea from July 27-29, 2011. It held talks with a military delegation of the KPA on July 28 to exchange views on further developing the friendly relations between the two militaries.¹¹⁷ Choummaly Sayasone, President of the Lao PDR, who visited Laos from September 21-23, met with KIM Jong-il on September 23, with KIM Jong-un in attendance. He is the first foreign head of state KIM Jong-un has met with since he was proclaimed KIM Jong-il's successor. He was also the last foreign head of state that KIM Jong-il met with. Together with KIM Jong-il and KIM Jong-un, Chunmalee toured the exhibition hall to learn the history of the development of the military equipment of the KPA and showed interest in North Korean weapons.¹¹⁸

UNSC Resolution 2397, adopted on December 22, 2017, requires countries to repatriate North Korean workers by December 22, 2019. The North Korean-run Angkor Panorama Museum in Sherimup, Cambodia (grand opening December 4, 2015; construction began August 11, 2011; construction completed September 6, 2015) and all North Korean restaurants in Cambodia were closed, and North Korean workers were repatriated.

¹¹⁵ *Rodong Sinmun*, March 23, 2011; *Rodong Sinmun*, April 6, 2011.

¹¹⁶ *Rodong Sinmun*, March 30, 2011; *Rodong Sinmun*, March 31, 2011; *Rodong Sinmun*, April 3, 2011.

¹¹⁷ *Rodong Sinmun*, July 28, 2011; *Rodong Sinmun*, July 29, 2011; *Rodong Sinmun*, July 30, 2011.

¹¹⁸ *Rodong Sinmun*, September 22, 2011; *Rodong Sinmun*, September 24, 2011.



Vietnam and Laos are different from Cambodia. In 2023, North Korean restaurants were still operating in Vietnam and Laos, and North Korean workers were still working there. Vietnam reported to the UNSC that it allows North Korean workers to work for humanitarian reasons.¹¹⁹ Laos, however, did not report anything to the UNSC. The difference in the three countries' responses to the UNSC sanctions against North Korea may be due to the nature of their relationship with North Korea since the Vietnam War.

5. Conclusion

Three major factors contributed to North Korea's involvement in the Vietnam War. The first is the structure of the Cold War. North and South Korea, as members of their respective blocs in the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, had to increase their value in the bloc by cooperating in the conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

The second is the bilateral factor between North Korea and North Vietnam. The Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s deepened relations between North Korea and North Vietnam, which was caught between China and the Soviet Union, and North Korea became actively involved in the Vietnam War.

The third is South Korea's deployment of troops in South Vietnam. South Korea, which has close relations with the United States and fought in the Korean War, sent troops to South Vietnam, which led North Korea to deploy troops to North Vietnam.

The military units sent from North Korea to Vietnam can be identified as air force units, engineering units, and a psychological operations group. North Korean or Vietnamese documents

¹¹⁹ The Panel of Experts, *Report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 1874 (2009)*, United Nations Security Council, (September 7, 2022), p.75.

cannot confirm the other units mentioned in the defectors' information. The air force units were the main combat units. The air force unit was deployed in October 1966. The date of its withdrawal cannot be determined, but it is believed to be 1969, according to North Korean and Vietnamese sources. The size of the Air Force unit cannot be determined as information varies from approximately 150 to 384 personnel. The size of the air force units would have varied according to the time of year because of the rotation system. The number of deaths is reported as 14 in Vietnam and 27 in North Korea. I don't know why the information is different.

North Korean air units were viewed unfavorably after their return. However, the success of North Korean air units in Vietnam was recognized by some elites in the socialist countries and the Non-Aligned Countries. It was also used in North Korea's subsequent military cooperation with the Non-Aligned Countries. North Korea's air force units would now be active in the Middle East.

The Vietnam War had a major impact on North Korea's subsequent relations with Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. North Korea supported all three countries in the Vietnam War. However, Vietnam and Cambodia came into conflict after the Vietnam War. After protecting the Cambodian head of state, Sihanouk, North Korea came into conflict with Vietnam in 1979. Relations with Vietnam gradually recovered after 1984, and around 2000, North Korea officially authorized the deployment of the North Korean air force to Vietnam.

Conversely, relations between North Korea and Cambodia, which had been bolstered by the personal relationship between KIM Il-sung and Sihanouk, weakened after KIM Il-sung's death in July 1994. Laos is believed to have continued military cooperation with North Korea after the Vietnam War. Rather, after the death of KIM Il-sung, signs of military cooperation between North Korea and Laos became more pronounced during the KIM Jong-il era.

North Korea's involvement in the Vietnam War, although complicated since then, led to the establishment of friendly relations not only between North Korea and Vietnam but also with Cambodia and Laos. While North Korea's relations with Cambodia, which were linked by the personal friendship of the Supreme Leader, have weakened with the death of the Supreme Leader, its relations with Vietnam and Laos have recovered and even deepened. This is because the relationship between Vietnam and Laos is not based on the Supreme Leader's friendship but an organizational relationship between the Party and the government. I can say that North Korea established this relationship because of its involvement in the Vietnam War and its support for Vietnam and Laos.

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North Korea and the October War: Relations with Egypt and Syria

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A. Articles

1. Introduction

During the “Arab Spring” that shook Arab countries from about 2010 to 2012, anti-government protests, riots, and the overthrow of regimes created a sense of crisis in North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea: DPRK). This was probably not because the “Arab Spring” would spill over into North Korea but because of the fear that regimes in Arab countries would be overthrown and friendly relations with those countries would collapse. North Korea's greatest fear was the collapse of its friendly relations with Egypt, which has the largest population of any Arab country.

Due to anti-government protests and persecution by opposition forces, Hosni Mubarak, who had held the Egyptian presidency since 1981, announced his resignation through his Vice President, Omar Suleiman, on February 11, 2011. Therefore, on the following day, February 12, North Korea published a long article, “Leader KIM Jong-il's Courage is Korea's National Strength (김정일령도자의 담력은 조선의 국력이다)” written by a person said to be Egyptian, in *Rodong Sinmun*, the organ of the ruling party of North Korea, the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK).¹ He explained the history of friendly relations between North Korea and Egypt. We believe that North Korea was afraid that the collapse of the Mubarak administration would damage the friendly relations between North Korea and Egypt. Mubarak was such a good friend of KIM Il-sung and North Korea. It is believed that Egypt did not establish diplomatic relations with South Korea until KIM Il-sung's death in 1994 because of Mubarak's special feelings for KIM Il-sung.

It was not only Mubarak's downfall that was painful for North Korea. On February 10, 2011, the

¹ Yahya=Zechariah Hairura, “Leader Kim Jong-Il's Gustiness is Korea's National Strength (김정일령도자의 담력은 조선의 국력이다),” *Rodong Sinmun*, February 12, 2011 (Korean).

day before Mubarak's resignation was announced, Saad El-Shazly, former Egyptian military chief of staff and a hero in Arab society, took his last breath. Although the relationship between Mubarak and Shazly was acrimonious, both shared a special feeling for KIM Il-sung and North Korea. North Korea lost two of its best North Korean sympathizers in Egypt in February 2011. What is the connection between Mubarak, Shazly, and North Korea? It is the reinforcement of North Korean air force units in the October War, which broke out in October 1973.

This war, known as the Yom Kippur War on the Israeli side and the October War on the Arab side, began when Arab countries such as Egypt and Syria launched a preemptive attack on Israel, the first war in which Israel felt a sense of defeat.

North Korean air force units participated in the October War after the Vietnam War. Unlike in the case of the Vietnam War, KIM Il-sung publicly announced the involvement of North Korean air force units in the October War to the outside world even before his death. When President Mubarak visited North Korea on April 4, 1983, KIM Il-sung said at a welcoming banquet, "During the war in October 1973 our airmen fought shoulder to shoulder with the Egyptian brothers on the same front."² In the Korean edition of the *Works of Kim Il Sung*, Volume 40, published in April 1994, before his death, KIM Il-sung said in an interview with an Egyptian newspaper, "During the war in October 1973 our airmen fought shoulder to shoulder with the Egyptian brothers on the same front."³

However, Shazly, who commanded Egyptian forces as chief of staff during the October War, spoke of North Korean air force pilots in his memoirs published in English in 1980. Therefore, it is likely that the participation of North Korean air force units in the October War was known to some for some time.⁴

There are two versions of his memoir, one in English and the other in Arabic, published in 1979. The English version is an abridged translation of the Arabic version, with much of North Korea removed. The Arabic version was banned in Egypt and unavailable for a long time. The Arabic version has been reprinted as a result of the Arab Spring, and the North Korea section is now

² *Rodong Sinmun*, April 5, 1983.

³ KIM, Il-sung, "Answers to The Questions Raised by The Editor-In-Chief of the Egyptian Newspaper Al Massa, October 16, 1986 (에급신문 알마싸 책임주필이 제기한 질문에 대한 대답 1986년 10월 16일)," *Kim Il Sung Works*, Vol.40, (Pyongyang: The Worker's Party of Korea Publishing House, 1994), p.195 (Korean). English version is; KIM, Il-sung, "Answers to The Questions Raised by The Editor-In-Chief of the Egyptian Newspaper Al Massa, October 16, 1986," *Kim Il Sung Works*, Vol.40, (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1995), p.180.

⁴ Saad El Shazly, *The Crossing of the Suez*, 2003 revised edition, (San Francisco: American Mideast Research, 1980 and 2003), pp. 83-84.

knowable in more detail.⁵

Shazly's memoir is the most detailed material available on the involvement of North Korean Air Force pilots in the October War. However, other documents published by North Korea, such as *The Complete Works of Kim Il Sung, Comrade KIM Il-sung, the Great Leader of Great Work of Independence* and the aforementioned "Leader KIM Jong-il's Courage is Korea's National Strength" also describe the status of North Korea's participation in the war.

This participation in the October War was the second instance, after the Vietnam War, in which North Korean air force pilots experienced actual combat overseas. Unlike the Vietnam War, however, this was not in support of the socialist countries or to increase the solidarity of the Eastern bloc. Egypt is neither a socialist state nor an Eastern Bloc country. North Korea entered the October War for another reason, not as a socialist state.

Why did North Korea send its air force to Egypt? How did supporting Egypt and fighting Israel bear fruit for geographically distant North Korea? This paper will discuss why North Korea deployed its air force to Egypt and other countries and what results it brought to North Korea based on newly obtained Egyptian and North Korean materials.

North Korea's participation in the October War has been discussed in many newspaper articles and parts of books. KANG In-duk, the Director of the Institute of Far Eastern Studies in South Korea, was the first to publish the results of his research on North Korea's participation in the October War.⁶ However, most of the studies only discussed the status of North Korea's involvement in the October War. Few clarified the process of North Korea's participation in the war and discussed the policies of North Korea and Egypt. Satoru Miyamoto is the first to discuss North Korea's involvement in the October War, citing Shazly's memoirs in English. He states North Korea aimed to gain Third World support from the United Nations.⁷ Balázs Szalontai, discussing Egypt-North Korea relations in the 1970s, argued that North Korea, despite its involvement in the October War, did not achieve as much as it had hoped during the Anwar Sadat administration, which sought reconciliation and established diplomatic relations with Israel.⁸ It is true that the reconciliation between Egypt and Israel, including the Camp David Accords of 1978 and the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty of 1979, may have put North Korea in a difficult position

⁵ See "B. Materials".

⁶ KANG In Duk (강인덕) (ed.). *The Encyclopedia of North Korea (북한전서)*, Vol.1, (Seoul: The Institute for East Asian Studies, 1974), p.348 (Korean).

⁷ Satoru Miyamoto, "DPRK Troop Dispatches and Military Support in the Middle East: Change from Military Support to Arms Trade in the 1970s," *East Asia*, Vol. 27, No. 4, (August 2010), pp.345-359.

⁸ Balázs Szalontai, "Courting the 'Traitor to the Arab Cause': Egyptian-North Korean Relations in the Sadat Era, 1970-1981," *S/N Korean Humanities*, Vol.5, Issue 1 (March 2019), pp.103-136.

in its relations with other Arab countries. However, the North Korean government no longer raised the issue with the Mubarak administration, which succeeded Sadat's administration.

Also, in Israel, Alon Levkowitz discusses North Korea's involvement in the October War in the context of North Korea's involvement in the Middle East. Still, he does not discuss the North Korean side's objectives. He also discusses North Korea's deployment of air force units to Syria in the Six-Day War.⁹ However, we have found no documentation from North Korea or Syria that indicates this, so we will not discuss it in this paper. The Six-Day War broke out in June 1967, and since North Korea had sent an air force unit to Vietnam at that time, it is unlikely that North Korea could have afforded to send an air force unit to Syria.

2. Request from Egypt

During the Vietnam War, KIM Il-sung stopped using the term “Eastern bloc (Socialist camp) solidarity” after his speech on September 7, 1968.¹⁰ In 1972, KIM Il-sung began to seek to improve the standing of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the UN, and he began to interact not only with socialist states but also with Third World countries. Although North and South Korea were not yet full members of the UN, North Korea sought to improve its status in the UN by joining the UN as an observer to counter South Korea, which was already an observer member of the UN.¹¹ North Korea wanted the support of Egypt, a prominent leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, which includes many Third World countries.

At the time, Egypt was preparing for war against Israel with the support of the Soviet Union. Israel had occupied Egypt in the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula during the Six-Day War that broke out in June 1967. This war is also a war of revenge. It was promoted by Sadat, who assumed the presidency on September 28, 1970.

However, on July 18, 1972, President Sadat announced that the Egyptian government had demanded the withdrawal of the Soviet military advisory mission and that the withdrawal had already begun.¹² Thus, Shazly, as Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Armed Forces, was left to prepare

⁹ Alon Levkowitz, *North Korea and the Middle East*, (Ramat Gan: The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, January 2017), p.13.

¹⁰ KIM, Il-sung, “The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is the Banner of Freedom and Independence for Ourt People and a Powerful Weapon for Building Socialism and Communism (조선민주주의인민공화국은 우리 인민의 자유와 독립의 기치이며 사회주의, 공산주의의 건설의 강력한 무기이다.)” *Rodong Sinmun*, September 8, 1968 (Korean).

¹¹ Satoru Miyamoto, “North Korea's Foreign Policy: A Non-Isolated Country with Expanding Relations,” Inoguchi Takashi ed., *The SAGE Handbook of Asian Foreign Policy*, (London, California, New Delhi, Singapore: Sage Publishing, 2019), pp. 644-647.

¹² “Egypt Tells Soviets to Withdraw Military Advisers and Experts, ‘New Stage’ in Relations,” *New York*

for war with Israel in the face of dwindling support from the Soviet Union. One of the major problems was the air defense capabilities of the Egyptian military. According to Shazly, by the end of 1972, the Egyptian military's air defense capability after the Soviet Military Advisory Corps left was such that surface-to-air missile battalions could supplement the Soviet Military Advisory Corps' capabilities. However, a shortage of pilots remained a problem after the Soviets pulled out about 100 pilots who were operating 75 MIG-21 fighters.¹³

Around that time, a North Korean government delegation led by Vice-President KANG Ryang-uk visited Egypt from March 1 to 7, 1973. The purpose of the visit was to ask Egypt to support North Korea at the UN.¹⁴ On March 6, Shazly traveled with the delegation to the Suez front. On this occasion, Shazly approached General Zang Zung (Zang Zong in the English version), Vice-Minister of Defense (Vice-Minister of War in the English version), who was a member of the North Korean delegation. "Do you think it would be possible for North Korea to provide us with some MIG-21 pilots? It would be a win-win situation for both sides. For our side, your participation in air defense would solve our problem of pilot shortage. For the North Korean side, the pilots will gain practical knowledge of warfare. The Israelis will use the same planes and the same tactics as your supposed enemies."¹⁵

Shazly's proposal catalyzed North Korea's air force units to enter the October War. Who is "Zang Zung"? Such a Korean name is unthinkable. This is because there is no "Z" sound in the Korean language. However, it is clear that "Vice Minister of Defense" is equivalent to "Vice Minister of the Ministry of People's Armed Forces" in North Korea. Moreover, only one Vice Minister of the Ministry of People's Armed Forces was part of the North Korean government delegation led by KANG Ryang-uk, who was in Egypt on March 6. It was JANG Jong-hwan(장정환, 張正桓), a lieutenant general in the Korean People's Army (KPA).¹⁶

3. The career of JANG Jong-hwan

JANG Jong-hwan was born on January 25, 1923, and died on July 23, 1982. Although he is not well known abroad, he is one of the heroes of North Korea. Although he did not have an anti-

Times, July 19, 1972.

¹³ See "2. Translation of the Original Arabic Text" in "B. Materials".

¹⁴ For the activities of the delegates during their visit to Egypt see the articles in *Rodong Sinmun* from March 4 to 9, 1973. A joint communiqué issued by North Korea and Egypt on March 6 reaffirmed North Korea's stand on the reunification of Korea and stated that Egypt had submitted a request to the UN to discuss the Korean peninsula issue.

¹⁵ See "2. Translation of the Original Arabic Text" in "B. Materials".

¹⁶ Satoru Miyamoto rendered JANG Jong-hwan as CHANG Jung Hwan in an earlier paper (Miyamoto, "DPRK Troop Dispatches," p.349), which was borrowed from the English rendering of a person with the same name in South Korea, and this paper follows the North Korean English rendering.

Japanese guerrilla background, it is said that he was in Manchukuo when the Soviet Red Army invaded Manchukuo on August 9, 1945, and returned to his homeland on August 12, 1945.¹⁷ He then worked as a teacher in North Korea. From July 1950, he worked in the Education Department of the Chongjin City People's Committee, a local administrative organization. From 1952, he was an instructor of the North Hamgyong Provincial Committee of the WPK, an instructor of the Central Committee of the WPK, and Director of the Foreign Ministry Bureau. His military career began in April 1961 when he became a senior member of the KPA of the Military Armistice Commission. He then served as Deputy Director of the General Political Bureau of the KPA from August 1964, was appointed ambassador of the DPRK to Cuba in June 1966, and returned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as director of the bureau in 1971. He then served as Vice Minister of the Ministry of National Defense and Vice Minister of the Ministry of People's Armed Forces (renamed from the Ministry of National Defense). During this period, he visited Egypt. He was also a lieutenant general in the KPA.

He was Vice Chairman of the North Hamgyong Provincial Administrative Committee from July 1977 to the end of his life. He was a deputy to the Supreme People's Assembly from March 1961 to February 1974 and an alternate member of the Central Committee of the WPK from February 1974 to 1977. He was buried at the Patriotic Martyrs' Cemetery after his death.¹⁸

He had a varied career, but since his death, he has been treated as a military officer in North Korea. About JANG Jong-hwan, there is a video biography, “He Gave Me the Courage and Bravery of Baekdu (백두의 담력과 배짱을 안겨주시어),” and a historical novel in which he appears, *Destiny*(운명).¹⁹

JANG Jong-hwan served in local administrative organizations, the WPK, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the KPA. Such a career move between military and bureaucratic positions is not particularly unusual in North Korea. Even during the Korean War, NAM Il, a Chief of the General Staff of the KPA, was a former Minister of Education, and PAK Hon-yong, the Director of the General Political Bureau of the KPA, was also Minister of Foreign Affairs. Neither had previously served as an officer in the KPA.

Even in the KIM Jong-un era, JANG Song-thack, Vice Chairman of the National Defense Commission and member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the WPK, wore a

¹⁷ JONG Ki-jong, *Destiny* (운명), (Pyongyang: Literary Art Publishing House, 2012), pp. 1-8 (Korean).

¹⁸ Encyclopedia Press(백과사전출판사) eds., *The Great Korean Encyclopedia* (조선대백과사전), Vol.16 (Pyongyang: Encyclopedia Press, 2000), p.481.

¹⁹ JONG Ki-jong, *Destiny*.

military uniform and rank at an official function. CHOE Ryong-hae, former first secretary of the Central Committee of the Kim Il Sung Socialist Youth League and former chief secretary of the North Hwanghae Provincial Committee of the WPK, was appointed the Director of the General Political Bureau of the KPA. HWANG Pyong-so, the former First Deputy Director of the Organizational Guidance Department of the Central Committee of the WPK, became Director of the General Political Bureau of the KPA. Career moves between military and bureaucratic positions have long been common in North Korea.

Shazly asked JANG Jong-hwan to send air force pilots. Shazly was born on April 1, 1922, making him one year older than JANG Jong-hwan. This conversation between the two men, who are almost the same age, was the beginning of a plan to send North Korean Air Force pilots to Egypt. However, they had to overcome several difficulties to make it happen.

JANG Jong-hwan asked Shazly how many pilots he needed. Shazly replied, "I don't expect you to fill all the holes left by the Soviets. It would be enough to send one squadron. If we need to send another unit in the future, we will discuss it later."²⁰

Since it was a company, it was smaller than the regiment used in the Vietnam War. Still, they needed a political decision to make it happen. First of all, Shazly needed the approval of President Sadat, and JANG Jong-hwan needed the approval of President KIM Il-sung. The two men promised each other that they would make every effort to persuade the Supreme Leader to allow a political decision to be made. Therefore, JANG Jong-hwan returned to North Korea to obtain KIM Il-sung's approval.²¹

4. Shazly's Visit to North Korea

It was not difficult for Shazly to convince Ahmad Ismail Ali, the defense minister. Ali sought President Sadat's approval, which was granted within a few days. The problem was JANG Jong-hwan's persuasion of KIM Il-sung. JANG Jong-hwan returned to Egypt two weeks later and told Shazly that he had obtained KIM Il-sung's approval. He then added a condition. He demanded that Shazly make an official visit to North Korea and meet the pilots in person.²² The details of JANG Jong-hwan's return visit to Egypt are unknown because it was not reported in North Korea then.

Shazly left Egypt for Pyongyang on April 2, 1973. He stopped in Shanghai and arrived in

²⁰ See "2. Translation of the Original Arabic Text" in "B. Materials".

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

Pyongyang on April 6. Shazly's visit to Pyongyang was widely reported in North Korea then. Shazly received a warm welcome and held meetings and talks with top military and government leaders, which were reported in the media.²³ North Korea probably wanted to advertise its closeness to Egypt, a major Middle Eastern and Third World power. The fact that the chief of general staff of Egypt, the largest military power in the Arab world, visited North Korea should have been a great appeal to the Third World. However, the deployment of North Korean pilots to Egypt was not reported. This was still classified.

Shazly visited the Worker-Peasant Red Guards, a reserve force in North Korea, and toured numerous military facilities. North Korea has put many of its military facilities underground as part of its policy of "fortifying the country."²⁴ Only a limited number of foreigners have visited these underground military facilities, and Shazly was one of them. Shazly was quite impressed. No wonder. In terms of national power, Egypt far surpasses North Korea in both population and economic power. However, North Korea's military facilities were so developed that the Egyptian military chief of staff marveled at them. Shazly told KIM Il-sung that North Korea would be the only country left in the world in the event of a nuclear war.²⁵ While he may have been flattered, there is no doubt that Shazly was amazed at the development of the underground airport and the underground weapons factories he saw.

Shazly, who met with the North Korean Air Force pilots, was pleased with their abilities, with over 2,000 hours of flying experience, and promised to pay them a salary of one Egyptian pound, the same amount as an Egyptian military pilot.

He also promised that the North Korean pilots would be assigned to the most rear missions and would not fight inside Israel or in Israeli-occupied territories. In addition, Shazly requested that KIM Il-sung send specialists to build an underground facility. KIM Il-sung agreed. On April 15, Shazly left for home. It was the most difficult trip of his life.²⁶

5. Deployment of Troops to Egypt

Of the air force pilots and underground specialists requested by Shazly, the underground

²³ For what Shazly did during his visit to the DPRK, see the articles in *Rodong Sinmun* from April 7 to 16, 1973.

²⁴ Satoru Miyamoto, "The Purpose of the Defense Policy in North Korea: The Background to the Making of the Military Line of the Workers Party of Korea (朝鮮民主主義人民共和国における国防政策の目的—朝鮮労働党の軍事路線の成立経緯)," *Journal of International Security*, Vol.40, No.1 (June 2012) pp. 1-18 (Japanese).

²⁵ See "2. Translation of the Original Arabic Text" in "B. Materials".

²⁶ *Ibid.*

specialists arrived in Egypt first. They arrived in Egypt on May 1, 1973, for eight days of induction training at the newly established “Underground Facilities Section” of Shazly’s Egyptian Army Corps of Engineers. After the North Korean underground specialists returned home, Shazly formed a working group to design an underground airport. However, this was also a cover to make the Israelis believe that war was still far off. Shazly believed that it would take five years to build the underground airport. The October War would begin five months later, in October. The working group was still working on the design when the October War began. Mubarak, the air force commander, initially complained about the working group because he had not been informed of the situation. Still, later, Shazly told him about the situation, and the two laughed about it.²⁷ It is likely that there was still some degree of friendship between the two at that time.

On May 28, KIM Il-sung met with the pilots to be deployed. Here, KIM Il-sung told the pilots something different about the original purpose of the mission. KIM Il-sung said that the Egyptian president’s request for the mission “seems to be partly to strengthen the immediate military routine, but more to learn air force tactics from our pilots.” This is different from the exchange between Shazly and JANG Jong-hwan. However, KIM Il-sung mentioned that he might be involved in combat if war broke out, so he likely deployed his pilots, knowing they would be engaged in battle. Perhaps he said this to ease the tension. KIM Il-sung had given strict orders to the pilots to keep the mission undetected by the Israelis.²⁸ But it would soon be discovered.

North Korean pilots began arriving in Egypt in early June. In July, the formation of the squadron to which they belonged was completed. This squadron was too small for Egypt. According to Shazly, it consisted of 30 pilots (20 in the English version), eight flight controllers, five interpreters, three administrative men, a doctor, and a cook. Considering that the Soviets pulled up about 100 pilots, it is unsurprising that Egypt felt the unit was too small, as Shazly characterized it as “probably the smallest international military reinforcement in history.”²⁹

Israel detected this move, and on August 15, the Israeli military announced via radio broadcast that it had detected the presence of North Korean pilots in Egypt.³⁰ On August 18, North Korea’s Ministry of People’s Armed Forces issued a spokesman’s statement refuting the Israeli military’s announcement and denying the presence of the North Koreans.³¹ At the time, Shazly was also

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ KIM Il-Sung, “Talks with the pilots to be dispatched to Egypt, May 28, 1973 (에gypt에 파견되는 비행사들과 한 담화 1973년 5월 28일),” *The Complete Works of Kim Il Sung*, Vol. 51, (Pyongyang: The Worker’s Party of Korea Publishing House, 2003), pp.471-477 (Korean).

²⁹ See “2. Translation of the Original Arabic Text” in “B. Materials”. For the English version, see Shazly, *The Crossing of the Suez*, pp. 83-84.

³⁰ “Israeli Forces Say North Koreans Pilot Some Egyptian Jets,” *The New York Times*, August 16, 1973.

³¹ *Rodong Sinmun*, August 21, 1973.

asked by Ashraf Ghorbal, assistant to the Egyptian president for media affairs, whether this information was accurate.³² The fact that North Korean pilots were stationed in Egypt was a secret even within the Egyptian government.

However, the North Korean pilots were not isolated. They were under the command of Mubarak, the air force commander, and about 3,000 Egyptians worked at the base to which the North Korean pilots belonged. Egyptians handled radar, air defense, ground security, and administrative matters. The North Korean pilots, however, were self-reliant. They secured their own housing and tried to do everything themselves. Whether it was training, studying, or physical exercise, they had no leisure time. Not one of them had any clerical problems. Shazly recalls, "The relationship between North Korea and Egypt was the best one could hope for."³³

6. Outbreak of the October War

North Korea's accession to the World Health Organization (WHO) on May 17, 1973, qualified it to establish an Observer Delegation at the UN Headquarters in New York and the UN Secretariat in Geneva, and it took the first step towards participation in the UN General Assembly. On September 5, the North Korean Observer Delegation was opened. On September 21, it was decided that the issue of the Korean peninsula would be discussed at the 28th session of the UN General Assembly, which began on September 18. It was also decided on October 1 to invite North Korean observers to the UN General Assembly. North Korea has finally found a position where it can compete with South Korea at the UN. The extent to which North Korea has won over third-world countries such as Egypt to its side could be seen at the UN.

The October War broke out shortly thereafter, when a coalition of Egyptian and Syrian forces attacked Israeli forces on October 6. Israel was defeated in the early stages of the war but eventually began to fight back. After Israel launched a counterattack, KIM Il-sung took action in support of the Arab states. On October 17, KIM Il-sung met with the Egyptian and Syrian ambassadors in Pyongyang to inform them that the North Korean government had decided to send aid, including military assistance, to Egypt and Syria.³⁴ On October 18, KIM Il-sung sent a message to the heads of state of 16 Arab countries and the secretary general of the Arab League expressing support for the Arab nations. Among them was Saudi Arabia, which has no diplomatic relations with the DPRK.³⁵ It is believed that KIM Il-sung even wanted to promote goodwill and

³² See "2. Translation of the Original Arabic Text" in "B. Materials".

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Rodong Sinmun*, October 18, 1973.

³⁵ *Rodong Sinmun*, October 19, 1973. The 16 countries are: the Democratic People's Republic of Algeria and the Arab Republic of Yemen (now the Republic of Yemen), the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, the

friendship between the DPRK and the Arab countries by publicizing military assistance to Egypt and Syria. In this message, Kim Il Sung also avoided mentioning the deployment of troops to Egypt to promote friendly unity between the two countries.

However, on the same day, October 18, the United States government announced that Israeli and North Korean air force units had engaged in combat, and the participation of North Korean air force units in the war became internationally known.³⁶ According to North Korean announcements, the North Korean Air Force shot down four Israeli Air Force F-4 fighter jets in the first battle.³⁷ According to Shazly, North Korean pilots had engaged the Israeli Air Force two or three times before the October War broke out.³⁸ Although probably at the skirmish level, North Korean pilots had experience with the Israeli Air Force before the war.

As the war progressed, North Korea decided to send pilots to Syria as well as Egypt. This was in response to a request from the Syrian government. The Political Committee of the Central Committee of the WPK decided to send the pilots to strengthen the goodwill and friendship with Syria. During a meeting with the pilots to be sent to Syria on October 23, KIM Il-sung ordered them to keep the information about their deployment secret until they fought against Israel, as he had done with the Egyptian deployment.³⁹ As in Egypt, the mission was classified. In addition, large amounts of supplies were to be shipped to Syria.⁴⁰

North Korean pilots were indeed deployed to Syria. However, it should have been after the ceasefire. On October 22, 1973, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in the current situation, and Egypt accepted the resolution on October 23, followed by Syria on October 24. Although the fighting has not entirely ceased, the October War has been put to rest by the ceasefire. On November 7, KIM Il-sung sent a congratulatory telegram

Republic of Iraq, the Democratic People's Republic of Yemen (now the Republic of Yemen), the Democratic Republic of Sudan (now the Republic of Sudan), the Libyan Arab Republic (now the State of Libya), Kuwait, the Republic of Lebanon, the Kingdom of Morocco, the Republic of Tunisia, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the State of Bahrain (now the Kingdom of Bahrain), and the State of Qatar.

³⁶ "Jets Flown by North Koreans Are Reported in Clash with Israelis Over Mideast," *The New York Times*, October 19, 1973.

³⁷ Yahya=Zechariah Hairura, "Leader Kim Jong-Il's Gustiness is Korea's National Strength,"

³⁸ See "2. Translation of the Original Arabic Text" in "B. Materials".

³⁹ KIM Il-sung, "Talks with pilots to be dispatched to Syria, October 23, 1973 (수리아에 파견되는 비행사들과 한 담화 1973년 10월 23일)," *The Complete Works of Kim Il Sung*, Vol. 53 (Pyongyang: The Workers' Party of Korea Publishing House, 2004), pp. 88-93 (Korean).

⁴⁰ KIM Hyok-mo and Ri Kwang-sam, *Comrade KIM Il-sung, the Great Leader of Great Work of Independence* (자주위업의 위대한 수령 김일성동지), Vol. 8 (Pyongyang: Social Science Press, 2011), p. 249 (Korean).

to the pilots in Egypt, congratulating them all well.⁴¹ We guess that there were no casualties among the North Korean pilots.

7. The Fruits of War

The fruits of the participation of North Korean air force units in the October War were obtained at the UN General Assembly. From November 14, 1973, the issue of the Korean peninsula was discussed in the First Committee of the 28th session of the UN General Assembly with the participation of DPRK observers. Socialist countries, Middle Eastern and African countries, and others supported the DPRK.⁴² The representatives of Egypt and Syria also strongly supported the position of the DPRK.⁴³ As a result, on November 21, the First Committee decided without a vote to dissolve the UN Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK) at the request of the DPRK.⁴⁴ The DPRK has had some success in its first year of UN diplomacy. Egyptian and Syrian support for the DPRK at the UN continued. The DPRK's application for membership in the Non-Aligned Movement was approved on August 25, 1975, while the ROK's application was rejected.⁴⁵ Egypt and Syria also supported the DPRK and did not support the ROK. This was a landmark in North Korean diplomacy.

North Korea valued its friendship with Egypt and Syria and built munitions factories in Egypt and Syria even after the October War.⁴⁶ Egypt and Syria also cherished their friendship with North Korea. In 1995, the ROK Defense Ministry announced that Egypt had supplied North Korea with Soviet-made Scud-B ballistic missiles (known as R-17E in the USSR) in return for North Korea deploying its pilots to Egypt.⁴⁷ Since 1995 was the year that South Korea established diplomatic

⁴¹ KIM Il-sung, "To Friends and Fighters in the Air Corps: letter sent to thepilots who went to Egypt, November 7, 1973 (비행대전투원동무들에게 애급에 가 있는 비행사들에게 보낸 서한 1973년 11월 7일)," *The Complete Works of Kim Il Sung*, Vol. 53, (Pyongyang: Workers' Party of Korea Publishing House, 2004), p.212 (Korean).

⁴² *Rodong Sinmun*, November 16, 1973.

⁴³ *Rodong Sinmun*, November 23-24, 1973.

⁴⁴ *Rodong Sinmun*, November 22, 1973.

⁴⁵ *Rodong Sinmun*, August 27, 1975

⁴⁶ *Rodong Sinmun*, January 22, 1975; *Rodong Sinmun*, January 25, 1975; KIM Hyok-mo and Ri Kwang-sam, *Comrade KIM Il-sung, the Great Leader of Great Work of Independence*, p.250.

⁴⁷ In the *Defense White Paper* published by the ROK Ministry of National Defense, it was stated until the 1994 edition that the Soviet Union had handed over "ballistic missiles" to North Korea, but from the 1995 edition it began to state that Egypt had handed them over (Policy Planning Division eds., *Defense White Paper 1995-1996* [국방백서 1995-1996] Seoul: Ministry of National Defense in Korea, p.63). However, it seems that the ROK Ministry of National Defense was aware that it was Egypt that first transferred ballistic missiles to North Korea long before that, as it was introduced in a paper published in 1989 by LEE Tae Ho of the Defense Intelligence Staff in the ROK Armed Forces (LEE Tae-ho, (1989) "Perspectives and trends in North Korea's development of ballistic missiles, particularly Scud-B and Worm [북한의 유도탄 개발 추세와 전망: Scud-B 와 Worm 을 중심으로]," *Defense and Technology*, No.127, (September 1989), p.7).

relations with Egypt, it is believed that Egypt provided some information. It is assumed that North Korea's development of ballistic missiles began with these ballistic missiles.⁴⁸ However, it is difficult to think that North Korea used air force pilots to transfer ballistic missiles from the beginning. According to Shazly, North Korean Air Force units arrived in Egypt in June 1973, but the first Soviet missile brigade arrived in Egypt with the R-17E more than a month later, in late July.⁴⁹ When North Korea decided to deploy, Egypt had no ballistic missiles.

The establishment of the North Korean missile unit is believed to have occurred shortly after the deployment to Egypt, as there are records of KIM Il-sung's visit in August 1974 to the 639th Military Unit, later known as the Command of the Strategic Rocket Force of the KPA, later known as the Command of the Strategic Force of the KPA, which controlled long-range ballistic missiles.⁵⁰ It is not known when Egypt handed over the missiles to North Korea. It is believed that some agreement was reached between July 1973, when the R-17E was introduced to Egypt, and August 1974, when KIM Il-sung visited the 639th Military Unit. The missiles were then presumably handed over from Egypt to North Korea. This is where North Korea's ballistic missile development began. The 639th Military Unit was not publicly announced as the Command of the Strategic Rocket Force until some 40 years later.⁵¹

According to KIM Il-sung, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad (father of current President Bashar al-Assad) visited North Korea from September 28 to October 3, 1974, and promised to dispatch reinforcements if war broke out again on the Korean peninsula.⁵² The Bashar al-Assad administration also maintains friendly relations with North Korea. There must have been much military cooperation between Syria and North Korea, but its full extent is unclear. The “Arab Spring,” however, has plunged Syria into a state of civil war, and the Assad administration is weaker than before. Nevertheless, North Korea has continued to support the Assad administration without joining other forces inside Syria, such as the Islamic State (IS), the Free Syrian Army, the Al-Nusra Front, and the Kurdish Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG). North Korea is believed to be protecting the Assad administration by dispatching troops. On November 14, 2013, North Korea's Foreign Ministry announced that it had never sent military supplies or air force pilots to Syria.⁵³

⁴⁸ “Fact Sheet: North Korea Missile Test Activity,” *The Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation*, (November 14, 2023), <https://armscontrolcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/North-Korean-Missile-Test-Activity-Fact-Sheet-Feb-5-Edit.pdf> (Accessed on May 11, 2024).

⁴⁹ Shazly, *The Crossing of the Suez*, pp. 133-135.

⁵⁰ *Rodong Sinmun*, March 14, 2002.

⁵¹ *Rodong Sinmun*, March 3, 2012.

⁵² KIM Il-sung, “Talks with Syrian Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party Delegation, November 2, 1975,” *The Complete Works of Kim Il Sung*, Vol. 58, (Pyongyang: The Worker's Party of Korea Publishing House, 2005), p.191.

⁵³ *Korean Central News Agency*, November 14, 2013.

However, the Russian state-run TASS news agency reported on March 23, 2016, that North Korea had deployed two military units to Syria, named *Chalma-1* and *Chalma-7*.⁵⁴ *Chalma* is probably more accurately *Cheolma* or *Cholma*, which means ‘iron horse’ in Korean, another name for ‘tank’ in North Korea. Therefore, it can be assumed that *Chalma-1* and *Chalma-7* are tank units.

The Assad administration also continues to support North Korea. Syria has not established diplomatic relations with the US, South Korea, or Israel, all of which are enemies of North Korea. Furthermore, it opposes sanctions against North Korea and has not provided sanctions status reports since October 14, 2006, as required of the UN member states under the UN Security Council resolution sanctioning North Korea. In addition, Syria has consistently voted against the resolution on the human rights situation in North Korea in the UN Human Rights Committee and the UN General Assembly since December 2005.

Syria also voted against the resolution on the situation of human rights in North Korea adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 17, 2015, which was the last vote on the resolution on the situation of human rights in North Korea.⁵⁵ The resolution on the situation of human rights in the DPRK has not been voted on since then due to the adoption of a consensus system. Syria's opposition to the Resolution on the Situation of Human Rights in the DPRK may be due in part to the Assad administration's questionable human rights record in Syria. Still, it also shows that the Assad administration's support for North Korea goes back generations and continues to this day.

8. Relations between North Korea and Egypt after the war.

Friendly relations between Egypt and North Korea continued until the fall of the Mubarak administration, as first noted. However, Shazly, who asked North Korea to deploy air force pilots, and Mubarak, who led the North Korean air force pilots, fell out after the war. Shazly, the first to give Israel a sense of defeat, would have been a national hero had he remained in place, but he clashed with President Sadat throughout the war. After the war, he was dismissed as chief of staff and left Egypt in December 1973 to become ambassador to the United Kingdom, followed by ambassador to Portugal. It was Mubarak, an air force commander, who became a national hero as a result of the October War. After the war, he was awarded the “Order of the Sinai Star” and appointed as the Vice President of Egypt on April 16, 1975.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ TASS news agency, March 23, 2016.

⁵⁵ United Nations, *United Nations General Assembly Seventieth session 80th plenary meeting Official Records A/70/PV.80*, (New York: United Nations General Assembly, December 17, 2015), p.24.

⁵⁶ See “1. Explanatory” in “B. Materials”.

Shazly opposed President Sadat, and Mubarak who followed him, but the fate of the three men was also affected by the times. President Sadat sought reconciliation with Israel. From September 5-17, 1978, the leaders of Egypt, the US, and Israel met and signed the so-called Camp David Accords, which included the beginning of negotiations for a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. On March 26, 1979, the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty was signed, making Egypt the first Arab country to recognize Israel as a state. This was met with considerable domestic opposition as well as opposition from other Arab states, and President Sadat was assassinated during a parade marking the anniversary of the victory in the October War on October 6, 1981.

Shazly openly criticized President Sadat for signing the Camp David Accords. This forced him into exile in Algeria and London. And for his criticism of President Sadat, he published his memoirs, *The October War*, in 1979, in which he revealed details about the deployment of North Korean pilots to Egypt. He was sentenced to three years in absentia for revealing military secrets. His memoir, *The October War*, was banned, and only a few excerpts are known from the English edition. Upon his return to Egypt in 1992, Shazly was imprisoned and forced to live in seclusion for the rest of his life after serving his sentence. Shazly retired from political life.⁵⁷

On the contrary, Mubarak became president of Egypt on October 14, 1981, following Sadat's assassination. Mubarak followed Sadat's legacy and maintained relations with the US and Israel. Shazly and Mubarak, who fought together in the October War, took very different paths.

However, while Mubarak continued Sadat's pro-US line, he refused to establish diplomatic relations with South Korea, a US ally. He had long made clear his support for North Korea. Mubarak visited North Korea as Vice President from January 10-13, 1980, and as President from April 4-5, 1983, and May 13-14, 1990.⁵⁸ Mubarak received a warm welcome in North Korea, where he met with KIM Il-sung and deepened friendly relations.

When Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Egypt's foreign minister since 1977 and UN secretary-general since 1992, tried to establish diplomatic relations between Egypt and South Korea, Mubarak continued to thwart him. Mubarak continued to cultivate his friendship with KIM Il-sung.⁵⁹ However, after KIM Il-sung's death in 1994, Sulciman, then the chief of Egypt's General Intelligence Service, made a secret visit to South Korea and met with President KIM Young-sam. He strongly

⁵⁷ See "1. Explanatory" in "B. Materials".

⁵⁸ In South Korea, there are reports that Mubarak also visited North Korea in 1985. However, this has not been reported in North Korea. Yoon Dong-young Yoon, "President Mubarak May Play Mediating Role in North-South Korea Relations (무바라크대통령 남북관계 중재역할 가능성)," *Yonhap News Agency*, April 3, 1999, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1718/implementation-reports> (Accessed April 29, 2002) (Korean).

⁵⁹ See "1. Explanatory" in "B. Materials".

encouraged Mubarak to establish diplomatic relations with South Korea, and Egypt established diplomatic relations with South Korea in 1995. This is the same Suleiman who became Vice President at the end of Mubarak's administration and announced Mubarak's resignation.⁶⁰

However, it appears that Mubarak did not abandon North Korea but instead tried to mediate between North and South Korea. The defection of CHANG Sung-gil, the North Korean ambassador to Egypt, to the US on August 26, 1997, had no impact.⁶¹ Mubarak visited South Korea on April 9-11, 1999, but did not change his stance in seeking reconciliation between North and South Korea.⁶²

On October 14, 2006, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1718, which required all UN member states to report to the UNSC Sanctions Committee on the status of sanctions within 30 days of the adoption of the resolution. The Mubarak administration did not report. Nor did it report under Resolution 1874, adopted on June 13, 2009, which also required implementation reports within 45 days. Egypt did not report until June 29, 2012, the day before Mubarak fell and Mohamed Morsi came to power.⁶³ Incidentally, the Morsi administration should have been undesirable to North Korea since it broke diplomatic relations with the Assad administration in Syria, which has maintained friendly relations with North Korea.

However, this Morsi administration also fell in a coup on July 3 without reporting on Resolution 2094, which was adopted on March 7, 2013. The subsequent Egyptian administration has reiterated its defense of North Korea. Furthermore, diplomatic relations with Syria were also restored. In the resolution on the human rights situation in North Korea adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 19, 2014, Egypt, like Syria, voted against it.⁶⁴ Egypt also voted against the resolution on the human rights situation in North Korea adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 17, 2015, which was the last vote on the resolution on the human rights situation in North Korea.⁶⁵ Egypt has voted against the resolution since its inception in December

⁶⁰ “Suleiman is the ‘secret envoy’ for the diplomatic relations of Korea-Egypt (슬레이만은 한-이집트 수교 ‘비밀 특사’),” *JoongAng Ilbo*, February 12, 2011 (Korean).

⁶¹ “Defecting Envoy from North Korea to Get U.S. Asylum,” *The New York Times*, August 27, 1997.

⁶² “Egypt Promises to Deliver Message of Reconciliation to North Korea (대북 화해 메시지 이집트, 전달 약속),” *Chosun Ilbo*, April 10, 1999 (Korean).

⁶³ United Nations Security Council, “Implementation Reports,” the United Nations Security Council, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1718/implementation-reports> (Accessed on April 29, 2024).

⁶⁴ United Nations, *United Nations General Assembly Sixty-ninth session 73rd plenary meeting Official Records A/69/PV.73*, pp.22-23.

⁶⁵ United Nations, *United Nations General Assembly Seventieth session 80th plenary meeting Official Records A/70/PV.80*, (New York: United Nations General Assembly, December 17, 2015), p.24.

2005, continuing the policy of the Mubarak administration.⁶⁶

However, in October 2015, Egypt scored a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for 2016-2017. Egypt submitted six implementation reports to the UNSC Sanctions Committee during these two years.

With the inauguration of President Donald Trump in the US on January 20, 2017, and the adoption of a series of UNSC sanctions resolutions against North Korea, Egypt's attitude towards North Korea changed.

According to the report of the UN Panel of Experts on February 27, 2017, Egypt intercepted the Jie Shun, a vessel commanded by a North Korean captain that was en route from North Korea towards the Suez Canal on August 11, 2016. A search revealed a cargo containing 30,000 PG 7 rocket-propelled grenades and related subcomponents in wooden crates concealed under about 2,300 tonnes of limonite (iron ore). The 132-ton arms cargo consisted of 79 crates containing 24,384 disassembled PG 7 rocket-propelled grenades and materials for an additional 4,616 rocket-propelled grenades, all manufactured in North Korea.⁶⁷

In talks with South Korean Minister of Defense SONG Young-moo, Egyptian Defense Minister Sedki Sobhy stressed that his country had already severed all military ties with North Korea on September 11, 2017.⁶⁸

However, since 2018, when the US-North Korea summit began, Egypt has begun to return to its previous stance on North Korea. Implementation reports are no longer submitted to the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee. Of course, relations have not yet returned to the level of friendship that existed between North Korea and Egypt during the Mubarak administration. KIM Jong-un sends New Year's cards to heads of state every New Year, but he has not sent one to the Egyptian president since 2019. However, he sends the Syrian president a New Year's card every year. It can be said that Syria maintains the same friendly relations with North Korea as before.

Since the October War, the situation in the Middle East has undergone a profound transformation.

⁶⁶ Department of Public Information "General Assembly Addresses Human Rights Situations in Five Countries, As It Adopts 60 Draft Texts Recommended by Its Third Committee," *General Assembly GA/10437*, (December 16, 2005), <https://press.un.org/en/2005/ga10437.doc.htm> (Accessed on April 29, 2024).

⁶⁷ Panel of Experts Established pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1874 (2009), "Report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 1874 (2009)," (New York: United Nations, February 27, 2017), pp. 28-29.

⁶⁸ "S. Korea, Egypt vow ties on N. Korea, defense industry," *Yonhap News*, September 11, 2017, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20170911011900315> (Accessed on April 29, 2024).

Egypt has established diplomatic relations with Israel, while a change of regime in Egypt temporarily closed diplomatic relations with Syria. However, it is possible to say that Egypt and Syria have tried to maintain friendly relations with North Korea. The deployment of North Korean pilots to Egypt and Syria during the October War laid the foundation for Egypt's and Syria's continued support for North Korea.

Conclusion

North Korea, Egypt, and Syria are friendly countries. This is mainly because North Korea sent reinforcements to the October War. North Korea sent reinforcements to the October War because it wanted to deepen exchanges with Third World countries to improve its standing in the UN and win the cooperation of the Non-Aligned Movement. Egypt was the leader of the Non-Aligned Movement because it was the leader of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Egypt and Syria sought the assistance of North Korean air force pilots to combat Israel. The alignment of interests between North Korea, Egypt, and Syria facilitated this collaboration.

North Korea was indeed able to achieve this result. It won the support of Egypt, Syria, and many other Third World countries at the UN General Assembly, outflanked South Korea, and joined the Non-Aligned Movement. North Korea, which had experienced international isolation due to the loss of the Eastern Bloc, was reborn as a member of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Friendly relations between North Korea and Egypt were probably at their peak during the Mubarak administration. However, this was mainly due to personal exchanges. In Egypt, Mubarak, an air force commander during the October War, valued his interactions with KIM Il-sung and did not establish diplomatic relations with South Korea during KIM Il-sung's lifetime. In Syria, the Assad administration, generation after generation, has not established diplomatic relations with South Korea while continuing to interact with the supreme leader of North Korea.

However, diplomatic relations based on personal exchanges can break down when regimes change. In the case of Syria, as the Assad administration remains in power, they continue to have friendly relations with North Korea, where KIM Il-sung and his descendants reign as supreme leaders. North Korea continues to defend the Assad administration in the Syrian civil war by sending troops. If war breaks out on the Korean peninsula, Syria has promised to send troops to defend North Korea.

In Egypt, the situation is more complicated because of the regime change. In addition, Egypt is in a difficult position in international relations because it has established diplomatic relations with

South Korea, the US, and Israel, all of which are enemies of North Korea. However, this was not a problem during Mubarak's presidency, who valued personal exchanges with KIM Il-sung. When the Mubarak administration collapsed, Shazly died with it, and North Korea lost a strong supporter in Egypt. Under the next Morsi administration, relations with North Korea cooled as Egypt began submitting reports to the UN Security Council's Sanctions Committee on the implementation of sanctions against North Korea. However, when the Morsi administration collapsed, the Egyptian military, on which Mubarak had based his administration, regained power and tried to restore relations with North Korea to some extent. However, they have not returned to the friendly relations of the Mubarak administration.

The friendship between North Korea and Egypt is not as good as it used to be. Nevertheless, it can be said that Egypt and Syria have supported North Korea since the October War. What North Korea's participation in the October War brought to it was friendly relations with Egypt and Syria and personal exchanges between the leaders who supported them. As long as this continues, Egypt and Syria will continue to support North Korea, and North Korea will continue to support Egypt and Syria.

B. Materials⁶⁹

1. Explanatory

Anti-government protests in Egypt began on January 25, 2011, and after 18 days of mass demonstrations, President Mubarak was forced to resign on February 11. The decisive event was the military's move the day before. The military, without the president as commander-in-chief, independently convened the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), issued Military Order No. 1 to facilitate the transition of the regime, and on the following day, February 11, forced the president to resign, who had still refused to resign in a speech on the evening of February 10.

As if to coincide with that February 10, when the military leaders, long depoliticized, stepped to the political front, a general ended a tumultuous life. He is Lieutenant General Saad el-Shazly (Sa'd al-Din al-Shadhily).⁷⁰ Born in 1922, Shazly was a military officer in the Egyptian army. As

⁶⁹ The original text of this chapter can be found in the following article: IKEUCHI, Satoshi and Satoru Miyamoto, "The Origin of North Korea's Ballistic Missile Development: From the Memoirs of Egyptian Army General Staff Saad el-Shazly (北朝鮮の弾道ミサイル開発の起源：シャーズィリー・エジプト軍参謀総長の回顧録から)," *The Monthly Journal Toa (East Asia)*, No. 553 (July 2013), pp.78-86 (Japanese).

⁷⁰ Shazly's name has been transcribed from Arabic as "Sa'd al-Din al-Shadhily," with "Sa'd al-Din" as the

Chief of the General Staff (April 1971-December 1973), he led the initial good fighting during the October War, including the crossing of the Suez Canal. He would have been a national hero had he remained in office, but he clashed with President Sadat during and immediately after the war and was ousted. In December of that year, Shazly was left as ambassador to the UK, then to Portugal, and he entered into a decisive confrontation with President Sadat by openly opposing the 1978 Camp David Accords, leading to his exile in Algeria, then London.

In 1979, Shazly was convicted in absentia of “leaking military secrets” for publishing his memoirs, *The October War*, and sentenced to three years in prison. His magnum opus, a memoir entitled *The October War*, was banned in Egypt and prevented from being published in Arab countries, with only a modest circulation through unnamed institutions in the UK and the US. Among scholars, it is known only in an abridged English version, *The Crossing of the Suez*.⁷¹

It seems dramatic, even fateful, that Shazly died the day before the fall of the Mubarak administration and the formation of the military's SCAF. It is precisely because the revolutions of the “Arab Spring” made it possible for Shazly's honor to be restored and reevaluated with the fall of President Mubarak, who had faithfully followed Sadat's peace line.

On the contrary, there is evidence that the SCAF, which seized real power under the slogan “the army and the people join hands,” gave a major boost to Shazly's restoration to power. According to political sociologist Hazem Kandil, who published a groundbreaking work on the relationship between politics, the military, and the security apparatus in modern Egyptian history, “Shazly lived through the January 2011 revolt, but died one night before the military forced the president to step down. A few weeks after, his so-far-banned memoirs were published in Egypt and quickly made it to the top of the best-seller chart - a symbolic gesture from the military to its cherished commander.”⁷²

The military needed to project an image of its legitimacy and popular support to remain in power after the fall of the military-based Mubarak administration. Shazly, the architect of the October War “victory” in which Egyptians take great pride and who opposed both the Sadat and Mubarak administrations, was an unparalleled asset to SCAF.

first name and “Shadhily” as the last name. In English, however, the person himself seems to have transcribed the name as Saad el-Shzaly, and the name is often abbreviated to “Din” and called “Saad”. In this paper we will use the person's English rendering, Saad el-Shzaly.

⁷¹ General Saad el-Shazly, *The Crossing of the Suez: The October War (1973)*, (London: Third World Centre for Research and Publishing, 1980).

⁷² Hazem Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies, and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt*, (London, New York: Verso, 2012), p.136.

In the Egyptian political context, the fact that Shazly's memoirs were republished and widely distributed after the fall of the Mubarak administration is significant in itself, but what is interesting from a Japanese and Far East Asian perspective is that the Arabic version, which was previously difficult to obtain, contains various statements that were omitted or deleted from the English translation. The Arabic version, which has been difficult to obtain in the past, contains various descriptions that were omitted or deleted from the English translation, and these descriptions reveal part of the truth about the military and political relationship between Egypt and Far East Asia. This includes a section on North Korean military aid to Egypt. In this chapter, we will translate this section and add commentary. The translation can be found on pages 118-123 of the new edition of *The October War*, in the section entitled "North Korean Pilots in Egypt."⁷³

Regarding military cooperation between Egypt and North Korea, two types of North Korean assistance are described here. The first is the provision of North Korean military pilots. In 1972, when Egypt expelled the Soviet military advisory group, the Egyptian military, which had entrusted up to 30% of its MIG-21 fleet to Soviet pilots, fell on hard times. At that time, the Egyptian military requested pilots from North Korea to make up for the shortage.⁷⁴ It is known among experts that North Korean pilots were part of the Egyptian Air Force's operations immediately before and during the October War of 1973. The Egyptian government has neither officially confirmed nor denied this. However, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Egypt's former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Secretary-General of the UN from 1992-96, admitted as much in his memoir, *Unvanquished: A U.S.-U.N. Saga*, as follows:

"During the 1973 October War between Egypt and Israel, Kim Il Sung had sent to Egypt a squadron of MiG fighter aircraft with North Korean pilots. They had patrolled Egyptian airspace throughout the war. Hosni Mubarak was the general in command of the Egyptian Air Force at that time. As a result of this support for Egypt by the DPRK, President Mubarak would never agree to establish full diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea (ROK). As for myself, over many years I had constructed a network of personal ties to North Korean officials through contacts at various conferences of the third-world and nonaligned countries. At the same time, the Korean government in Seoul was well aware that I was persistently arguing in Cairo for the establishment of Egypt-ROK relations in view of the fact that nearly half the world's nations had diplomatic ties

⁷³ Al-Fariq Sa'd al-Din al-Shadhily, *Harb al- Uktubar: Mudhakkirat*, (Cairo: R'u ya li-Nashrwa al-Tawzi', 2011). This edition is referred to as a "new edition". However, since the preface to the 1998 4th edition by Shazly is still included, it is assumed that the 1998 edition was published in a different format and with changes, such as the addition of secondary headings.

⁷⁴ Only a summary of this fact is given in the English version, Shazly, *The Crossing of the Suez*, pp. 60-61. The Arabic version, which will be translated in the next section, describes the circumstances in more detail.

to both Koreas. My efforts were repeatedly doomed as soon as Mubarak realized that I was making progress. He would never disappoint the DPRK. So there were several good reasons for my decision to go to Pyongyang: I had access on both sides of the Korean peninsula; I was the UN secretary-general; and a General Assembly resolution legitimized a UN role in the current crisis. Nonetheless, the US maintained its pressure to prevent me from going.⁷⁵

The deployment of North Korean pilots during the October War is significant as the “origin” of the very close military ties between Egypt and North Korea from the Sadat to Mubarak administrations. As Boutros-Ghali notes, Egypt did not establish diplomatic relations with South Korea for a long time. On one hand, it has been allied with the US; on another, it has maintained diplomatic relations only with North Korea on the Korean peninsula, refusing to establish formal relations with South Korea. It can be assumed that Mubarak, the air force commander during the October War, was indebted to KIM Il-sung for his support. It was not until April 1995, after the death of KIM Il-sung in July of the previous year, that Egypt finally decided to establish diplomatic relations with South Korea.

It will be interesting to see if Shazly's memoirs can confirm the fact that Scud B(R-17E) missiles were provided to North Korea by Egypt in return for North Korean assistance to Egypt during the October War and that this was the basis for North Korea's missile development. However, the memoir covers the period up to December 1973 and does not mention the quid pro quo provision. It is unclear from the memoirs whether the quid pro quo was discussed before the October War and simply not mentioned here or whether it was discussed after Shazly's ouster. Whether Mubarak, as commander of the air force, then further deepened relations with North Korea and took the initiative to provide Scud missiles himself or whether there were other channels on the Egyptian side, we should wait carefully for new documents and reports to emerge in a period of change in Egypt.

The second area of North Korean military assistance concerns the construction of underground facilities. This is an issue that has received little attention, as it is not included at all in the English summary. The technical assistance for constructing the underground facility should receive further attention in the context of North Korea's impact on the broader Middle East and the consequences of that impact on international politics. The difficulty in dealing with the issue of Iran's nuclear program is that many of the alleged facilities are underground. Shazly describes with surprise that the construction of underground facilities is North Korea's strongest suit. If North Korea's technology in this regard were being provided to Egypt and other countries in the Middle East,

⁷⁵ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Unvanquished: A U.S.-U.N. Saga*, (New York: Random House, 1999), p.126. This passage is a description in connection with Boutros-Ghali's visit to Pyongyang on December 24, 1993.

North Korea would be deeply involved in the international issues surrounding the Middle East today, literally at the center of them. The fact that such efforts were made to Egypt as early as 1973 does not rule out the possibility that similar technology grants were made to other countries in the Middle East, and further investigation is awaited.

9. Translation of the Original Arabic Text

“North Korean Pilots in Egypt,” *October War*, new edition, pp. 118-123.

In March 1973 the Vice President of the DPRK paid an official visit to Egypt.⁷⁶ Lieutenant General JANG Jong-hwan, vice-minister of the People's Armed Forces, accompanied the group and requested an inspection of the front line in Suez.⁷⁷ On March 6, I went to the front with JANG. On the way, we discussed and exchanged views on various military issues. I told him that Egypt was having trouble training pilots and could not operate our MIG-21s, especially after the Soviets withdrew about 100 pilots who were operating 75 of them. Then, seizing the opportunity, I said to him, “Do you think it would be possible for North Korea to provide us with some MIG-21 pilots? It would be a win-win situation for both sides. For our side, your participation in air defense would solve our problem of pilot shortage. For the North Korean side, the pilots will gain practical knowledge of warfare. The Israelis will use the same planes and the same tactics as your supposed enemies.”

He asked me how many pilots I needed, and I said, “I don't expect you to fill all the holes left by the Soviets. It would be enough to send one squadron. If we need to send another unit in the future, we will discuss it later.” Although we were discussing the issue as military officers, we both knew that it would require a political decision on both sides. We promised each other that we would make every effort to convince the political side to make the necessary decision.

It was easy to convince the Minister of Defense. But the minister told us that he would first seek the president's permission. A few days later, President Sadat agreed to the idea. I awaited the North Korean response. About two weeks after the North Korean envoy's visit, General JANG Jong-hwan visited Egypt again and informed me that North Korean President KIM Il-sung had agreed to the plan. However, before sending the pilots to Egypt, he demanded that I make an official visit to North Korea to see the pilots in person. On April 2, 1973, I set out on a visit to Pyongyang,

⁷⁶ According to North Korean records, the Vice President of the DPRK is KANG Ryang-uk.

⁷⁷ The original Arabic text refers to General Zang Zung, Vice Minister of Defense, but the North Korean record refers to Lieutenant General JANG Jong-hwan, Vice Minister of the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces. The translations below as “JANG” and “JANG Jong-hwan” are “Zang” or “Zang Zung” in the original Arabic text.

the capital of North Korea.

Since there were no direct flights to Pyongyang, my itinerary was via Shanghai, China. The Chinese government invited us for three days before we arrived in Pyongyang on April 6. Despite my unofficial status, the Chinese side extended a warm welcome to me and the accompanying delegation. The Chinese Chief of Staff hosted a banquet for me, during which we exchanged views on military and political issues.⁷⁸ The Chinese also arranged a number of sightseeing tours. I visited the Great Wall of China, the northernmost point of the Great Wall of China. I also visited the Great Wall of China at its northernmost point, as well as a number of shelters that would resist any nuclear attack. I also visited Beijing's new subway system and many museums. The simplicity, self-reliance, and self-sacrifice impressed upon me by the Chinese people and their political leadership during my brief visit will forever remain in my life's memory. This memory will never be erased from my mind.

In Pyongyang, we received an enthusiastic welcome. Everywhere we went—from military installations to factories and other facilities set up in mountain caves—we were greeted by thousands of people singing songs and waving flags. My excitement was heightened by the enthusiastic welcome, which was followed by a succession of performances. During one of my visits, I attended a fire drill conducted by one of the units of the Worker-Peasant Red Guards, which was tasked with air defense.⁷⁹ The unit was made up entirely of young girls, and because of their short stature, I assumed that they were no older than 15. However, I was informed that they were 18 or older. The results of the training were excellent. When it was my turn to review, I said, “Thank you for showing us your excellent marksmanship. I'll show you how much I appreciate it by giving you this beret.” I took off the scarlet beret I had worn throughout the visit, which only paratroopers were allowed to wear, and gave it to the commander of that unit.

I could say many things about North Korea and KIM Il-sung. It is safe to say that what has been accomplished in that country in the last two decades is incredible. Not only has he managed to rebuild his country from the ashes of civil war, but he has also made it possible for the country to become self-sufficient in all things. North Korea can now produce most of its military and civilian needs, from tanks and artillery to tractors, machinery, and more. While China, with its vast natural resources and huge population, was able to develop independently without the assistance of

⁷⁸ Since the position of Chief of General Staff of the People's Liberation Army of China was vacant at that time, it is believed that one of the acting military officers met with him.

⁷⁹ In the original it is “al-haras al-watani (the National Guard).” It seems to be an understanding of the “Worker-Peasant Red Guards” of North Korea, a reserve force composed of companies, farms, and universities, as a paramilitary organization (National Guard, Republican Guard, etc.) under the direct control of the king or president, established in parallel with the national army, which is common in Arab countries.

outside developed countries (Note: China began introducing Western technology in 1978. This was done with the intention of accelerating the pace of development. The US and its Western allies praised and supported this direction. The intention was to create a threatening element on the eastern border of the Soviet Union), North Korea, with a population of only 15 million, is an unprecedented example of a small country developing without outside assistance. The Korean people are completely organized as if they were a huge military camp.

At 7:00 in the morning, I saw the school children carrying hoes as tall as they were and shovels for digging holes. They are singing songs on their way to the work sites. Every citizen, young and old, is required to perform a certain number of hours of unpaid physical work for the benefit of the state. Similarly, the paving and repair of roads and the construction of underground and other evacuation facilities for public use are carried out according to a planned work schedule that organizes this enormous human effort. The North Koreans took advantage of the mountainous terrain and abundant manpower to build tunnels to protect themselves from the atomic bomb and even to relocate factories and airports. I saw several factories hidden in the mountains and airfields with nothing on the surface but the runway.

The whole complex is hidden in the mountainside. It is truly a dazzling and amazing undertaking. When I met President KIM Il-sung, I said to him, "Your Excellency. I am afraid that if there is a nuclear war, the whole world will collapse, and North Korea will be left behind."

The President laughed and said, "Listen to me, Lieutenant General. I know very well that the Americans are no match for us in air combat. So, the only thing left for us to do is to dig tunnels and let the air raids pass us by. After that, we will flood their airspace with artillery and machine gun fire." (Note: I personally disagree with this view. While this method would have a positive effect on air defense, spreading a large number of such weapons throughout the land of the Republic will certainly cause tremendous restrictions on other aircraft as well. Such fire should be called sabotage.)

I met with a group of pilots who were going to be deployed to Egypt. The pilots had a lot of experience and many of them had over 2,000 hours of flying experience. We agreed to pay them a salary of one Egyptian pound. This was the same as the salary of an Egyptian pilot. I promised President KIM Il-sung that I would personally take care of the pilots in their free time. I also assured him that we would not fight together inside Israel or on Israeli-occupied land and that their duties would be limited to air defense in the rear area. I also asked the President of the DPRK to send specialists to the underground facilities so that we can take advantage of their knowledge and expertise, and we reached an agreement on this. I left for Egypt on April 15. This was my

visit to the most difficult place to reach.

As soon as I got back to Cairo, I organized a group of engineers. The purpose was to form the nucleus of a new division within the Corps of Engineers. It was called the "Underground Facilities Division." On May 1, a group of specialists on North Korean underground facilities arrived in Egypt. They stayed in Egypt for eight days for on-the-job training with a group of Egyptian engineers. When the delegation paid a courtesy call on me before returning his country, the head of the delegation said, "The head of the Egyptian technical delegation has excellent theoretical knowledge of underground facilities, but he needs practical knowledge." The training and guidance provided by the North Korean experts on underground facilities was very useful.

Soon after the North Korean experts returned their country, I organized a working group. Their task was to design an airport hidden under a mountain. I met with this group every week or two to discuss their progress, and when the October War broke out in 1973, they were still designing and working out the details. We were making remarkable progress in this task. I wanted to meet with this group regularly. There were two reasons. The first was my interest in the task. The second reason was a kind of camouflage, to make it appear that war was not yet imminent. I could not imagine that the Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Armed Forces would spend even a small amount of time planning an airport that would take five years to build when war was imminent.

One of the members of the working group was an officer from the Operations Section of the Air Command. Less than two weeks before the operation, Major General Hosni Mubarak saw the officer busy gathering information and making design proposals for the underground airport and scolded him, "You have more important things to do than this." The officer replied, "Lieutenant General Shazly ordered me to do this." Hosni Mubarak was surprised and said, "Next time I will ask the chief of staff if what you said is true." When Hosni Mubarak and I met two days later, we told this story and laughed together.

In early June 1973, North Korean pilots began to arrive. In July, the formation of their squadron was completed. Then, on August 15, an Israeli radio broadcast reported that there were North Korean pilots in Egypt. Dr. Ashraf Gulbar, the assistant to the president for media affairs, called me and asked if this information was true. I told him that the information was true, but that it was up to politics to decide whether to report it or not, especially since we had to consult with other foreign countries before making it public. Now, five years have passed since this happened, the North Koreans have returned home, and the support they gave us during the war is now part of history. I have determined to tell this story in its entirety so that the Egyptian people will know all about those who were with them during their ordeal. The US, Israel and the Soviet Union know

about North Korean support. The pilots used the Korean language over the radio to communicate with their colleagues and ground control during their daily training. Any foreign intelligence service could record these conversations. Why hide the truth from the Egyptian people and the Arab people when everything important is known?

The support force sent by North Korea to Egypt was the smallest support force sent by a single country to a friendly country in the history of warfare. This support force consisted of 30 pilots, eight flight controllers, five interpreters, three administrative men, a doctor and a cook. They were joined by 3,000 Egyptians at the base who provided radar, air defense, ground patrol and all administrative matters for this squadron. I had visited the base many times to make sure there were no problems, and each time I went, I found that everything was going according to plan. The relationship between North Korea and Egypt was the best one could hope for. The North Korean soldiers were strange. The pilots were autonomous in every way. They had their own housing, they were on their own in everything. No one had any leisure time, either on training missions or in study or physical training. Not a single one of them had an office problem.

There were two or three battles between North Korean pilots and Israeli pilots before the October War and many more during the war.

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Indonesia's Diplomacy to North Korea: Changes and Continuities

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1. Introduction

2020 marked the 75th anniversary of Indonesia's independence. Independence Day is August 17, and congratulatory messages were received from the leaders of various countries in conjunction with the independence commemoration ceremony. North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea: DPRK) also sent a congratulatory telegram from Kim Jong-un, in which he praised Indonesia for achieving social prosperity through non-alignment and appealed for future-friendly relations between the two countries.¹ It is not known whether this is true, but it is not common for him to send congratulatory telegrams to other countries on their independence anniversaries. If this is the case, it can be understood as a sign of his recognition that Indonesia is an important, friendly country. He attached importance to the current Joko Widodo administration (since 2014). Why? It is premised on the relationship between former President Megawati Sukarnoputri (chairperson of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle [PDI-P]), the real power under Widodo, and North Korea, and further back to the relationship between former President Sukarno, Megawati's father and the "father of national independence," and Kim Il Sung of North Korea. While reviewing this history, I discuss the significance of diplomacy with North Korea in Indonesia's domestic politics.

2. Sukarno and North Korea

The diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1961. Sukarno, becoming isolated internationally, visited Pyongyang in 1964 to appeal for friendship

¹ <https://www.kompas.tv/article/102176/kim-jong-un-ucapkan-selamat-hari-kemerdekaan-indonesia-ini-harapannya>

with Kim Il Sung. In January of the following year, Sukarno announced Indonesia's withdrawal from the UN and launched the Conference of Emerging Forces (CONEFO) as a "second" UN. North Korea decided to join CONEFO alongside Vietnam and China, and Kim Il Sung visited Indonesia the same year. Kim Il Sung was interested in a flower he saw at the Bogor Botanical Gardens near Jakarta. Sukarno decided to name the flower the "Kim Il Sung Flower" (see photo) and make it a symbol of friendship between the two countries.



source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kimilsungia>

Sukarno must have had special feelings toward Kim Il Sung, who came to see him amid his growing international isolation. However, Sukarno was ousted the same year, and power in the country shifted to Suharto, an army officer. Suharto became acting president in 1966, and in a 180-degree turnaround from Sukarno's previous foreign policy line, he adopted an anti-communist, pro-US line and decided to dissolve CONEFO before the conference could be held.

The Suharto dictatorship continued for the next 30 years, and although diplomatic ties existed, relations with North Korea cooled. From Kim Il Sung's point of view, it would have been difficult to imagine friendship with Suharto, who had ousted his "good friend Sukarno," and for the Suharto regime, strong U.S.-Japan relations were essential for the establishment and development of his dictatorship. Therefore, the priority given to North Korea was relatively low.

3. Megawati and North Korea

After 2001, relations between the two countries began to revitalize. This was the year when the Suharto regime collapsed (1998), democratization progressed, and Megawati,

the leader of the PDI-P, became the president. North Korea also entered the generation of Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il, and both countries entered the era of the second generation. President Megawati visited Pyongyang in March 2002 and met with Kim Jong-il to reaffirm the friendship that had existed since their parents' time. The international situation at the time was tough in North Korea, just as it was in the U.S. President George W. Bush was stepping up pressure on the country with his "axis of evil" remarks. For diplomats who remembered Kim Il Sung's visit in 1964, when Sukarno was internationally isolated, Megawati's 2002 visit was perceived as a "payback" visit. However, Kim Jong-il did not visit Indonesia during Megawati's administration. Perhaps this was because Megawati's administration was too short-lived; after losing the 2004 presidential elections to retired Lieutenant General Yudhoyono, Megawati stepped down from power while remaining on the political stage as the leader of the first opposition party.

As expected, Kim Jong Il did not come to Indonesia during the Yudhoyono administration (2004-2014). Nevertheless, Kim Yong Nam (Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly) served as his point of contact with Indonesia; he participated in the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Asia-Africa Summit (Bandung Conference) held in Bandung in 2005. Kim Yong Nam also visited Jakarta in 2012 during the second Yudhoyono administration and met with President Yudhoyono.

4. The Third Generation of Diplomatic Relations

Although no significant progress was made in bilateral relations during the Yudhoyono era, Indonesia's diplomacy with North Korea has been reinvigorated since the current Joko Widodo administration came to power. Although the president seems to have virtually no commitment to North Korea, as noted above, the backbone of this administration is the PDI-P, with Megawati, the party leader, as the de facto supreme authority. Soon after the administration's inauguration, Megawati's sister (i.e., also Sukarno's daughter), Rahmawati, visited the country. She is the president of the Sukarno Education Foundation, and her visit was to present Kim Jong-un with the "Sukarno Star Award." Rahmawati praised him for his significant contribution to peace in the Korean Peninsula.

More interestingly, Megawati's daughter, Puan, a PDI-P politician, also played a role in North Korean diplomacy. In other words, she is the third generation of the Sukarno family, and her counterpart is also a third generation, Kim Jong-un. Puan was selected as Coordinating Minister (in charge of human resource development and cultural affairs) in the first Jokowi administration (2014-19). As minister, he visited Pyongyang in July 2018 as a presidential envoy. He met with Kim Yong Nam and invited Kim Jong Un to the Asian Games the following month.

The timing of this diplomacy is also interesting. It was just after U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo appealed to ASEAN foreign ministers in Singapore to strengthen sanctions against North Korea. Neither Megawati nor Puan showed any consideration for U.S. strategy in Asia. Rather, for every appeal for increased regional cooperation and pressure on North Korea, Indonesia seems to deploy diplomacy in the opposite direction. What does this mean? Before we get the answer, let us look more closely at relations with North Korea under the Jokowi administration.

Although UN sanctions were imposed on North Korea in 2017, the Jokowi administration attempted to develop bilateral trade. In 2018, a North Korean-flagged ship brought \$3 million worth of coal into Indonesia, and although the Indonesian government once seized it, the coal trade was not stopped. In March 2020, the Indonesian ambassador to Pyongyang said on *Suara Indonesia* (Voice of Indonesia), a radio station for Indonesians abroad, that the international community should move toward easing sanctions against North Korea and that bilateral trade would proceed. He explained that the international community should move toward easing sanctions against North Korea and that the country is preparing to promote bilateral trade. Despite the hurdle of UN sanctions, he appealed that now is the time for Indonesian companies to come to Pyongyang and develop new trade and that the embassy will actively support business negotiations.

According to the Indonesian ambassador, many Indonesian food products and detergents enter North Korea and are popular among citizens. Against this background, the embassy set up a gallery of Indonesian products in the building and began active promotion in 2019.



source:<https://kemlu.go.id/pyongyang/en/news/1893/indonesian-embassy-in-pyongyang-establishes-the-first-indonesian-product-outlet-in-north-korea>

Indonesian products exhibition space set up inside the Embassy

Of course, the ambassador said that the current trade between the two countries is limited to third countries and through third parties, not direct trade, but he appealed for more active business exchanges in the future. According to data from Indonesia's Ministry of Commerce, exports to North Korea grew significantly in 2019. In terms of value, this was just over \$3 million in 2019, a nearly threefold increase compared to \$930,000 in 2018, when UN sanctions took effect. In 2015, it was approximately \$2.6 million. Imports from North Korea fell from \$5.5 million in 2016 to \$33,000 in 2018 and rose a bit in 2019 to just \$200,000. According to the company, the main imports from North Korea were minerals, chemicals, filament bulbs, and semiconductors.

During the term of the Widodo administration, in which Megawati is behind, she wants to take her father's legacy of relations with North Korea a step further with her own hands, according to a senior official within the PDI-P. The ambassador also understands the demand and is looking for an opportunity in the symbolism of the new Indonesian-North Korean relationship. In this context, one of the projects currently being explored by the Indonesian Embassy is the vision of importing North Korean Taedonggang beer and becoming a sales hub for the Oceania region.

There is also the idea that the Korean tiger and Indonesia's orangutan should be actively exchanged, just as the "Kim Il Sung flower" became a symbol of friendship between the two countries during the Sukarno era, and that a tiger and monkey should be the symbol of friendship for the new era.

In any case, it can be said that the motivation to deepen relations with North Korea is growing stronger at the core of the current Jokowi administration, and the diplomacy of hostility and isolation is not on its mind. How strong this is was also exposed in the "Aisha Incident." This famous case involved an assassination attempt on Kim Jong-nam in Malaysia in 2017, in which an Indonesian woman, Aisha, was tricked into complicity in the assassination by lying that she was helping with a TV prank project. The Vietnamese woman was also framed as the executor, and the government strongly protested North Korea to involve its own citizens. However, the Indonesian government remained silent and never publicly complained about North Korea. This opposing attitude from Vietnam shows how concerned Jakarta is about its relations with Pyongyang.

5. Conclusion

Why did Indonesia develop this kind of diplomacy with North Korea? Of course, there may be aspects of historical relations and personal preoccupation, as is generally explained. However, this also seems to reflect Indonesia's confidence as a nation that has now become a middle power. As UN sanctions continue and diplomacy with North Korea cools worldwide, Indonesia's nationalism seems to be at work to demonstrate that it can, in contrast, develop stronger diplomatic relations, thereby demonstrating its presence as a regional middle power, unlike other ASEAN countries that are buried in the tug-of-war between major powers. This is especially the case in Southeast Asia, where a US-China confrontation is occurring. As Southeast Asia is becoming a site of superpowers' contestation between the U.S. and China, the strategic identity of being able to "take its own line" satisfies Indonesia's nationalism, which has begun to pride itself as a middle power of the Global South. Indonesia's diplomacy with North Korea probably reflects contemporary nationalism and a newly developing identity as a leader of the Global South. This domestic dynamic cannot be seen from the institutional or normative perspectives of the Non-Aligned Movement and will continue to be an important aspect in understanding the direction of Indonesia's North Korean diplomacy.

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Friendship between North Korea and Mongolia: Friendly Relations between Neighbors of Different Regimes

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1. Introduction

Mongolia is one of the friendly neighbors of North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea: DPRK) in East Asia. During the Cold War era, when the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR, hereafter unified as Mongolia) was under the one-party dictatorship of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), North Korea also under the one-party dictatorship of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), was one of the friendly countries of the Eastern Bloc for Mongolia. However, North Korea maintained a one-party dictatorship after the Cold War, while Mongolia transitioned to a multi-party system. Nevertheless, friendly relations between the two countries have been maintained. How was this possible?

Diplomatic relations between Mongolia and North Korea were established on October 15, 1948, about a month after the founding of North Korea. Mongolia was the second country after the Soviet Union to establish diplomatic relations with North Korea. Mongolia sent a lot of horses to North Korea for reconstruction after the armistice in the Korean War and took in many North Korean war orphans. The Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed between the two countries in 1986, codifying that the two countries are important friends.

North Korea has maintained friendly relations with Mongolia, even though Mongolia transitioned to a multi-party system in 1990 after the end of the Cold War and dropped "People's Republic" from its name in 1992. The new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed between the two countries on August 8, 2002. It differs from the old Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed at the end of the Cold War.¹

Why do North Korea and Mongolia have a friendly relationship? The presence of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union greatly influenced the relationship between North Korea and Mongolia during the Cold War. Balázs Szalontai, a North Korean diplomatic historian, argues that even

¹ *Rodong Sinmun*, August 10, 2002 (Korean).

during the Cold War, North Korea and Mongolia had conflicts between the two countries because their bilateral relations were affected by the Sino-Soviet split.² OH Mi-young, a South Korean researcher on Mongolia, also argues that one of the reasons for the effective relationship between North Korea and Mongolia is that Mongolia, which is also in the Eastern Bloc, sent aid to North Korea during the Korean War and took in North Korean war orphans.³ However, these do not seem directly related to the post-Cold War friendship. Neither the Soviet Union nor the Eastern Bloc existed after the Cold War.

Post-Cold War studies of friendly relations between the two countries have focused on Mongolia's objectives in pursuing a policy of engagement with North Korea. Charles Krusekopf, Director of the American Center for Mongolian Studies, argues that Mongolia's objectives are economic interests, including the use of the Rajin Port in North Korea.⁴ Migeddorj Batchimeg, a senior researcher at the Institute for Strategic Studies of Mongolia, argued that Mongolia's objectives are not only its security and development but also to promote peaceful prosperity and economic cooperation in the region.⁵ Tjalling H.F. Halbertsma, an adviser to Prime Minister of Mongolia N. Enkhbayar, argued that Mongolia aims to build a "spearhead a regional security mechanism."⁶ Many commentators argue that Mongolia continues to engage with North Korea, seeking to cooperate on economic and security matters.

However, data show that the economic relationship between North Korea and Mongolia today is tenuous. Trade between the two countries is almost nonexistent compared to the Cold War period, and although the new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation states that the two countries should develop economic relations, little progress has been made. In addition, there is little confirmed security cooperation between North Korea and Mongolia. Defense delegations come and go, so there may be some defense cooperation, but it is probably minimal. The Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation also provides for disarmament cooperation but not defense cooperation. The economic and security objectives of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation alone cannot

² Balázs Szalontai, "Small-Power Diplomacy in Northeast Asia: Mongolian–North Korean Relations During the Cold War, 1948–1989," *North Korean Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (FALL 2016), pp. 45-63.

³ OH Mi-young, "North Korean War Orphans and Mongolia during the Korean War: Focusing on Data from the Mongolian Archives (한국전쟁 시기 북한 전쟁고아와 몽골: 몽골 문서보관소의 자료를 중심으로)," *North Korean Studies Review*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (January 2019) pp.269-297 (Korean).

⁴ Charles Krusekopf, "North Korea and Mongolia: A New Partnership for Two Old Friends?," *Asia Pacific Bulletin* (November 14, 2013), https://www.eastwestcenter.org/sites/default/files/private/apb240_0.pdf (Accessed on December 8, 2023).

⁵ Migeddorj Batchimeg, "Mongolia's DPRK Policy: Engaging North Korea," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (March/April 2006), pp.275-297.

⁶ Tjalling H.F. Halbertsma, "Mongolia and the DPRK at Sixty-Five: Ulaanbaatar's Changing Relations with Pyongyang," *North Korean Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (FALL 2014), pp.23-38.

explain why Mongolia has continued its post-Cold War policy of engagement with North Korea.

Moreover, since the establishment of diplomatic relations, the two countries have not maintained unchanged friendly relations. During the Sino-Soviet split and in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, relations between the two countries cooled at times when visits by dignitaries from North Korea and Mongolia were suspended due to their differing positions. However, unlike the Soviet Union and China, North Korea never publicly criticized Mongolia, even during the period of cooling relations. In this respect, North Korea's attitude toward the Soviet Union and China is different from its attitude toward Mongolia, even toward the same neighboring socialist country.

In this paper, I aim to clarify why North Korea and Mongolia were able to maintain friendly relations after the Cold War by examining how the two countries overcame the cooling period. This paper will add new material published since then to clarify how Mongolia and North Korea came out of the cooling period.

2. From the Conclusion of Diplomatic Relations to the Sino-Soviet split

Mongolia played a small role in the liberation of Korea from the Empire of Japan. Although Mongolian forces did not directly attack the Korean Peninsula, Mongolia declared war on the Empire of Japan on September 10, 1945, the day after the Soviet Union launched its invasion of Manchuria, and invaded Manchukuo and Inner Mongolia with an army of about 30,000 men against a population of about 750,000.⁷ The invasion of Manchuria by Soviet and Mongol troops was the precursor of the later deployment of the Soviet Red Army on the Korean peninsula.

In addition, Mongolia is North Korea's second diplomatic state after the Soviet Union. For Mongolia, North Korea is also the second state with which it has had diplomatic relations, except for a period when it had diplomatic relations with the Republic of China. Therefore, it is not surprising that the two countries have friendly relations.

The reality, however, is somewhat different. Mongolia and North Korea announced the establishment of diplomatic relations on October 8, 1948, and the two countries signed diplomatic relations on October 15.⁸ However, the establishment of diplomatic relations did not mean that high-level officials came and went between the two countries, but rather that diplomatic relations were established in Moscow. The relationship between the two countries was through the Soviet

⁷ Jamyang's Battor (Жамьянгийн Баттөр), *Mongolia-Korea relations of the 20th century Sub-book 1948-1961 (XX зууны Монгол Солонгосын харилцаа Дэд дэвтэр 1948-1961 он)*, (Ulaanbaatar: UB Admon 2004), p.55 (Mongolian).

⁸ *ibid.*

Union and was not considered mutually important. North Korea established diplomatic relations with Mongolia, which it considered a satellite state of the Soviet Union, and Mongolia established diplomatic relations with North Korea, which it considered a satellite state of the Soviet Union.

The dispatch of ambassadors was further delayed. It was not until 1951, amid the Korean War, that ambassadors were sent to each other. The first high-level Mongolian delegation to North Korea was in January 1953, during the Korean War, when C. Surenjav, Mongolia's first deputy prime minister, visited North Korea.⁹

During the Korean War, Mongolia helped North Korea. According to J. Lombo, Mongolia's ambassador to North Korea, Mongolia took in and raised 200 war orphans for seven years. It has continued to support North Korea. Mongolia sent 226,236 heads of livestock, 7,230 tons of meat and food, 129,000 cotton garments, 139 tons of medicine, and 6,204 tons of wheat to North Korea.¹⁰ Mongolian aid to North Korea during the Korean War is detailed in a study by OH Mi-young.¹¹ The DPRK Prime Minister KIM Il-sung visited Mongolia in July 1956, and Mongolian Prime Minister Y. Tsedenbal visited North Korea in October 1956. Friendly relations between the two countries continued into the 1960s.

In the 1960s, the relationship between the two countries changed. As Szalontai points out in his study of the conflict between North Korea and Mongolia through Hungarian diplomatic documents, relations between the two countries deteriorated as the Sino-Soviet split intensified in the 1960s. Szalontai points out that the differences in economic interests between the two countries limited economic relations between them.¹²

However, the impact of the deterioration of relations between the two countries on trade cannot be confirmed. Trade between North Korea and Mongolia during the Cold War period has only been published five-yearly since 1960 (Table 1). These trade figures show that even when relations between the two countries deteriorated due to the Sino-Soviet split, trade between the two countries gradually increased. This is an example of how conflicts between nations do not always affect trade. The difference is noticeable when we compare trade between Mongolia and China. During the Sino-Soviet split, Soviet pressure severely restricted trade between Mongolia

⁹ L. Khash-Erdene, ed., *70 Years of Relations between Mongolia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea* (몽골 조선민주주의인민공화국 관계 70 년), (Ulaanbaatar: "Monkhiin usug" HHK-d, 2018), p.120 (Korean).

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.278.

¹¹ OH Mi-young, "North Korean War," pp.269-297.

¹² Szalontai, "Small-Power Diplomacy," p.51.

and China, and from 1960 to 1970, trade between Mongolia and China decreased. It was not until 1980 that trade between Mongolia and China exceeded that between North Korea and Mongolia.¹³

Year	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980
North Korea	0.2	1.8	2.8	6.1	5.9
China	5.7	5.4	2.5	5.3	7.4

During the Sino-Soviet split, Mongolia, which the Soviet Union heavily influenced, had cooled its relations not only with China but also with North Korea. Therefore, it was unsurprising that trade between North Korea and Mongolia was severely restricted. But it was not as bad as the economies of China and Mongolia. Trade between North Korea and Mongolia continued, probably because it was not as alarmed as it was in China.

North Korea and Mongolia did not criticize each other during the Sino-Soviet split. However, it is also true that there was a cooling-off period during which high-level delegations did not come and go. According to N. Baasanjav, who served as Mongolia's ambassador to the DPRK, this period began in the 1970s. According to Baasanjav, the restoration of bilateral relations began with the exchange of party delegations in 1975.¹⁵ However, this is probably Baasanjav's subjective view.

A list of high-level delegations from both countries in the book published by North Korea and Mongolia in 2018 shows that Mongolia did not send a high-level delegation to North Korea between 1961 and 1975, while North Korea sent high-level delegations five times during that period. In the 1960s, however, North Korea sent a high-level delegation to Mongolia only once, in 1966, suggesting that relations between the two countries were cool in the 1960s. This indicates that the North Koreans were trying to encourage Mongolia to restore relations.¹⁶ According to the subjective view of North Korea, the cooling of relations between the two countries probably occurred in the 1960s, but no North Korean documents clearly show this.

¹³ Japan External Trade Organization Overseas Economic Information Center (日本貿易振興会海外経済情報センター), *Economic Overview of the DPRK, North Vietnam, and Mongolia [Supplement: The Economy of the DPRK]*(北朝鮮・北ベトナム・モンゴルの経済概観[附: 北朝鮮の経済]), (Tokyo: Japan External Trade Organization Overseas Economic Information Center), August 1974, p.27 (Japanese).

¹⁴ B.Batdavaa, et. al. eds., *Mongolia in 100 Years* (Ulaanbaatar: National Statistics office of Mongolia, 2021), p.365 (Mongolian / English).

¹⁵ L. Khash-Erdene, ed., *70 Years of Relations*, p.251.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp.12-123.

As relations between North Korea and the Soviet Union were restored in the 1980s, relations between North Korea and Mongolia became more active. In May 1984, KIM Il-sung visited the Soviet Union for the first time in 23 years. This led to a new relationship between North Korea and Mongolia. This was reflected in the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between North Korea and Mongolia signed during the visit of Mongolian Supreme Leader J. Batmönkh to the North Korea on November 18-21, 1986.

The "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the DPRK and the MPR" signed on November 21, 1986, was signed by KIM Il-sung, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the WPK and President of the DPRK on the North Korean side, and by Batmönkh, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the MPRP and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the State Great Khural of Mongolia.¹⁷ The text of the treaty was announced the next day, making it the most important treaty signed by the supreme leaders of both sides.

The content of the treaty is highly socialist ideological. The preamble of the treaty states, "The Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of Mongolia, recognizing that the further strengthening of friendship and unity and the expansion and development of cooperation based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism, respect for autonomy, full equality, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, comradely cooperation and mutual benefit are in the fundamental interests of the peoples of the two countries and will contribute to strengthening the unity and solidarity of the socialist countries, wishing to strengthen the common action of the socialist countries and all progressive and peace-loving forces in the world, including the international communist movement, the non-aligned movement and the national liberation movement, and to make a positive contribution to the prevention and defeat of imperialist aggression and war policies and to the maintenance of peace and security in Asia and the world, have decided to conclude the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and have agreed as follows."¹⁸ Both the Soviet Union and Mongolia had already begun to move toward de-socialization, and the North Korean side's wariness of such a move may have been reflected in the treaty.

Article 3 of the treaty stipulates the development of coordination and cooperation in various areas of social life, including economics, science, technology, culture, and education, with no explicit mention of defense cooperation. North Korea and Mongolia did not expect each other to cooperate in national defense. North Korea and Mongolia signed the treaty to develop friendly relations

¹⁷ *Rodong Sinmun*, November 22, 1986.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

between the socialist countries.

From June 28 to July 1, 1988, KIM Il-sung visited Mongolia for the first time in 32 years. At that time, KIM Il-sung told Batmönkh, “Among the socialist states in Northeast Asia, with the exception of our two countries, the rest are all large countries. The Soviet Union is a superpower; China is a big power, too. Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia are Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, we (North Korea and Mongolia) should keep a close relationship.”¹⁹

This story of KIM Il-sung is only documented on the Mongolian side and not reported on the North Korean side. However, KIM Il-sung's idea that North Korea and Mongolia must maintain friendly relations because they are small socialist states in Northeast Asia is a possible story given North Korea's foreign policy at the time, which was to establish friendly relations with several non-aligned countries in Asia and Africa in an attempt to eliminate as much of the influence of the great powers as possible. It was recognized that North Korea and Mongolia were small countries with little influence on each other and, therefore, needed to maintain friendly relations.

3. Relations between North Korea and Mongolia after the Cold War

After the end of the Cold War in 1989, on March 15, 1990, the Central Committee of the MPRP renewed its Politburo and decided to abandon its one-party dictatorship. North Korea, which maintained a one-party dictatorship, would have been alarmed by Mongolia. In addition, Mongolia established diplomatic relations with South Korea on March 26. However, despite North Korea's criticism of the Soviet Union when the Soviet Union normalized diplomatic relations with South Korea on September 30, North Korea did not criticize Mongolia. For North Korea, the Soviet Union and Mongolia were of different importance.

On January 11, 1992, the State Great Khural of Mongolia changed the country's name from the MPR to Mongolia.²⁰ Mongolia made it clear that it was breaking with socialism. North Korea, however, did not criticize Mongolia. For North Korea, Mongolia was just a friendly but uninvolved neighbor. When the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations with South Korea, North Korea was in danger of losing its nuclear umbrella. However, whether Mongolia established diplomatic relations with South Korea or renounced socialism, the impact on North

¹⁹ Migneddorj Batchimeg, “Mongolia's DPRK Policy: Engaging North Korea,” *Asian Survey*, Vol.46, No.2 (March/April 2006), pp.278. It is a quote from archive documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Mongolia, as cited in Demberel, “Kim Ir Sen ba Mongol,” p.5.

²⁰ *Asahi Shimbun*, January 12, 1992 (Japanese).

Korea was minimal.

However, according to Udo B. Barkmann, in 1995, Mongolia abrogated the 'Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation' concluded in 1986 because it no longer corresponded to the existing legal framework in Mongolia with the adoption of the new Mongolian Basic Law (1992) and the new foreign policy and security concept (1994).²¹

Indeed, the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, based on Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism, was inconvenient for Mongolia, which had abandoned socialism. However, as the treaty is valid for 20 years, Mongolia's abrogation of it is a clear violation of the treaty. Mongolia did not seek to break off relations with North Korea; rather, it sought to conclude the new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with North Korea.

According to Barkmann, Mongolia's proposal to negotiate the new treaty was not taken up because North Korea was incapable of acting at the time. KIM Il-sung died in 1994. His son, KIM Jong-il, took over the government only after a three-year mourning period. This long period of mourning paralyzed the North Korean state apparatus in many segments, including foreign relations and Mongolian-North Korean relations.²² After the death of KIM Il-sung in 1994, North Korea's diplomatic function was paralyzed, and it could not accept the Mongolian proposal.

In December 1996, the Mongolian government informed the North Korean government that it would expel the third secretary of the DPRK embassy in Mongolia by December 31 for using counterfeit US dollar notes, but this did not affect relations between North Korea and Mongolia.²³ On 25 August 1999, North Korea notified the Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that it was closing the DPRK Embassy in Mongolia.²⁴ During the 1990s, North Korea closed several embassies, including one in Mongolia, due to financial difficulties. However, some argue that the closure of the DPRK embassy in Mongolia was not solely due to economic problems. It is said to be due to that President N. Bagabandi expressed support for the South Korean 'Sunshine Policy' during a summit meeting on 31 May 1999, when South Korean President KIM Dae-jung visited Mongolia.²⁵ In this regard, no evidence suggests that relations between North Korea and Mongolia have deteriorated. In November 1999, the Mongolian Prime Minister, R. Amarjargal,

²¹ Udo B. Barkmann (Удо Б. Баркманн), "Relations between Mongolia and North Korea 1948-2003," *Baabar.mn*, <http://baabar.mn/article/relations-between-mongolia-and-north-korea-1948-2003> (Accessed on December 29, 2023).

²² *ibid.*

²³ *Mainichi Shimbun*, December 29, 1996 (Japanese).

²⁴ *Mainichi Shimbun*, September 18, 1999.

²⁵ *Asahi Shimbun*, November 2, 1999.

visited North Korea.

On August 8, 2002, North Korea signed a new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Mongolia, which had been proposed by Mongolia. The DPRK Foreign Minister PAEK Nam-sun visited Mongolia to sign the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. The signatories were PAEK Nam-sun, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK, and L. Erdenechuluun, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia.²⁶

While the text of the old Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed between the Supreme Leaders was immediately reported, the text of the new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs was not reported. It was not until the book was published in Mongolia that the text of the treaty became known.

The new treaty's content is based on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. The preamble of the treaty states, "Mongolia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, wishing to strengthen the legal basis for expanding and developing the traditional friendly and cooperative relations, recognizing that the development of friendly and cooperative relations between the two countries is in the fundamental interests of the two peoples and will contribute to peace, security, progress and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region, to develop relations of goodwill and cooperation between the two countries, based on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, have agreed as follows."²⁷ The socialist ideological part of the old treaty was removed, and the new treaty emphasized the UN Charter and defined the two countries as having a traditional relationship. Moreover, this treaty does not modify the old Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. It is defined as having been entered into for the first time in 2002.

North Korea has also reopened the closed the DPRK embassy in Mongolia. The two countries agreed to reopen the embassy during a visit to North Korea by Mongolian Foreign Minister N. Enkhbayar on November 19-20, 2003.²⁸ On November 20, an agreement was signed on Mongolia's aid to North Korea. This marked the beginning of a new development in relations between the two countries.²⁹ The North Korean embassy in Mongolia was reopened in August 2004. However, North Korea did not construct a new building; instead, it used the former Japanese embassy building.³⁰

²⁶ *Rodong Sinmun*, August 10, 2002.

²⁷ L. Khash-Erdene, ed., *70 Years of Relations*, pp.210-212.

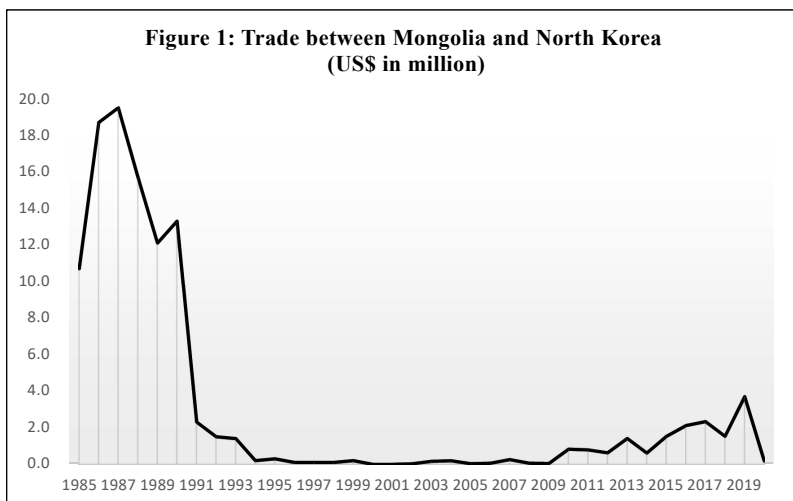
²⁸ *Asahi Shimbun*, November 22, 2003.

²⁹ *Rodong Sinmun*, November 22, 2003.

³⁰ *Sankei Shimbun*, September 5, 2007 (Japanese).

The signing of the new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation did not lead to a steady development of friendly relations between North Korea and Mongolia. At least the positive effect on trade cannot be confirmed. We know the annual trade volume between North Korea and Mongolia since 1985. After 1991, the trade between the two countries was very different from that before 1990 and has almost disappeared. After March 31, 1991, when the Agreement on Trade and Payments between Mongolia and North Korea was signed, trade settlements shifted to hard currency.³¹ As a result, trade between Mongolia and North Korea has declined sharply since 1991. The trade volume in 1991 was only about 17% of that in 1990. The trade volume continued to decline, and by 2000, it had almost disappeared. This remained the case even after the signing of the New Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 2002 (Figure 1).

The volume of trade began to increase somewhat in the second half of the 2010s. This is probably related to the fact that North Korea's economy began to develop. However, since the beginning of the 2020s, the border has been closed due to quarantine measures for the novel coronavirus strain, and it has returned to the level of the 2000s.



³¹ *Rodong Sinmun*, April 1, 1991.

1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
10.7	18.7	19.5	15.7	12.1	13.3	2.3	1.5	1.4	0.2	0.3	0.1
1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
0.1	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.1
2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
0.0	0.8	0.8	0.6	1.4	0.6	1.5	2.1	2.3	1.5	3.7	0.2

What would develop with the signing of the new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation would be political exchanges. Until Mongolia established a multiparty system, the key relationship between North Korea and Mongolia was the exchange of their supreme leaders, the exchange of the WPK and the MPRP, the dominant party in both countries.

After Mongolia moved to a multiparty system, state relations became more important than party relations. The interaction of state representatives became more important than the party's supreme leader. In Mongolia, the president has been the state's representative since P. Ochirbat took office on September 4, 1990, after the constitutional amendment of May 10, 1990, introduced a presidential system and a multi-party system.

In North Korea, the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly has represented the state since the constitutional amendment of September 5, 1998 (the President of the State Affairs Commission has also represented the state since the constitutional amendment of April 11, 2019). Since then, the exchange between the leaders of North Korea and Mongolia has been between the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK and the President of Mongolia.

When Mongolian President N. Bagabandi visited North Korea from December 21-22, 2002; he was received by KIM Yong-nam, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK. KIM Yong-nam visited Mongolia from July 20 to July 23, 2007; he was received by President N. Enkhbayar.

When T. Elbegdorj, President of Mongolia, visited North Korea from October 28 to 31, 2013, he

³² National Statistics office of Mongolia, *Mongolian Statistical Yearbook 1997*, (Ulaanbaatar: National Statistics office of Mongolia, 1998), pp.210-211 (Mongolian / English); National Statistics office of Mongolia, *"Mongolia in a Market System" Statistical Yearbook 1989-2002*, (Ulaanbaatar: National Statistics office of Mongolia, 1998), p.221 (Mongolian / English); UN Comtrade, <https://comtradeplus.un.org>, (Accessed on December 8, 2023).

was received by KIM Yong-nam. However, since Elbegdorj's visit to North Korea was the first by a foreign leader since KIM Jong-un became the supreme leader of the WPK, there were expectations in South Korea that he might have a meeting with KIM Jong-un.³³

The South Korean expectations were disappointed. T. Elbegdorj returned home without meeting KIM Jong-un. On October 31, the last day of his visit, T. Elbegdorj gave a speech at the Kim Il Sung University, which the Mongolian presidential office published on its website on November 15. It included the sentence, "No tyranny lasts forever." This sentence led to speculations that T. Elbegdorj could not meet KIM Jong-un because of this sentence.³⁴

However, it is an exaggerated expectation. Since T. Elbegdorj visited North Korea at the invitation of KIM Yong-nam, he had no reason to meet with KIM Jong-un. The speech at Kim Il Sung University was given just before his return to North Korea, and it is an unreasonable explanation that he could not meet with KIM Jong-un because of the content of the speech. The Korean version of this speech is included in "70 Years of Mongolia-Korea Relations," which was jointly produced by North Korea and Mongolia, which shows that it is not considered a problem in North Korea.³⁵ On the occasion of T. Elbegdorj's visit to North Korea, North Korea treated its relations with Mongolia not as party diplomacy but as government-to-government diplomacy, as it has been doing since 2002.

To begin with, KIM Jong-un was legally in a position to represent the executive branch, but not the state. KIM Jong-un only became a state representative after he was promoted to the position of the President of the State Affairs Commission, which was newly empowered to represent the state through a constitutional amendment on April 11, 2019. The foreign heads of state that KIM Jong-un has met with since becoming Supreme Leader on April 11, 2019, are the President of China, the President of the United States, the President of Cuba, and the President of Vietnam. As for Singapore, he met with the prime minister as a executive branch representative, but not with the president as head of state. China, Cuba, and Vietnam are socialist countries with one-party dictatorships, where party diplomacy is more important than government-to-government diplomacy. There are no diplomatic relations with the United States.

The first foreign head of state KIM Jong-un met with was Russian President Vladimir Putin. This was KIM Jong-un's first meeting with President Putin. KIM Jong-un met with President Putin after he had the authority to represent the state. During the period when he was not a representative

³³ *Chosun Ilbo*, October 29, 2013 (Korean).

³⁴ *Chosun Ilbo*, November 16, 2013.

³⁵ L. Khash-Erdene, ed., *70 Years of Relations*, pp.196-201.

of the state, KIM Jong-un avoided meeting with the Russian and Mongolian presidents. In this sense, North Korea treats Mongolia, like Russia, as a traditional friendly country with neighborly diplomatic relations.

4. Conclusion

Today, North Korea and Mongolia are considered traditional friends. They were the second countries to establish diplomatic relations, and Mongolia supported North Korea during the Korean War. However, it is difficult to say that such traditions have maintained friendly relations between the two countries.

The relationship between North Korea and Mongolia was linked in the Eastern Bloc, with the Soviet Union at the center. During the Cold War, the relationship between North Korea and Mongolia was an ideological relationship in which party diplomacy took precedence as a socialist state with a one-party dictatorship. Thus, the Sino-Soviet split cooled relations between North Korea, which had deteriorated relations with the Soviet Union, and Mongolia, which had deep ties with the Soviet Union. However, since neither side publicly criticized the other and there was little caution, there was not much difficulty in repairing the relationship. After North Korea made peace with the Soviet Union, relations with Mongolia developed further. The fruit of this relationship was the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.

Moreover, the cooling of relations between North Korea and Mongolia did not affect trade. This can be seen by comparing trade between China and Mongolia. Trade between North Korea and Mongolia was largely unaffected by politics.

However, after the Cold War, when Mongolia changed from a one-party dictatorship to a multi-party system and abandoned socialism, the Soviet Union and socialism became useless in the friendly relations between North Korea and Mongolia. Moreover, Mongolia, after abandoning socialism, tried to abrogate the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1995, which had a strong socialist ideology. However, North Korea, whose diplomacy had ceased to function after the death of Kim Il-sung, did not comply. In addition, North Korea closed its embassy in Mongolia in 1999. However, this post-Cold War cooling-off period between North Korea and Mongolia seems to have been caused by North Korea's financial difficulties and the decline of government functions due to the death of KIM Il-sung rather than a political confrontation.

In August 2002, North Korea and Mongolia signed the new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which excluded socialist ideology. This was a clear sign of the transition from party diplomacy to government-to-government diplomacy after the Cold War. Since then, the president has visited

North Korea as a representative of the Mongolian state, and the chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly has visited Mongolia as a representative of the North Korean state, the DPRK. Exchanges by state representatives were considered more important than those by party representatives. Nevertheless, state-to-state relations have not affected trade. The signing of the new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation did not increase defense cooperation or trade.

The relationship between North Korea and Mongolia was an ideological one during the Cold War, when, as a one-party socialist state, party diplomacy took precedence. After the Cold War, however, the relationship became that of normal, friendly neighbor and government-to-government diplomacy. Nevertheless, they have never been at odds and have maintained friendly relations because they are both small countries. In the case of Russia and China, even though they are neighbors, they are often at odds with each other because of their significant influence. However, Mongolia and North Korea, which are small neighboring countries, have little influence over each other and do not criticize each other. That is why they have been able to maintain friendly relations.

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Re-militarized Myanmar and Diplomatic Relations with North Korea

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1. Introduction

Myanmar underwent a decade-long period of democratization and economic reform from April 2011 to January 2021, marking an extraordinary phase in its political history. Plagued by violent conflicts following its independence in 1948, Myanmar's government has grappled with state-building, national integration, and economic development challenges. Nevertheless, this era of reform or "transition" from 2011 witnessed tangible strides in democratic advancements, economic prosperity, and diplomatic opening. However, this trajectory was abruptly disrupted when the Myanmar armed forces invoked Article 417 of the 2008 Constitution, declared a State of Emergency on February 1, 2021, and assumed control of state powers. This juncture arguably heralded Myanmar's departure from its reform course towards re-authoritarianisation led by the armed forces. To make a worse assumption, there is even a risk of state failure due to the further escalation of violent conflicts.

Three years after the coup, the current military junta, the State Administration Council (SAC), has failed to bring stability to society. The resistance forces, consisting of pro-democracy groups like the National Unity Government (NUG) and local young revolutionists, and several ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) fighting for revolutionary change of the political regime to create a new federal democratic government, are gradually expanding their ruling areas, if not to the point of dominance. Consequently, the protracted armed conflicts have engendered socioeconomic stagnation, exacerbating prevailing pessimism regarding Myanmar's future to come¹.

Myanmar's foreign relations have also reached a turning point in 2021. After the military coup, Western powers such as the United States, United Kingdom, and the European Union turned to pressure diplomacy by imposing targeted sanctions, and other liberal countries like as Japan, South Korea and Australia changed their conventional Myanmar policies. Despite the varying levels of pressure, the constructive relations with liberal countries that existed in the 2010s are

¹ For the latest economic developments, see (Edwards et.al., 2024)

unlikely to be restored in the foreseeable future. Instead, emerging authoritarian powers like China and Russia are making advances once again. As global great power rivalry intensifies, Myanmar's military junta is aligning diplomatically with factions that sometimes aggressively challenge the status quo of the international order. Given the circumstances, Myanmar's junta sees bandwagoning as its inevitable course of action.

Despite severe state suppression and of the escalating violent conflict since the coup, it remains unlikely that the Myanmar armed forces will make any compromises with the resistance forces. Reflecting on the reforms and their consequences in Myanmar following the 2011 transition, it is clear that international efforts create a democratic Myanmar have failed with tragic consequences. Will the failed transition in Myanmar lead the country back to the days of the previous junta which lasted from 1988 to early 2011? This paper examines whether Myanmar is reverting to the days of the previous junta, which lasted from 1988 to early 2011. The focus is on Myanmar's relationship with North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea: DPRK). The author argues that the current Myanmar junta has serious shortcomings in domestic governance and is unlikely to establish diplomatic and military ties with North Korea, another "pariah state", at least in the short term.

2. Myanmar and North Korea

Diplomatic relations between Myanmar and North Korea have followed a fluctuating path over time. Myanmar aligned with South Korea during the Korean War in compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution No.84, which condemned North Korea's invasion into South Korea and supported South Korea in 1950.² However, in the 1960s, the ascendancy of the socialist military regime under General Ne Win supplanted a civilian government, fostering a burgeoning rapport between Ne Win and Kim Il Sung. Notably, in 1980, Ne Win, then president, participated in the 6th Party Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) alongside a delegation from the dominant party, the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). Despite Ne Win's implementation of socialist policies, including the establishment of a one-party system, the nationalization of private capitals and lands, and the adoption of a planned economy, his diplomatic stance remained non-aligned and neutral, which had been taken over from the previous administration with a little rearrangement. The rearrangement is to maintain amicable ties with both Western and Eastern blocs while preserving a certain degree of aloofness, Ne Win's approach can be construed as emblematic of a strategy of passive detachment.

² UN. Security Council. "Resolution 84 (1950) [adopted by the Security Council at its 476th meeting], of 7 July 1950." (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/112027?ln=en>) (Jan 31, 2024)

In 1966 Ne Win became the first Myanmar leader to visit the United States. President Lyndon Johnson articulated in his welcome remarks, "Our goal in Southeast Asia is a very simple one. We want the countries in that area to have the opportunity to develop in peace. We want them to be able to prosper free from outside interference or aggression."³ This statement suggests that Myanmar's foreign policy effectively diverted U.S. attention away from aggressive anti-communism by carefully managing its relations with the communist bloc while avoiding antagonism toward the Western powers (Clymer 2016). This strategic approach reflects the diplomatic maneuvering of a small Southeast Asian nation confronting significant external intervention from global powers. Consequently, the enhancement of relations with North Korea did not entail the cessation of diplomatic ties with South Korea; in 1975, Myanmar established formal diplomatic relations with South Korea. Notably, South Korea was governed by a military regime at the time, and its homogeneity likely contributed to the fostering of amicable relations.

However, only eight years later, the parallel relationship between North and South Korea became untenable. In 1983, South Korean President Jeon Doo-hwan embarked on the first official visit to Myanmar as a South Korean head of state. During the visit, it was planned to pay homage on October 9 at the Martyrs' Mausoleum in Yangon. North Korean secret agents, having acquired intelligence regarding the visit, clandestinely planted a remote-controlled explosive device at the mausoleum two days prior to assassinate President Jeon Doo-hwan. Nonetheless, on the morning of October 9, the president's delayed arrival at the Martyrs' Mausoleum. The North Korean agents mistakenly identified another vehicle as the president's, prompting one of the guards to commence a musical performance, which inadvertently triggered the detonation of the bomb. While the president himself escaped harm, the explosion resulted in the deaths of seventeen South Korean government officials, including four cabinet members and the South Korean deputy prime minister, who had already assembled at the mausoleum, alongside four Burmese cabinet members and government officials. In response to this egregious incident, the Myanmar government severed diplomatic ties with North Korea.

Diplomatic relations were informally rekindled after approximately a decade, during the early 1990s, as North Korea, grappling with acute food shortages, aligned with the interests of Myanmar's military junta, which sought to modernize its armed forces. This convergence led to a bilateral barter trade arrangement, wherein Myanmar exported commodities such as rice, rubber, and timber to North Korea in exchange for weaponry and military technical assistance. Notably, North Korean military personnel reportedly aided in the construction of military tunnels in

³ "Remarks of Welcome at the White House to General Ne Win, Chairman of the Revolutionary Council of the Union of Burma" September 8, 1966 (<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-welcome-the-white-house-general-ne-win-chairman-the-revolutionary-council-the>) (February 7, 2024)

Myanmar's capital, Nay Pyi Taw, during the early 2000s. The precise nature and intricacies of these exchanges remain shrouded in ambiguity, a fact that is hardly surprising given the clandestine nature of such arrangements.

At that juncture, North Korea had terminated the moratorium on its nuclear program, which had been agreed upon in 1994, and resumed operations at its nuclear facilities in 2002. Subsequently, in 2003, North Korea announced its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), prompting the convening of the Six-Party Talks involving Japan, the United States, South Korea, China, Russia, and North Korea. Despite diplomatic efforts to address North Korea's repeated violations of agreements, the country persisted in conducting nuclear tests, prompting the United Nations Security Council to pass resolutions imposing sanctions on North Korea. Concurrently, Myanmar experienced a gradual escalation of sanctions, primarily spearheaded by the United States. Notably, in 2003, comprehensive sanctions were imposed following the reinstatement of house arrest on Aung San Suu Kyi, encompassing import/export embargoes and financial restrictions.

Despite the impediments posed by the international order, Myanmar and North Korea found common ground, leading to the reinstatement of diplomatic relations in 2007. In the subsequent year, General Thura Shwe Man, the Joint Chiefs of Staff of Myanmar's armed forces and the anticipated successor to General Than Shwe, visited Pyongyang. During this visit, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the two military entities, outlining cooperation in developing solid-fueled medium-range ballistic missiles and tunnel construction⁴. In 2009, North Korean cargo vessels, namely the "Tumangan" and the "Kang Nam 1," made port calls at Thilawa near Yangon. This resurgence in diplomatic ties between Myanmar and North Korea sparked apprehensions regarding Myanmar's nuclear ambitions.

This growing nuclear suspicion led U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to express concern about cooperation in nuclear development between the two countries in July 2009.⁵ Notably, during the early 2000s, a significant number of Myanmar military engineers pursued studies at Russian universities, exacerbating suspicions of nuclear ambitions. Furthermore, media reports suggested not only the existence of intentions to develop nuclear armaments but also the presence of concrete facilities and nuclear materials within Myanmar, purportedly corroborated by

⁴ Aung Zaw (2009) "Burma's Secret Mission to North Korea" *Irrawaddy*. Vol.17, No.4.

⁵ Glenn Kessler, "Clinton: U.S. Wary of Growing Burmese, North Korean Military Cooperation," *The Washington Post*, July 21, 2009.

testimonies from defected former military officers.⁶ Despite the apparent technological limitations of the Myanmar armed forces, the immediate feasibility of nuclear development appeared relatively low. However, suspicions persisted due to allegations of external support, compounded by the perceived lack of transparency and trustworthiness of the military regime, which was previously branded as the "outpost of tyranny" during the George W. Bush administration.⁷ Consequently, suspicions surrounding Myanmar's nuclear activities remained unabated.

3. Myanmar's transition and its diplomatic impact

Myanmar's foreign policy underwent a profound transformation following the assumption of power by Thein Sein's administration newly formed in 2011, marked notably by a shift towards closer alignment with the West and a corresponding reduction in reliance on China. The new administration actively sought the engagement of the United States, recognizing the potential for economic development through the relaxation of U.S. economic sanctions while simultaneously endeavoring to lessen political and economic dependence on China. The government embarked on a series of measures aimed at fostering domestic reconciliation and demonstrating a willingness to compromise with the United States, exemplified by the successive pardons of political prisoners, including former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt and prominent 1988 student movement leader Min Ko Naing, on January 13, 2012.

This strategic posture of diplomatic balancing was further exemplified by the decision made on September 30, 2011, to suspend the construction of the Myitsone Dam, a joint project with the China Power Investment Corporation (CPI) located close to the Chinese border of Kachin State along the upper Ayeyarwady River. During U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to Myanmar in December 2011, President Thein Sein underscored the importance of peace, stability, economic growth, and human resource development in the democratization process, emphasizing the necessity of U.S. assistance in achieving these objectives.⁸ Furthermore, he addressed U.S. concerns regarding nuclear issues, affirming Myanmar's commitment to compliance with Security

⁶ "Burma's Nuclear Secrets", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 1, 2009 (<http://www.smh.com.au/world/burmax2019s-nuclear-secrets-20090731-e4fv.html>) (Feb 4, 2024); Desmond Ball, "Burma's Nuclear Programs: The Defectors' Story," *Security Challenges*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Summer 2009). (<http://www.securitychallenges.org.au/ArticlePages/vol5no4Ball.html>) (Feb 4, 2024)

⁷ "Rice targets 6 'outposts of tyranny' *The Washington Times*, 19 January 2005 (<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2005/jan/19/20050119-120236-9054r/>) (Feb 1, 2024).

⁸ *New Light of Myanmar*, December 2, 2011

Council Resolutions 1718 and 1784 pertaining to nuclear nonproliferation, in addition to other measures aimed at dispelling suspicions regarding the country's nuclear capabilities.

Still, in 2012, the Directorate of Defense Industries of the Ministry of Defense of Myanmar was added to the U.S. sanctions list due to its technical collaboration with North Korea, despite which military relations between Myanmar and North Korea persisted. In August 2012, North Korea attempted to illicitly export goods to Myanmar, contravening UN Security Council sanctions, prompting Japan, at the behest of the United States, to intercept the shipment. As reported by *Asahi Shinbun*, the intercepted items comprised "15 aluminum alloy bars stamped with 'DPRK,' denoting North Korea, along with approximately 50 metal tubes measuring 5 meters in length and 9 centimeters in diameter."⁹ Notably, the UN Panel of Experts concluded that the materials were not uranium. However, Katsuhisa Furukawa, a member of the UN Panel of Experts at the time, observed that many of the alloys appeared unsuitable for sale and were rendered unusable (Furukawa 2017: 1501/6067).

The Myanmar armed forces' "Defense White Paper," released for the first time in 2015, also espoused support for the abolition of nuclear weapons (The Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2015: Ch.7). Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing's frequent references to the concept of a "standard army" in his speeches alluded to the military's transition from an army-centric formation towards bolstering its air force and naval capabilities. Upon the establishment of the Aung San Suu Kyi administration in 2016, Myanmar became a signatory to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Concurrently, between 2016 and 2017, the Security Council adopted six resolutions imposing sanctions on North Korea, thereby escalating pressure on Myanmar-North Korea relations. In 2018, the Myanmar government decided to repatriate the North Korean ambassador. While formal military relations appear to have been maintained since then, the extent of engagement seems limited, with North Korean military officers primarily involved in teaching Korean language courses at Myanmar military training school, Defence Services Academy. Consequently, there is currently no discernible inclination for the resurgence of previous nuclear-related suspicions.

4. Uncertain diplomacy in the post-coup period

The February 1, 2021 coup d'état heralded a seismic shift in Myanmar's political landscape. The erstwhile dichotomy between a robust military dictatorship and a non-violent democratic

⁹ *Asahi Shinbun*, November 24, 2012 (<http://www.asahi.com/special/08001/TKY201211230786.html>) (February 9, 2024)

movement, epitomized by the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi, has been upended. Presently, the military regime, experiencing a waning capacity for governance, finds itself embroiled in conflict with a burgeoning resistance movement, wherein armed struggle has assumed a prominent role. While elements of the resistance encompass segments of the democratization movement, it concurrently comprises disparate factions united in their endeavor to disrupt the established state apparatus. A smooth transition is deemed improbable under prevailing circumstances.

Looking at the diplomatic front, multiple approaches have dealt with the Myanmar problem without effect. Immediately after the coup, the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union, and some other countries imposed targeted sanctions on Myanmar armed forces leaders, army units, defense ministry departments, military-affiliated companies, some state-run companies, and political and commercial entities. Myanmar government assets at the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank were also frozen. While this is meant to limit the military junta's return to the international community, it has not changed the armed forces' behavior. ASEAN, which has been trying to engage rather than exert pressure, also reached a "five-point agreement" with the Myanmar armed forces at the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting immediately after the coup. Still, progress since then has been extremely slow. As a result, SAC leaders have not been allowed to attend the ASEAN Summit and the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting to date, and ASEAN's approach has been a mixture of pressure and engagement. It appears that neighboring countries such as China, Thailand, and India are cautiously accepting SAC to avoid further political confusion that could undermine border control.

What lies ahead for the relationship between Myanmar and North Korea in the post-coup situation? It is unlikely that we will witness a resurgence of the close ties that characterized their relationship during the former military regime, at least not in the immediate future. This is primarily due to the current constraints the Myanmar armed forces face, which preclude considerations of external security matters. The stability of the former military junta contrasts starkly with the current one operating under SAC. Despite its coercive tactics, the SAC has struggled to establish governance stability. While the armed forces swiftly quashed resistance during the 1988 pro-democracy movement in less than two weeks, it now faces sustained civil resistance even three years after the 2021 coup. Moreover, the military's authority over border regions such as northern Shan State, Kayah State, northern Rakhine State, and Chin State has diminished. As a fragile state, Myanmar lacks the capacity for sustained investment in capital and technology for weapons development. To address domestic threats, the country requires heavy weaponry for close combat and additional resources for close air support, such as fighter jets.

In the long term, geopolitical dynamics may gradually revert to a semblance of those observed during the former military regime. Myanmar's engagement with North Korea and its purported nuclear program commenced in the late 1990s, a period marked by mutual international isolation and authoritarian regimes demonstrating antipathy towards the West. Subsequently, Myanmar made strides towards enhancing relations with the West during the 2010s. However, following political upheavals, military control was reinstated, accompanied by a resurgence of anti-Western ideology. From an objective standpoint, inter-state security tensions in Southeast Asia are comparatively lower than those in East Asia. Southeast Asia is instead poised for future economic growth amidst political stability and prosperous population.

Nonetheless, tendencies toward paranoia may be ingrained within Myanmar's military leaders. Just as Myanmar's military leadership once perceived threats to national sovereignty in response to U.S. military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, there exists the possibility of a heightened self-centric perception of threat. In such a scenario, it is conceivable that military ties with North Korea could intensify. Nevertheless, the trade in supplies remains constrained due to the inherent risks associated with maritime shipping under the sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council. The Myanmar armed forces' fundamental diplomatic strategy will likely involve procuring weaponry from Russia while concurrently cultivating amicable ties with China. Furthermore, there will be concerted efforts to enhance cooperation, particularly in the realm of naval operations, with the militaries of India and Bangladesh, which share mutual interests in the security of the Indian Ocean, all the while emphasizing economic development. Initially eschewing relations with Western powers, the junta aims to strike a delicate equilibrium with emerging global powers. However, effective diplomacy hinges upon internal stability. In the interim, the military junta's primary focus will be on fortifying its domestic rule, although the efficacy of this endeavor remains uncertain.

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The Philippines - North Korea Relations: From the Perspective of the Philippine Security

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Introduction

Since gaining independence in 1946, the Philippines had been aligned with the United States or part of the Western bloc, opposite North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea: DPRK). However, from the late 1980s, there were attempts to improve relations between the Philippines and North Korea, and in the year 2000, diplomatic relations between both countries were established. Although the Philippines was the last among Southeast Asian nations to establish diplomatic relations with North Korea, by the mid-2010s, the Philippines briefly ranked among the top countries engaging in trade with North Korea. However, trade relations declined rapidly afterward and have since stagnated.

What factors influenced the evolution of relations between the two countries? How can the relationship between the Philippines and North Korea be perceived? This article aims to explore these questions by examining the process of establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries that accelerated in the late 1980s and its before and after, particularly in the context of elements related to Philippine security that became pivotal in the negotiation process.

1. Historical Background

As an ally of the United States

From 1898 to 1946, excluding the period of Japanese occupation, the Philippines was under American colonial rule. Even after gaining independence, the Philippines continued to host one of the largest U.S. military bases in Asia. Under such circumstances, the division of roles in the security field persisted, with the United States overseeing the Philippines' external security, while internal security was the responsibility of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Because of this historical background, the influence of the United States remains strong in the diplomatic and

security domains in the Philippines.

During the Korean War that erupted in 1950, the Philippines, as an ally of the United States, deployed the Philippine Expeditionary Force to Korea (PEFTOK) as part of the United Nations forces. In 1954, the Philippines joined the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), which was established under the leadership of the U.S. The Philippines also contributed its military forces to the Vietnam War on the side of the United States. Domestically, continuous counterinsurgency operations have been conducted against communist insurgent forces engaged in armed struggle.

Since gaining independence, the Philippines has consistently maintained a strong anti-communist stance within the context of the Cold War, positioning itself diametrically opposite to North Korea.

Improvement of relations with Eastern Bloc countries

Since the establishment of the Ferdinand Marcos administration in 1965, the Philippines has pursued an independent foreign policy aimed at moving away from a strong U.S. influence and diversifying its external relations. This involved strategies like forging closer ties with Middle Eastern countries and strengthening cooperation within ASEAN. Especially, the ultimate goal was the normalization of relations with socialist countries. The objective was to leverage the diversification of external relations for the diversification and expansion of trade, and contribute to the president's economic development plan, an approach referred to as "development diplomacy."¹

President Marcos articulated a policy in the late 1960s to normalize relations with socialist countries. As the 1970s began, diplomatic ties were established with several socialist nations. In June 1975, diplomatic relations were established with China, and in June 1976 with the Soviet Union. Within this context, the prospect of establishing diplomatic relations with North Korea emerged.

In 1979, the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Philippines revealed that he had received proposals for visits from North Korea in May and July of the same year.² Furthermore, in October of that year, President Marcos disclosed that there were ongoing contacts between the two governments

¹ Richard Kessler, *Development diplomacy: The making of Philippine foreign policy under Ferdinand E. Marcos*, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (Tufts University), 1986.

² *Asahi Shinbun*, July 10, 1979. (Japanese)

and expressed his intention to recognize North Korea.³

However, suspicions of North Korea supporting communist insurgency within the Philippines and the political turmoil, as well as political regime change in the Philippines, hindered progress toward establishing diplomatic relations. While many Southeast Asian countries established diplomatic ties with North Korea in the 1970s, the Philippines was slower in normalizing relations compared to other Southeast Asian nations.

Starting diplomatic negotiations with North Korea

In February 1986, the authoritarian regime of President Marcos collapsed, and under President Corazon Aquino, democratization progressed in the Philippines. Even after this shift in the political system towards democratization, the country continued to maintain close ties with the United States and sought to diversify its foreign relations, including improving of relations with socialist countries.

In January 1989, Philippine Foreign Minister Raul Manglapus emphasized the prioritization of improving relations with socialist countries, revealing that the establishment of diplomatic ties with North Korea was under consideration.⁴ Subsequently, annual diplomatic contacts and discussions between the Philippines and North Korea began, eventually leading to the establishment of diplomatic relations in 2000.

Changes in political leadership— including the collapse of the authoritarian regime and subsequent periodic changes in administrations in the Philippines, as well as the death of North Korea's Kim Il-sung—were seen as factors that interrupted the negotiations. Other influences also affected the trajectory of relations between the two countries.

This paper will explore factors on the Philippine side that influenced the negotiations, particularly in relation to elements related to Philippine security.

2. The threat of communist forces within the Philippines

Internal security threat: CPP-NPA

As a prerequisite for establishing diplomatic relations with North Korea, the Philippines demanded North Korea cease its support for the communist insurgency in the Philippines, namely

³ *Asahi Shinbun*, October 30, 1979. (Japanese)

⁴ *Asahi Shinbun*, January 18, 1989. (Japanese)

the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its military arm, the New People's Army (NPA).

The Philippines has experienced a prolonged armed struggle by the communist insurgency against the government. The Partido Komunista ng Philipinas (PKP), established during American colonial rule, continued armed resistance even after independence. However, it was decimated in the mid-1950s by the military's counterinsurgency operations, supported by the United States. Subsequently, in 1968, the CPP was established, centered around Jose Maria Sison and based on Marxist-Leninist and Maoist ideologies. In 1969, its military wing, the NPA, began armed struggle with the aim of achieving an armed revolution. Since the 1990s, there have been organizational splits, and the momentum has declined, but armed struggle continues to this day.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) have recognized the activities of communist insurgency, comprising the CPP-NPA and its front organization, the National Democratic Front, as the most significant threat. According to military estimates in the late 1980s, the NPA's regular forces were believed to have reached around 23,000 by the mid-1986, with an estimated support base of approximately one to two million people⁵. In 1985, it was estimated that 17% of barangays⁶ nationwide in the Philippines were believed to be under the influence of the CPP-NPA⁷. Many high-ranking military officers recognized that the CPP-NPA were the most serious security threat both militarily and politically. Consequently, they remained vigilant about the expansion of these forces⁸.

Subsequently, around the 1990s, the CPP-NPA experienced a decline in influence and power. However, during the period when diplomatic negotiations between the Philippines and North Korea accelerated, it remained the most significant security threat to the Philippines.

CPP-NPA and North Korea

The Philippine government, particularly the AFP, has been cautious about foreign support for the CPP-NPA from socialist countries, and it has been wary of North Korea's involvement as a

⁵ David G. Timberman, "The Philippines in 1986," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 1987, p. 253.

⁶ The smallest administrative unit in the Philippines, corresponding to a village or district.

⁷ Fidel V. Ramos, "The NAFP: Its First Hundred Days," *Fookien Times Philippines Yearbook 1985-86*, 1986, p.76.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.76. Rafael M. Iletto, "At the Crossroads," *Fookien Times Philippines Yearbook 1986-87*, 1987, p. 58. In an April and May 1987 survey conducted among military officers, 93% of the respondents described the threat posed by communist forces as "quite significant" or "significant." Felipe B. Miranda and Rubin F. Ciron, "Development and the Military in the Philippines: Military Perceptions in a Time of Continuing Crisis," Soedjati Djiwanjono and Yong Mun Cheong, eds., *Soldiers and Stability in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988, 193-197.

supporting nation.

In its early days, the CPP-NPA received limited financial assistance from abroad, primarily in the form of token support from China. In their of an armed revolution, the CPP-NPA sought arms assistance from China, attempting to import hundreds of firearms from mainland China in July 1972 and January 1974. However, both of attempts failed.⁹ The aid pipeline was cut in 1975-1976 with the opening of diplomatic relations between Manila and Beijing and the death of Mao Zedong.¹⁰

The CPP-NPA also sought support from the Soviet Union, negotiating directly with the them and requesting low-level arms support and high-level funding in 1984 and 1985. Since 1987, the CPP has begun taking steps to strengthen and publicize its already well-established relations with Moscow. In 1987, CPP members revealed that the Soviet Union had offered “all the arms and money it needed.”¹¹ In 1988, Defense Secretary Ramos said the CPP was receiving “moral and other support” from communist parties abroad, including the Soviet Union.¹²

Such military and financial support from China and the Soviet Union to the CPP-NPA was minimal, essentially constituting moral and psychological assistance. However, by the late 1980s, it was a significant concern for the Philippine government, as evidenced by a joint statement released during the 1988 foreign ministers' meeting between the Soviet Union and the Philippines, confirming that the Soviet Union would not continue supporting the CPP-NPA in the future¹³. In such a situation, the Philippine government, as well as the AFP, perceived that North Korea was still providing support to the CPP-NPA.

In the late 1980s, the CPP established connections with Libya, the Palestine Liberation Organization, North Korea, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Eastern European countries.¹⁴

According to the intelligence officer of the APF, documents seized from a detained official of the CPP in 1989 revealed that meetings between the CPP and the Workers' Party of Korea had taken

⁹ Antonio Lopez, “Running a Revolution,” *Asiaweek*, March 9, 1994, pp. 35-37.

¹⁰ On the relationship between China and CPP-NPA, see the chapter 6 in Gregg R. Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerrilla Movement*, Westview Press.

¹¹ On the relationship between Soviet Union and CPP-NPA, Leif Rosenberger, “Toward a U.S.-Soviet Agreement in the Philippines,” *SAIS Review*, 9(1), pp. 213-226.

¹² *The Manila Chronicle*, March 3, 1988.

¹³ *Asahi Shinbun*, December 23, 1988. (Japanese)

¹⁴ Dominique Caouette, *Perservering Revolutionaries: Armed Struggle in the 21st Century, Exploring the Revolution of the Communist Party of the Philippines*, A Dissertation presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Cornell University, 2004, p. 478.

place in September and October 1986 and in May 1987.¹⁵ Furthermore, it was reported that from 1987 to 1988, 11 members of the NPA's special forces underwent training in North Korea.¹⁶ The CPP enjoyed warm relations with Pyongyang, a fact underscored by the visit of a delegation of Filipino communists to North Korea in September 1988 to attend ceremonies celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the communist regime.¹⁷

By the late 1980s, it was believed that the most likely source of arms for the NPA was North Korea. Several events suggested this. For example, in late October or early November 1987, a North Korean ship believed to be carrying arms was spotted sailing toward the Philippines.¹⁸ The arms shipment coming from North Korea with about 50 tons of arms (including anti-tank missiles, land mines, and Soviet-made light weapons) was almost discovered when US military ships started patrolling one of the landing points. Seeing such intense monitoring of the coastline, the NPA decided to call off the operation.¹⁹

Negotiations for the establishment of diplomatic relations and CPP-NPA problem

The AFP has become a resistance force against establishing diplomatic relations with North Korea, which is suspected of supporting the CPP-NPA. Since the Philippines participated on the side of South Korea in the Korean War, the AFP officers and retired veteran organizations were cautious about establishing diplomatic relations with North Korea. Furthermore, the AFP, which is deeply engaged in military assistance and exchanges with the U.S. military and has long-standing conflicts with the CPP-NPA within the country, is the organization most infused with anti-communist ideology in the Philippines. And the influence of the AFP on the security policy is particularly strong in the Philippines, where the presence of multiple anti-government armed groups poses a significant threat to internal security.

In January 1990, around the time when the periodic diplomatic negotiations between the Philippines and North Korea began, an officer from the AFP intelligence division disclosed that, in meetings between the CPP and the Workers' Party of Korea held in 1986 and 1987, the CPP had agreed to provide information to North Korea about U.S. military bases in the Philippines and, in return, North Korea had agreed to provide military assistance to the CPP-NPA.²⁰ It was

¹⁵ Manny Mogato, "AFP: NPAs spy for N. Korean communists", *The Manila Chronicle*, January 25, 1990.

¹⁶ Raymond Burgos, "Defector's protectors keep eye on NPA rebels", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 22, 1997.

¹⁷ Gregg R. Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerrilla Movement*, Westview Press, 1989, p. 305.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

¹⁹ Caouette, 2004, p. 480.

²⁰ Manny Mogato, "AFP: NPAs spy for N. Korean communists", *The Manila Chronicle*, January 25, 1990.

thought that the leak was intended to affect the negotiations between the Philippines and North Korea adversely.²¹

In response, President Aquino stated that foreign assistance to CPP-NPA had been decreasing, emphasizing that the support was more financial in nature than the provision of weapons.²² The President's statement was a measure of consideration to ensure that the AFP's leak did not negatively impact the negotiations.

Regarding this matter, North Korea addressed the concerns of the Philippines at the negotiation table. In June 1990, a delegation of Philippine parliamentarians made the first-ever visit to Pyongyang as political representatives, meeting with Vice Premier Kim Dal-hyon and later with President Kim Il-sung. During the talks, the Vice Premier reiterated that North Korea 'will not provide weapons or training to the NPA-CPP, now or in the future.' Moreover, in an official letter to President Aquino from Vice Premier Kim, it was stated, 'I am authorized by the government (of North Korea) to convey that we will not have any contact with or support for the New People's Army in the Philippines,' ensuring no support for the CPP-NPA.²³

Furthermore, in June 1991, North Korea's Vice Premier Kim Dal-hyon, the first official representative from North Korea, visited Manila and held meetings with President Aquino and Philippine Foreign Minister Manglapus.²⁴ During these meetings, North Korea once again explicitly stated that they would not support the CPP.²⁵

In the subsequent years, entering the 1990s, the CPP-NPA experienced a rapid decline in strength due to offensives by the AFP and internal ideological disputes leading to break-up. The number of NPA forces, which was 25,800 in 1988, decreased to 8,350 by 1993.²⁶ As a result, the CPP-NPA receded as a security threat in the Philippines, and the negative impact of the CPP-NPA issue on negotiations between the Philippines and North Korea dwindled.

²¹ It was reminded that, in the 1970s, during the diplomatic negotiations between the Philippines and China, the AFP, with a negative stance towards the negotiations, leaked information about the relationship between China and the CPP-NPA. See, "Choices in Philippine Diplomacy", *Sekai*, Vol. 349, December, 1974, p. 129. (Japanese)

²² "Foreign aid to NPA dwindling", *The Manila Chronicle*, January 27, 1990.

²³ "N. Korea won't aid NPA rebels", *The Manila Chronicle*, June 17, 1990.

²⁴ "RP, N. Korea to set up diplomatic ties", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 14, 1991, Bert Castro, "Manila and Pyongyang warm up", *The Manila Chronicle*, June 14, 1991.

²⁵ "Aquino holds face-to-face talks with N. Korea deputy premier", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 12, 1991, "North Koreans renounce NPA", *The Manila Chronicle*, June 12, 1991.

²⁶ Takeshi Yamane, *Armed Forces and Politics in the Philippines: Civilian Supremacy and Military Intervention of Politics after Democratization*, Horitsu Bunka Sha, 2014, pp. 85-86. (Japanese)

3. Allegations of North Korea's nuclear and missile development

The Philippines had cited the resolution of North Korea's nuclear suspicions as one of the conditions for establishing diplomatic relations.

North Korea joined the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in December 1985 but refused to sign the safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for inspection. Meanwhile, from the autumn of 1990 onward, suspicions about North Korea's nuclear development escalated, leading to expressions of concern from the Japanese, American, and South Korean governments. However, as reconciliation efforts between North and South Korea began in the 1990s, in December 1991, North Korea agreed to a joint declaration with South Korea, pledging the prohibition of nuclear weapons testing, manufacturing, possession, as well as the non-possession of uranium enrichment and reprocessing facilities. In January 1992, North Korea also agreed to sign the safeguards agreement with the IAEA.

The Philippines, which had set the resolution of North Korea's nuclear suspicions as a condition for establishing diplomatic relations, welcomed the development. In January 1992, a diplomat from the Philippines stated that North Korea's decision to sign the NPT and accept nuclear inspections was a 'welcome development' that would 'promote the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.'²⁷

However, during six inspections by the IAEA from May 1992 to February 1993, discrepancies with North Korea's declared activities became apparent, deepening suspicions of nuclear development. As a result, the IAEA demanded North Korea accept a 'special inspection,' but North Korea refused. In March 1993, North Korea announced its withdrawal from the NPT.

North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT treaty set back Manila's efforts to open ties with Pyongyang. Foreign Secretary Roberto Romulo said "We have looked forward to the normalization with North Korea once they had complied with the IAEA inspection. However, because North Korea refused to meet the deadline set by the IAEA to allow inspection of two suspected nuclear facilities, it becomes a little bit tougher and more difficult to normalize ties with it".²⁸

In response to North Korea's withdrawal, Foreign Secretary Romulo recommended to the

²⁷ *Asahi Shinbun*, January 4, 1992. (Japanese)

²⁸ "Delay seen in Manila's recognition of Pyongyang", *The Manila Chronicle*, March 15, 1993.

National Security Council of the Philippines the administration's plan to hold off the decision to normalize relations with North Korea. Romulo told reporters, "I did point out to the NSC whereas the Philippines hope to normalize its relations with North Korea in the near future, this does not seem very probable considering the rather deplorable behavior of North Korea in connection with thier withdrawal from the NPT".²⁹

Following North Korea's refusal to open its nuclear facilities to the IAEA inspection, diplomatic negotiations for establishing diplomatic relations came to a standstill. Philippine Foreign Minister Domingo Siazon, who was the foreign minister when diplomatic relations were established, later stated, "we had always been postponing because of the nuclear issue"³⁰, indicating that suspicions of North Korea's nuclear development had a significant impact on the course of relations between the two countries.

4. Relationship between the Philippines and South Korea

North Korea's nuclear development seemed to have affected the progress of negotiations more in relation to the Philippines' relationship with South Korea than as a direct threat to Philippine security.³¹

In relation to negotiations with North Korea, in June 1990, Philippine Foreign Minister Manglapus stated, 'the government will still have to consult with South Korea before it decides to establish ties with North Korea'.³² From the outset of the accelerated diplomatic negotiations with North Korea, it was evident that the Philippines had been proceeding with the talks while taking into consideration South Korea's concerns.

Failure to consider South Korea led to backlash. For instance, in June 1991, when North Korea's Vice Premier Kim Dal-hyon visited Manila and held talks with President Aquino and Foreign Minister Manglapus, announcing their agreement to establish diplomatic relations as early as possible in 1991 and exchange ambassadors³³, it was reported that South Korea protested as

²⁹ "Manila views as 'worrisome' Nokor's move", *The Manila Chronicle*, March 20, 1993.

³⁰ "Siazon favors RP relations with N. Korea", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, November 10, 1999.

³¹ On the relationship between the Philippines and South Korea, Renato Cruz De Castro, "The Philippines-South Korea-North Korea Triangular Relationship: Between a Long-Time Security Partner and a Traditional Security Threat", Lam Peng Er ed. *Contemporary Korea-Southeast Asian Relations*, Routledge, 2023, pp. 179-196.

³² "Talks with N. Korea held", *The Manila Chronicle*, June 21, 1990.

³³ "RP, N. Korea to set up diplomatic ties", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 14, 1991, Bert Castro, "Manila and Pyongyang warm up", *The Manila Chronicle*, June 14, 1991.

follows. The South Korean Ambassador to Manila said to the Philippine Foreign Minister that his government found it difficult to understand why Philippine officials never consulted them on the issue, as they had earlier promised, considering the strong, friendly relations between the two governments. The Ambassador said it was regrettable that his office was informed only less than an hour after a joint statement by Manglapus and Kim announced plans to exchange ambassadors before the yearend. He also mentioned that before the North Korean delegation visited here, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) of the Philippines assured the South Korean embassy that the Philippines would not conclude any agreement with the North Korean delegation, as this would be tantamount to a de facto recognition of Pyongyang. In addition, the Ambassador noted that the DFA had informed the embassy that the North Korean delegation would not meet with President Aquino.³⁴

This kind of relationship with South Korea has influenced diplomatic negotiations with North Korea, especially since the mid-1990s.

The Philippines had set the following conditions for establishing diplomatic relations with North Korea: 1) UN membership, 2) Resolution of nuclear suspicions, and 3) Cessation of support for the CPP-NPA.³⁵ Regarding this matter, on February 1, 1995, Philippine Foreign Undersecretary Rodolfo Severino stated, “we consider that the three conditions have been met.”³⁶ However, on the other hand, as mentioned later, the South Korean government believed that the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and North Korea, given the connection with nuclear suspicions, was premature.

In February 1995, Philippine Undersecretary Severino held talks with the North Korean Ambassador to Thailand regarding establishing diplomatic relations. Immediately after this meeting, the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs cautioned Manila against opening relations with North Korea quickly, expressing concerns about North Korea's nuclear development suspicions. Seoul said in a statement, “The talks leading to diplomatic relations will give the wrong signal to North Korea”. It also mentioned that establishing relations would be premature because Pyongyang had yet to fully comply with an agreement with the US on its controversial nuclear program.³⁷

Furthermore, a South Korean official cautioned the Philippine government, stating that Seoul

³⁴ Cynthia D. Balana, “Sokors sore at RP’s fling with Nokors”, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 15, 1991.

³⁵ North Korea joined the United Nations on September 17, 1991.

³⁶ *Asahi Shinbun*, February 1, 1995. (Japanese)

³⁷ “Diplomatic ties with Nokor loom”, *The Manila Chronicle*, February 1, 1995.

wanted Manila to avoid approaching North Korea until there was progress in relations between the two Koreas, which were still technically at war. The official also mentioned that considering the nuclear accord between Pyongyang and Washington had not yet been implemented, it would be better if Manila did not hurry to establish relations.³⁸

In the face of such a reaction from the South Korean government, the Philippine government decided to postpone the establishment of diplomatic relations with North Korea. President Ramos said forging ties with Pyongyang would have to be done step by step and in consultation with Seoul, with whom Manila has diplomatic relations.³⁹

Thus, the North Korean nuclear development issue had an impact on the diplomatic negotiations between the Philippines and North Korea in relation to South Korea.

At that time, economic relations between the Philippines and South Korea were deepening. Bilateral trade between the two countries increased by 25 percent from \$1.01 billion in 1992 to \$1.25 billion in 1993. South Korea had become the 7th largest trading partner for the Philippines, while the Philippines ranked as the 20th trading partner for South Korea.⁴⁰

In the midst of these developments, in November 1994, South Korean President Kim Young-sam visited the Philippines and held talks with President Ramos. The meeting between the two parties included discussions on the expansion of trade and investment between the two countries and the acceptance of Filipino overseas workers in South Korea.⁴¹ It was in February 1995, immediately after this meeting, that the South Korean government's concerns regarding the diplomatic negotiations between the Philippines and North Korea, mentioned above, were expressed.

Philippine foreign policy is characterized by three pillars instituted under the Fidel Ramos administration: (1) national security, (2) economic security, and (3) the protection of the rights of overseas Filipinos. Regarding economic security, the Ramos administration viewed it within the framework of comprehensive security and prioritized the Philippines' economic growth.⁴²

For the Philippines, South Korea has been a friendly nation since the Korean War. Furthermore, as the Philippines sought to expand trade and investment for economic growth to promote economic security, its relationship with South Korea became increasingly significant. In a context

³⁸ "South Korea unhappy over Manila's pro-North moves", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 3, 1995.

³⁹ Lynda T. Jumilla, "RP delays decision on North Korea ties", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 2, 1995.

⁴⁰ "Welcome President Kim Young Sam and party", *Manila Bulletin*, November 11, 1994.

⁴¹ "Kim to promote trade during three-day visit", *The Manila Chronicle*, November 11, 1994.

⁴² Yusuke Takagi, "The Philippine Foreign and Security Policy Perspective" Society of Security and Diplomatic Policy Studies, ssdpaki.la.coocan.jp/en/proposals/72.html, Accessed January 24, 2024.

where the recognition of the importance of economic security was heightened, it was challenging for the Philippine government to proceed with negotiations with North Korea without taking into account considerations of the concern of the South Korean government.

5. Changes in the international situation and the establishment of diplomatic relations

By the late 1990s, signs of easing tensions in the international situation regarding North Korea began to emerge. The international community actively worked to improve relations with North Korea.

In February 1998, the Kim Dae-jung administration came into power in South Korea, initiating a conciliatory "Sunshine Policy" towards North Korea. In June 2000, President Kim Dae-jung visited Pyongyang, and the first-ever North-South summit meeting took place between him and North Korea's leader Kim Jong-il.

Regarding the nuclear development issue, in September 1999, North Korea agreed to freeze the launch of ballistic missiles as long as U.S.-North Korea talks continued. In response, the United States partially lifted sanctions against North Korea.

Furthermore, North Korea started diversifying its relations with other states. It established diplomatic relations with South Africa in August 1998, with Burnie in January 1999, and with Italy in January 2000, followed by the restoration of disrupted ties with Australia in May 2000.

In the meantime, diplomatic negotiations between the Philippines and North Korea also progressed. The catalyst for this was an attempt to bring North Korea into the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). North Korea had been invited to the ARF, scheduled in Bangkok, Thailand, in July 2000.

According to former Philippine diplomat Juanito P. Jarasa, who served as Assistant Secretary for Asian and Pacific Affairs at the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines and Philippine Ambassador to South Korea, two years before the ARF annual conference in Bangkok, the Philippines, as chairman of the ARF annual conference in 1998, he initiated the process of securing the membership of the North Korea in the forum. However, North Korea indicated that ASEAN member countries, such as Brunei and the Philippines, which did not have inter-state relations with North Korea, should establish such relations before Pyongyang could give due

consideration to its participation in the ARF.⁴³

Besides, it was reported that North Korea assured the Philippines in 1999 that if Manila agreed to normalize relations, North Korea would seek membership in the ASEAN Regional Forum⁴⁴. With Brunei establishing diplomatic relations in January 1999, the Philippines and Myanmar were the only ASEAN member countries without diplomatic ties with North Korea.⁴⁵

These circumstances meant that North Korea's participation in the ARF was contingent on the progress of diplomatic negotiations between the Philippines and North Korea. In addition, Western powers have been urging the Philippines to adopt a policy of "constructive engagement" with North Korea.⁴⁶ Under these circumstances, to facilitate North Korea's participation in the ARF, the Philippines needed to advance the negotiations.

According to Juanito P. Jarasa, the foreign ministers of the Philippines and North Korea met on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York in September 1999 to discuss the improvement of relations. Subsequently, the two officials met during the 13th conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in Colombia in April 2000, where they agreed to establish diplomatic ties. Both South Korea and the United States expressed support for the diplomatic breakthrough, as this would bring North Korea into the international political mainstream. South Korea welcomed the development perfectly in accordance with then-President Kim Dae-jung's "Sunshine Policy".⁴⁷

In July 2000, the Foreign Undersecretary of the Philippines announced that the Philippines and North Korea would sign an agreement next month, setting up diplomatic relations two nations.⁴⁸

About 10 days later, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the AFP announced that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front 49 had arranged to purchase arms from North Korea using the \$3 million it had earlier received from suspected international terrorist Osama bin Laden.⁴⁹ This was considered to be a leak from the AFP, indicating a restrained stance towards establishing diplomatic relations with North Korea. In response, several senators urged the government to postpone a plan to

⁴³ Juanito P. Jarasa, "The Philippines vis-à-vis NKorea", *The Manila Times*, September 23, 2017.

⁴⁴ Dona Pazzibugan and Juliet Labog-Javellana, "RP, North Korea establish ties today", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 12, 2000.

⁴⁵ Due to the Rangoon bombing incident in 1983, Myanmar had severed diplomatic relations with North Korea. However, in April 2007, diplomatic ties were restored.

⁴⁶ Dona Pazzibugan and Juliet Labog-Javellana, "RP, North Korea establish ties today", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 12, 2000.

⁴⁷ Juanito P. Jarasa, "The Philippines vis-à-vis NKorea", *The Manila Times*, September 23, 2017.

⁴⁸ "RP, Nokor plan ties", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 11, 2000.

⁴⁹ Carlito Pable, "MILF buying weapons from N. Korea – AFP", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 21, 2000.

establish diplomatic relations with Pyongyang until the alleged arms purchase could be verified.⁵⁰

In response, Foreign Minister Siazon stated, “the North Korean ambassador to Thailand had conveyed Pyongyang's assurance that it would look into the alleged arms deal and stop it if the shipment was still in North Korea” and he emphasized that the 'government would be able to stop such arms deals in the future if it has established ‘friendly ties’ with North Korea. He also emphasized that the signing of the agreement would push through as scheduled.⁵¹ After this, subsequent resistance to diplomatic negotiations with North Korea did not escalate. The leak by the AFP did not have a hindering effect on the negotiations. As planned, diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on July 12, 2000.

As discussed above, various factors, such as internal threats, nuclear development suspicions, and considerations for South Korea, could have hindered the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and North Korea. However, except for the final phase, there was no indication that the Philippines prioritized and hurried the establishment of diplomatic relations with North Korea.

When negotiations were accelerated around 1990, then Philippine Foreign Minister Manglapus stated, “it was the North Korean government and not the Philippines which initiated calls for the forging of diplomatic ties.”⁵² When diplomatic relations were about to be established, Foreign Minister Siazon stated, “they have always wanted relations with us but we had always been postponing because of the nuclear issue.”⁵³ These statements suggest that the Philippines, if anything, had a passive stance toward establishing diplomatic relations with North Korea. Amid such circumstances, in the final phase, it seems that the Philippines opted for a response taking into account the trend in the international community, as stated by a senior official from the Department of Foreign Affairs who mentioned, “We do not want to be left behind by the international community.”⁵⁴

6. Stagnant relationship

In the 2010s, the Philippines expanded its trade relations with North Korea, becoming the top or

⁵⁰ Dona Pazzibugan, Christine Avendano and Cynthia Balana, “Postpone ties with N. Korea, gov’t urged”, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 22, 2000.

⁵¹ Cynthia D. Balana and Dona Pazzibugan, “House OKs diplomatic ties with North Korea: Pyongyang envoy assures Manila”, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 24, 2000.

⁵² “Talks with N. Korea held”, *The Manila Chronicle*, June 21, 1990.

⁵³ “Siazon favors RP relations with N. Korea”, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, November 10, 1999.

⁵⁴ *Asahi Shinbun*, July 11, 2000. (Japanese)

second trading partner among Southeast Asian countries with North Korea. On the global scale, the Philippines was North Korea's fifth-largest trade partner in 2016, according to the state-run Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency. The main export items from the Philippines include computers, bananas, integrated circuits, women's underwear, and more⁵⁵. On an annual basis, North Korea imported \$28.8 million worth of products from the Philippines in 2016, an increase of 80 percent from the previous year, while the Philippines' imports from North Korea surged 170 percent to \$16.1 million.⁵⁶

However, the relationship between the two countries, including trade, did not further develop. North Korea's nuclear and missile development became a concrete threat to the security of the Philippines, leading to a stagnation in the development of the relationship.

North Korea's nuclear and missile issues and the threat to the Philippines

The Philippines had long recognized North Korea's nuclear and missile development as a security threat. However, with the advancement of North Korea's missile technology and the increasing number of Filipino overseas workers, the threat had become more concrete.

Philippine policymakers believe that North Korea poses a direct threat to their country's national security for two reasons. First, many Filipinos are concerned that a North Korean missile test could directly threaten the territory of the Philippines. For example, in December 2012, debris from a North Korean rocket launch landed off the coast of northern Luzon, heightening concerns in Manila about Pyongyang's nuclear and missile ambitions. Second, North Korea's nuclear program poses a major security threat to Asia-Pacific countries where large numbers of Filipino overseas workers live. The heightened prospect of a military confrontation between North Korea and South Korea has increased concerns in Manila about the welfare of Filipino migrant workers in South Korea.⁵⁷

As mentioned above, Philippine foreign policy is characterized by three pillars. They are (1) national security, (2) economic security, and (3) the protection of the rights of overseas Filipinos⁵⁸.

⁵⁵ Portia Ladrido, "Women's undergarment, bananas, refugees: The Philippines-North Korea relationship", *CNN Philippines*, Apr. 27, 2018, <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/life/culture/politics/2018/4/27/north-korea-ph-relations.html>, Accessed January 22, 2024.

⁵⁶ "PH suspends trade with North Korea to comply with UN resolution", *Manila Bulletin*, September 10, 2017.

⁵⁷ Samuel Ramani, "The Philippines' Approach to North Korea", *The Diplomat*, January 25, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/the-philippines-approach-to-north-korea/>, Accessed January 22, 2024.

⁵⁸ Yusuke Takagi, "The Philippine Foreign and Security Policy Perspective" Society of Security and Diplomatic Policy Studies, ssdpaki.la.coocan.jp/en/proposals/72.html, Accessed January 24, 2024.

North Korea's nuclear and missile development, in connection with the increasing overseas employment in the Philippines, has had a new impact on the country's recognition of security threats.

The Philippines has been promoting overseas employment as a national policy, and the number of Filipinos working abroad has rapidly increased since the 1990s. Around 10 million Filipinos, including permanent residents, live overseas. Therefore, protecting its citizens abroad is a crucial responsibility for the government and poses a significant burden. Especially in countries like South Korea and Japan, where the threat of a military conflict that could be triggered by North Korea's nuclear and missile development is significant, there is a large population of Filipinos. As a result, the issue of North Korea's nuclear and missile development has been increasingly recognized in the Philippines, not just as a threat confined to its territory but as a spatially expansive threat. Indeed, every time North Korea conducts nuclear or missile tests, the Philippine government has been compelled to respond.

For example, in March 2012, Pyongyang announced it would launch a rocket to place a satellite in orbit and insisted this was purely for space research. But the United States and other nations saw the launch as a disguised ballistic missile test. Meanwhile, the Philippines said it was ready with a contingency plan to protect the safety of more than 50,000 overseas Filipino workers in South Korea if tensions with North Korea over its plan to launch a new rocket escalated into a full-blown crisis. The Philippine Embassy has posted a 10-page advisory on the contingency plan for Filipino workers in South Korea on its website.⁵⁹

Another example, in August 2017, North Korea launched a ballistic missile that flew over Japanese airspace. The Philippines expressed its grave concern over the firing by North Korea. In a statement, Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano called on North Korea to halt "these dangerous and provocative actions, which heighten tensions, increase instability and the risk of miscalculation, and could possibly endanger lives." The Secretary said he has instructed the Philippine Embassy in Tokyo to continue to closely monitor the situation and to ensure that the estimated 242,000 Filipinos living and working in Japan are safe. The Secretary added, "I wish to assure our kababayans (fellow countrymen) in Japan that our Embassy in Tokyo and our Consulate General in Osaka are prepared to assist them should it be necessary".⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Jerry E. Esplanada, "PH readies evacuation of Pinoys in South Korea", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Mar. 28, 2012.

⁶⁰ Roy C. Mabasa, "PH expresses concern, calls on N. Korea to stop 'dangerous, provocative actions'", *Manila Bulletin*, Aug 30, 2017.

UN Sanctions and the Philippines

In response to such threats, the Philippines has taken measures, including condemnation and protests through statements and actions in accordance with United Nations resolutions. Here are some examples.

On January 6, 2016, North Korea conducted its fourth nuclear test, which was followed by a ballistic missile launch test on February 7. In response to these actions, on March 2, 2016, the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution imposing sanctions on North Korea. The resolution required all countries to inspect cargo going to and from North Korea.

The Philippines, on March 3, hailed the UN resolution that imposed the “toughest sanctions so far” on North Korea after Pyongyang’s “provocative” nuclear tests. The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said in a statement that “the Philippines welcomes the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council Resolution on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.”. The DFA also said the Philippines “joins the international community in strongly urging” North Korea to comply with this recent UN resolution.⁶¹ Enforcing the UN sanctions on North Korea, the Philippines impounded a North Korean freighter on March 5. Several weeks later, the Philippines impounded another ship.

Furthermore, on July 4 and 28, 2017, North Korea conducted ballistic missile launch tests. In response to these actions, a UN Security Council resolution was adopted on August 5, 2017. Then, in September 2017, the Philippines suspended trade relations with North Korea to comply with a UN Security Council resolution over its repeated missile tests. Philippine Foreign Secretary stated, “We will fully comply with UN Security Council resolution, including the economic sanctions.”⁶² As a result of the sanctions, trade between the Philippines and North Korea significantly decreased. According to UN statistics, Philippine exports to North Korea, which were \$53,242,211 in 2015, dropped to \$1,216,106 in 2017 and further decreased to \$35,461 in 2022.⁶³

Indeed, recent developments have brought the nuclear and missile issues into the realm of concern of Philippine policy and security stakeholders. However, it has been pointed out that the threat

⁶¹ Paterno R. Esmaguél II, “Philippines hail UN sanctions vs North Korea,” *Rappler*, March 3, 2016, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/124561-philippines-north-korea-un-sanctions-nuclear-tests/>, Accessed January 16, 2024.

⁶² “PH suspends trade with North Korea to comply with UN resolution,” *Manila Bulletin*, September 10, 2017.

⁶³ UN Comtrade Database, <https://comtradeplus.un.org/TradeFlow?Frequency=A&Flows=X&CommodityCodes=TOTAL&Partners=408&Reporters=608&period=all&AggregateBy=none&BreakdownMode=plus>, Accessed January 10, 2024.

from North Korea is not particularly high and is not a pressing issue in the overall context of Philippine national security.⁶⁴

Amador Research Services, a think tank based in Manila, conducted the 2022 National Security Survey, which measured the tendencies of the security sector along various issue areas. The report found that only 4.6% of respondents listed nuclear proliferation as a top national security issue. As such, there is a largely neutral stance on what occurs in the Korean Peninsula. The survey also identified food/energy security, China, and natural disasters/climate change as the Philippines' primary and more immediate concerns. This suggests that, for the security sector, the Korean Peninsula is not a high-priority concern among the Philippines' security issues⁶⁵.

This tendency is also observed in some of the government's security policy documents. The "National Security Policy 2011-2016" of the Benigno Aquino III administration, the "National Security Policy 2017-2022," and the "National Security Strategy 2018" of the Rodrigo Duterte Administration recognized North Korea as part of the Philippines' external security concerns. Still, it only referred to North Korea in the context of persisting tension in the Korean Peninsula and its status as a state possessing weapons of mass destruction⁶⁶. Besides, in "National Security Policy 2023-2028" of the Ferdinand Marcos Jr. administration, there is no word for 'North Korea.'⁶⁷

Conclusion

Given North Korea's involvement in the Philippines' internal and external security threats (communist insurgency, nuclear weapons, and missiles), the Philippines' perceptions of them have influenced the development of the relationship between the Philippines and North Korea. In these circumstances, as such threats persisted while undergoing slight transformation, diplomatic

⁶⁴ Deryk Matthew N. Baladjay and Matthew C. Uy, "Whither the Philippines' Securitization of North Korea?", *Facts Asia*, Oct. 31, 2023, <https://www.factsasia.org/blog/whither-the-philippines-securitization-of-north-korea>, Accessed January 22, 2024.

⁶⁵ Julio Amador, Aries Arugay, Deryk Baladjay, Justin Baquisal and Charmaine Misalucha-Willoughby, *National Security Survey 2022: Results & Findings*, Amador Research Services, May 24, 2023, https://www.amadorresearchservices.com/_files/ugd/58aa99_816b2faebc4143789ee77316255ca842.pdf, Accessed January 22, 2024.

⁶⁶ Republic of the Philippines, Office of the President, "National Security Policy 2011-2016", <https://nsc.gov.ph/attachments/article/NSP/NSP-2011-2016.pdf>, Accessed January 24, 2024, Republic of the Philippines, Office of the President, "National Security Policy 2017-2022", <https://nsc.gov.ph/attachments/article/NSP/NSP-2017-2022.pdf>, Accessed January 24, 2024, Republic of the Philippines, Office of the President, "National Security Strategy", https://nsc.gov.ph/images/NSS_NSP/NSS_2018.pdf, Accessed January 24, 2024, Nuclear weapons are one of three such types listed.

⁶⁷ Republic of the Philippines, Office of the President, "National Security Policy 2023-2028", https://nsc.gov.ph/images/NSS_NSP/National_Security_Policy_2023_2028.pdf, Accessed January 24, 2024.

relations between the two countries were established, driven by the conciliatory atmosphere in the international community around the 2000s. During this process, it became apparent that the necessity for improving relations with North Korea was not an urgent matter for the Philippines.

Furthermore, in recent years, as the relations between the two countries have deteriorated due to North Korea's nuclear and missile development, the Philippines has actively implemented sanctions based on UN resolutions. Unless there is a noticeable change in North Korea's pursuit of nuclear and missile development, it seems unlikely that the Philippines will actively engage in improving relations with North Korea.

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Thailand and the North Korean Defectors

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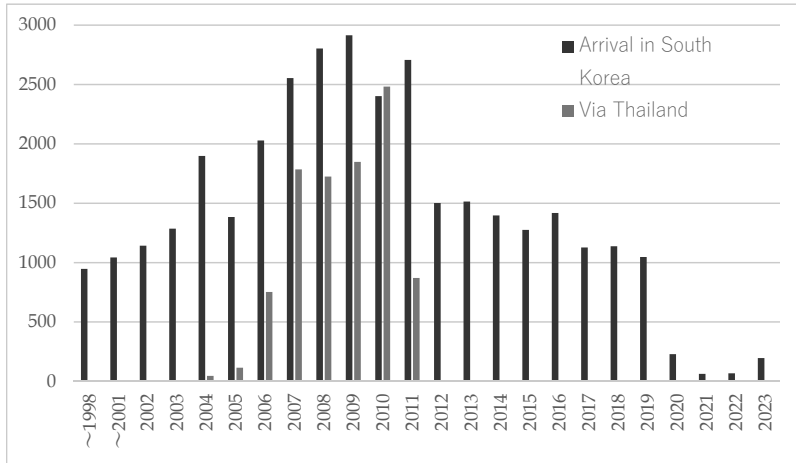
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1. North Korean defector heading for Thailand

Many people have escaped from North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea: DPRK). The main reasons driving these defections are political oppression and economic hardship, and most of the defectors have ended up in South Korea. According to South Korea's Ministry of Unification, the number of North Korean defectors arriving in South Korea increased markedly: from 947 until 1998, to 1,043 between 1999 and 2001, and to nearly 3,000 in 2009. The number of defectors arriving in South Korea has since halved to around 1,500, and decreased to nearly 1,100 in 2017. Furthermore, the number dropped sharply from 2020.

The routes by which people fleeing North Korea arrive in South Korea are diverse. Some crossed the 38th parallel of north latitude under high alert or paddled out into the Sea of Japan despite the risk of weather conditions. However, the main route is across the Yalu and Tumen Rivers into China. From China, although many defectors headed for Mongolia in the early years, an increasing number of defectors passed from southwest China to Southeast Asia (Skretteberg 2018). Among Southeast Asia countries, defectors going through Thailand increased dramatically after 2004. In 2011, 2,482 North Korean defectors arrested in Thailand were able to contact the South Korean embassy there. This is more than the 2,402 defectors who arrived in South Korea in the same year (see figure). After this, the Thai government stopped publishing the number of arrested defectors. This does not mean that no more defectors are arriving in Thailand. For example, in 2016, the number was reported to be 535.

Figure: The number of defectors: arrivals in South Korea and those via Thailand (persons)



Source: For arrivals in South Korea, Korean Ministry of Unification (https://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/relations/statistics/defectors/); for those via Thailand, Aksaraphak 2017. : 78

Why were defectors bound for Thailand? In this paper, we will first review the relationship between Thailand and North Korea to see how close or distant the two countries are. It's apparent that the two countries do not have particularly close friendly relations. Next, we will look at how North Korean defectors pass through China to reach the borders of Southeast Asian countries. Yunnan Province in southwest China borders Myanmar and Laos, while Guangxi in southern China borders Vietnam. Thailand, however, does not border China. Thailand borders Laos and Myanmar but not Vietnam.

On the other hand, Thailand's other neighbor, Cambodia, does not border China. Defectors enter Thailand via Laos or Myanmar or take a cargo ship from Yunnan Province down the Mekong River, an international river, to Thailand. According to a researcher who boarded such a cargo ship departing from Kuan Yue Port in the Xishuangbanna (Sipsongpanna) district of Yunnan Province, the required travel time was two to three days (Hashitani, 2011 pp. 66-71).

Based on previous studies, we will then consider what attracts defectors to Thailand and why they choose Thailand over Vietnam, Laos, or Myanmar. One researcher notes "Thailand is the closest

country to a heaven that North Korean refugees can reach" (Jeong, 2020 p. 22). To preempt the conclusion, the appeal of Thailand was that once the defectors reached Thailand they would not be deported to North Korea or China and could then travel to South Korea relatively easily. The fact that defectors, who are illegal immigrants because they have not completed immigration procedures at Thailand's immigration office, are willing to appear in person and have themselves arrested tells us that Thailand is a gateway to "heaven" for defectors.

2 Thailand-North Korea Relations

2.1 Political Relations

Thailand adopted a pro-U.S. line when the Korean War broke out in 1950 and took the initiative in deploying government troops. In this sense, it was an enemy of North Korea. However, following the end of the Vietnam War and improved relations with China, Thailand established diplomatic relations with North Korea on May 8, 1975. The North Korean ambassador to Myanmar became in charge of Thailand, and the Thai ambassador to Beijing became in charge of North Korea; the North Korean Trade Representative Office in Bangkok, which had been established on December 25, 1979, was upgraded to an embassy in Thailand on March 15, 1991. The Thai side did not have an embassy in Pyongyang, and the ambassador to Beijing continued to oversee North Korea.

Dignitaries began coming and going in the 1980s and increased in the 1990s. North Korean foreign ministers visited Thailand in 1982 and 1988. The Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs also visited North Korea in 1987. Interestingly, several members of the royal family from Thailand visited North Korea: Princess Galyani Vadhana, the sister of King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX) visited in 1987; Princess Sirindhorn in 1991; and Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn (the present king Rama X) twice in 1992 and 1993. It is believed that North Korea was aware well of the political importance of the royal family in Thailand and invited them.

After the end of the Cold War, relations between the two countries deepened. This was especially true on the economic and regional diplomatic fronts. After the Chatchai administration (August 1988-February 1991), Thailand began to emphasize economic diplomacy while simultaneously seeking to expand its role in the ASEAN region. North Korea, on the other hand, faced economic difficulties with the end of the Cold War and needed to expand diplomatic relations and increase trade. North Korea focused on Europe and Southeast Asia, and in Southeast Asia it emphasized Thailand.

For North Korea, Thailand's appeal was fourfold: 1) Thailand is geographically located in the

center of Southeast Asia. This favorable location is evidenced by the fact that Thailand ranks third in the world in terms of the number of U.S. diplomatic missions abroad. 2) Thailand plays a leading role in ASEAN. 3) Thailand has the food and raw materials North Korea needs. 4) Compared to other countries, Thailand has not taken a tough stance toward North Korea politically or economically (Nithi, 2020 p. 147).

An example of Thailand's conciliatory stance is the kidnapping of a Thai woman. In his book, former U.S. soldier Jenkins mentions a Thai woman, Anocha Panjoi, who was abducted in Macau. In contrast to the Japanese government's intense pressure on North Korea to return the abductees to Japan, the Thai government only summoned and questioned the North Korean ambassador and took no concrete measures when the North Korean side denied it (Nithi, 2010 pp. 150-151).

North Korea made efforts to expand its relations with Thailand in the 1990s. North Korea hoped for military cooperation, and its Minister of Defense visited Thailand in 1990. The Thai Defense Minister also visited North Korea in 1993. North Korea requested that a military attaché be stationed in Thailand and a Thai military attaché at its embassy in Beijing be assigned to North Korea. Thailand did not respond to this request. Next, North Korea proposed the conclusion of cultural cooperation agreements in 1989 and 1991. As Thailand did not respond positively, North Korea dispatched the Speaker of the National Assembly to Thailand, where he gained an audience with King Bhumibol Adulyadej in March 2002, leading to the conclusion of a cultural exchange agreement (Nithi, 2010 p. 146).

Thailand prepared the international stage for North Korea. During Thailand's ASEAN chairmanship, Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan lobbied North Korea's Foreign Minister to join the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and through Cambodia's King Sihanouk, who had a pipeline to North Korea. As a result, North Korea joined the ARF in 2000. Participation in the international multilateral interactions was greatly beneficial to North Korea. North Korea's Foreign Minister was able to meet with US Secretary of State Albright before she visited North Korea. North Korea joined the ARF because it was not under the firm control of the United States and friendly countries such as Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were its members (Nithi, 2010 p. 152).

A problem arose in 1999: the Hong Sun-kyung incident. The North Korean government informed the Thai government that Hong, a North Korean embassy official, had defrauded the Thai government of \$80 million that North Korea paid for the purchase of rice from Thailand. They also added that if the Thai government could not arrest Hong, it would not be able to get the proceeds. It was later revealed that an embassy car heading toward the Laotian border was involved in a traffic accident. It was discovered that embassy officials were attempting to take

Hong and his family into custody as an excuse to avoid paying the rice purchase price. The Thai government deported 11 embassy employees and banned them from entering the country (Nithi, 2010 p. 152).

2.2 Economic Relations

Trade between Thailand and North Korea was in surplus on the Thai side, with the main exports being rice, sugar, and tin, as well as other industrial products such as computers and their components. In some years, crude oil and chemical products were also exported. Thai imports were industrial raw materials such as iron, power equipment, minerals, and chemicals (Nithi, 2010 pp. 147-148).

The greatest impediment to trade was North Korea's ability to pay. For this reason, a trading account was used (Nithi, 2010 p. 148). When North Korea purchased 300,000 tons of rice in 1993 and 1995, Thailand had to provide the North Korean government with a one- to two-year loan. When North Korea failed to repay the loan, the Thai government began deducting from the price of goods imported from North Korea by private Thai companies. This was done to circumvent the problem of North Korea's inability to pay in its reserve currency (dollars or yen) (Nithi, 2010 p. 148). As a result, trade between the two countries has increased from only \$13.1 million in 1994 to \$206.9 million in 2000. Thailand consequently became North Korea's fourth largest trading partner, reaching a peak of \$328.6 million in 2004.

Allegations of corruption arose in Thailand over the sale of rice. The Thai Senate investigated the sale of 300,000 tons of rice to North Korea for 20 billion baht. The ship carrying the rice was headed to somewhere other than North Korea. There was a possibility of collusion between Thai suppliers and North Korean representatives. If the rice was sold to North Korea, it would take two years before payment was made, and it was not a certainty that a payment would be made. Though the price was lower, cash would be paid immediately for the rice if sold to a third country. The North Korean representatives were reportedly paid \$6 per ton (Nithi, 2010 p. 153).

A notable aspect of the economic relationship between the two countries was the investment in North Korea's telecommunications business by a Thai company. Loxpac, a subsidiary of a famous Thai trading company Loxley, which belongs to a powerful business group owned by the Lamsam family, has invested in the Korea Posts and Telecommunications Corporation (KPTC), a state company owned by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MPT) of North Korea, to establish Northeast Asia Telephone and Telecommunications (NEAT&T). NEAT&T opened the Rason International Telecommunication Centre in Rason Special City. NEAT&T was the first

mobile telecommunications operator in North Korea and began providing cell phone services in Pyongyang and Rason on November 11, 2002. Loxpac had acquired long-term business rights by developing a telecommunications network¹.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously adopted Resolution No. 2375 on September 11, 2017, prohibiting existing joint ventures with North Korean individuals and entities; NEAT&T's business must be dissolved within 120 days. Under the resolution, Loxpac ceased operations and transferred the assets of NEAT&T to KPTC in 2018.

Before the resolution, the UNSC had begun imposing sanctions in connection with North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile development, banning imports from North Korea in 2006 and exports to North Korea in 2009. Reflecting this, imports from North Korea have declined markedly since 2007, and exports have also declined significantly since 2008 (see table). Apart from the reduction in trade and investment, North Koreans working in Thailand have also decreased. In December 2017, the UN adopted Resolution 2397, strengthening economic sanctions against the launch of an ICBM-class ballistic missile on November 29 of the same year, obligated UN member states to repatriate workers from North Korea to North Korea. That deadline was set for two years, and as of December 2019, North Korean citizens in Thailand for work purposes would be deported.

Table: Trade between Thailand and North Korea (\$ million)

year	exports	imports	total	rank
2000	186.90	20.05	205.10	74
2001	106.33	21.80	124.80	78
2002	172.78	42.90	215.13	67
2003	203.59	49.92	252.55	68
2004	239.84	88.82	327.41	57
2005	206.98	119.47	325.76	52
2006	204.08	69.57	273.16	60
2007	179.52	33.51	212.84	69
2008	46.37	28.73	75.10	86
2009	30.43	13.92	44.35	89
2010	29.54	21.37	50.91	98

¹ Tamura, Kazuteru, "Kukyo wo mitometa koryolink kita-chousen seisai no eikyou to sinki sannyo no kanousei (In DPRK, koryolink and KANGSONG NET are providing mobile phone service)", February 16, 2016 (<https://wirelesswire.jp/2016/02/50321/>).

8. Thailand and the North Korean Defectors

2011	24.12	12.58	36.70	108
2012	40.31	21.92	62.23	108
2013	99.79	13.90	113.68	111
2014	107.25	19.08	126.33	113
2015	74.96	7.02	81.98	108
2016	26.35	2.27	28.62	125
2017	1.71	0.51	2.22	159
2018	0.51	0.33	0.83	185
2019	0.16	0.01	0.17	222
2020	1.24	0.04	1.28	217
2021	0.09	0.26	0.35	189
2022	0.04	0.01	0.05	230
2023	0.03	0.11	0.15	193

Source: Department of Trade Negotiations, Ministry of Commerce, Thailand

3 Escape Routes

3.1 Passage through China

Although China had taken a tolerant attitude toward defectors, it hardened its attitude in 2002 after an incident in which North Korean defectors rushed to diplomatic establishments in China to ask for help. They included the embassies of Spain, Germany, the United States, Canada, Albania, and Ecuador, and the consulates general of Japan, the United States, and South Korea (Yoon, 2006 p. 297). The Chinese government demanded the extradition of those who had fled to the embassies and consulates.

When Kim Jong-un became the leader of North Korea in 2011, China's attitude hardened further. Since China is cooperative with North Korea, the Chinese transit portion of the defectors' escape is reported to be the most dangerous (Jeong, 2020 pp. 15-18). According to NGOs, there are between 30,000 and 50,000 defectors in China, and the Chinese government knows where they are, but because of their economic and demographic advantages has left them without arrest or other action.

It was reported in 2011: "The defectors take great risks to get here. After escaping into China, they must dodge police who may arrest them and send them back to North Korea to be imprisoned. They usually need to save money to pay brokers who organize the journey, but as illegal workers,

they are subject to exploitation. Many women are forced into the sex trade, while men end up working as hired muscle for Chinese gangsters” (Ferrie, 2011).

Religious organizations, NGOs, and brokers assist defectors, helping them move from China to the borders of Mongolia and Southeast Asia. Winn reported in 2017 that defectors' "journeys are typically managed by either rogue people smugglers, who charge several thousand dollars, or secretive Christian networks operating out of Seoul. It is reported that "[t]he cost of moving a North Korean defector through China rose to tens of thousands of dollars from thousands of dollars before the pandemic"².

The Christian support network has actively assisted defectors in China. Once in China, defectors are either assisted by contractors who charge thousands of dollars to move them to South Korea or by a Christian network headquartered in Seoul. The latter is also supported by fundraising in the United States, sometimes referred to as the "underground railroad," the trails used by enslaved Americans in the 19th century (Winn, 2011).

According to members of a Christian network, the first month in China was spent in the homes of their supporters, where they were well-fed. This was because if they were emaciated, they would be easily detected on the move. Since they traveled by public transportation, railroads, and buses, they had to evade the scrutiny of Chinese officials. Once they had improved the fleshiness of their emaciated bodies and came to "look like Chinese," they took public transportation to their destinations. A journalist reported in 2011 that escapees were exposed "to more than a week's worth of bus and train rides riddled with random checkpoints" (Winn, 2011).

3.2 Beyond China

"Underground railroads" for defectors include those going to Mongolia via China and those going from southwest China to Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar.

In the 1990s, it took 15 hours to put them on a bus to Mongolia, which was possible for about \$500 per person. Since 1999, Korean Christian organizations and Chinese brokers have helped defectors escape to Mongolia. Along the way, if caught by Mongolian soldiers, they were sent to the South Korean embassy in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, but if caught by Chinese soldiers, they were repatriated to North Korea (Aksaraphak, 2017: 75). However, as China tightened its crackdown and built an interdiction line at the border, they changed their route to southwest China.

² "Defecting from North Korea Is Now Far Harder", *The New York Times*, July 9, 2023 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/09/world/asia/north-korea-china-defectors.html>).

They arrived at China's southwestern border in a little over a week using public transportation such as trains and buses. They had to pass through checkpoints along the way. From China, they crossed the border into Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar before arriving in Thailand.

Many defectors came to Vietnam because of the country's early tolerance for defectors. The tolerance was partly due to a surge in direct investment from South Korea, which became the largest investor in Vietnam. In 2004, the Vietnamese government sent 468 defectors to South Korea. Vietnam explained that this was out of respect for domestic and international law and human rights. North Korea protested and recalled its ambassador; when the Vietnamese foreign minister visited North Korea in 2008, the issue of defectors became a topic of discussion (Akasaphak, 2017 p. 75). The Vietnamese government changed its attitude under pressure from North Korea. The hardening of the Vietnamese attitude contributed to an increase in defectors to Thailand.

In Laos, NGOs and missionaries have been assisting defectors. Lao government officials sometimes arrested defectors but let them go if they paid a ransom; in 2007, they demanded \$1,000 per person from a Japanese NGO; in 2009, the Lao government allowed 50 defectors to travel to South Korea (Akasaphak, 2017: 76). However, in May 2013, nine North Korean orphans between the ages of 15 and 23 were arrested and deported to North Korea. Since this coincided with a visit to Pyongyang by the Laotian Foreign Minister, it was thought that Laos might have used this as a bargaining chip. The international community criticized the South Korean government for not responding quickly enough. Laos signed an agreement with North Korea in March 2016, showing the closeness of relations between the two countries. This was related to the fact that China's influence on Laos has been greater than that of Vietnam since 2013 (Jeong, 2020 pp. 19-20).

4 Attractiveness of Thailand

4.1 Defectors in Thailand

Even though Thailand does not border China, most defectors heading to Southeast Asia via China go to Thailand (Han, 2020 p. 75). In the period between 2004 and 2011, Thailand was a popular route for defectors: 46 in 2004, 752 in 2005, 1,785 in 2007, 1,849 in 2009, and 2,482 in 2010. By 2006, the rise in volume reportedly had strained the system and led Bangkok authorities to intensify measures to prevent illegal entry by North Koreans. In an indication of the Thai government's fraying patience, the Foreign Ministry complained in December 2006 that international and local NGOs...were hurting its ability to prevent the illegal entry of North Korean

defectors” (WikiLeaks, 2009: 13). Despite these frustrations, it was reported in 2011 that 95% of the North Korean defectors arrived in South Korea via Thailand. The Thai government has since stopped releasing the number of defectors; in 2013, it was estimated at 10-15 defectors per week.

Although Thailand does not welcome defectors, Thailand contrasts favorably with Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar, which are more lukewarm toward defectors. In Thailand, defectors are treated as illegal immigrants. The Immigration Office of the National Police Agency handles Thailand's immigration administration. This has been the case since the formation of the modern state in Thailand at the end of the 19th century when the police were established under the Ministry of Interior and has remained unchanged even after the police were separated from the Ministry of Interior in 1998. Defectors are taken into custody by the immigration police as illegal immigrants and are kept in detention facilities for one month. After securing their safety in the camps, they are handed over to the South Korean embassy for asylum in South Korea. For this reason, defectors turn themselves in for arrest when they enter Thailand. Thailand is one of the easiest countries for defectors to reach where they can expect extradition to South Korea.

The border area between Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar is known as the Golden Triangle. The Mekong River, which flows down from Yunnan Province in China, forms the border between Laos and Myanmar, and the Golden Triangle is the area where the Ruak River, which forms the border between Myanmar and Thailand, meets the Mekong River. The Golden Triangle was once famous for poppy cultivation, and today there are casinos here. Chiang Rai Province is in this northernmost part of Thailand, and Chiang Saen, a river port on the Mekong River, is located there.

Many have entered Thailand from the Golden Triangle. According to a lawyer in Chiang Rai, as of 2011, an increasing number of people were coming down to Chiang Rai by cargo ship from Chinese territory on the upper Mekong River. However, some were entering from Nong Khai and Nakhon Phanom via Laos on the opposite bank of the Mekong River. Reuters had expected an increase from 535 in 2016 to 385 in the first half of 2017³. In August 2015, a Christian missionary who has lived in Thailand for nearly 20 years was arrested for helping seven defectors smuggle themselves into Thailand in June via Laos.

According to a 2016 article in *The Bangkok Post*, immigration police reported that the number of defectors coming to Thailand had increased to about 2,000 a year as more defectors used the

³ “North Korean defectors surge into Thailand amidst regional tension”, *Reuters*, August 1, 2017 (<https://www.nst.com.my/world/2017/08/263054/north-korean-defectors-surge-thailand-amidst-regional-tension>).

route via Laos.⁴ North Korean defectors entering China first worked to earn money to travel to southern China. Some use the Golden Triangle route, but most prefer to go through Laos. From Laos, they either head for Chiang Saen in Chiang Rai or cross the Mekong River to Nong Khai, Nakhon Phanom, Bueng Kan, and Chiang Khong (Loei Province). Upon entering Thailand, they would head to the police to be arrested. After their arrest, Korean government officials visited them and arranged for their travel to South Korea.

According to the Thai immigration office, migration process of defectors was as follows: 1) first cross the border into China; 2) take the train to Beijing, where they stay for a few months to prepare for their move to the south; 3) head to Sichuan Province and then to Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province; 4) cross the border into Laos; 5) cross the Mekong River into Thailand and have them arrested.

Upon arrival in Thailand, defectors are arrested by Thai officials to seek asylum in Korea. Some of them intentionally commit minor crimes to be arrested. They are fined a small amount for illegal entry and transferred to a detention center in Bangkok. Some travel to Bangkok alone and turn themselves in to save time before leaving the country. Because the South Korean constitution grants citizenship to North Korean citizens, North Korean defectors travel to South Korea as returnees. North Korean defectors who arrived in Thailand would migrate to South Korea and the U.S., with the former accounting for the majority. The time between arrival in Thailand and departure for South Korea is reported to be approximately one month, and due to the increase in the number of people entering Thailand since 2004, South Korea proposed the establishment of a support center in Chiang Rai. The Thai government did not allow it, judging that the increase in arrivals and the resulting increase in brokers would threaten national security (Aksaraphot, 2017: 78).

4.2 Survey of Immigration Police Officers

Artnarong, an immigration police officer working in Chiang Saen, Chiang Rai Province, where many defectors enter the country, wrote his master's thesis on defectors at Phayao University in 2012. He describes the 27 defectors in custody, including interviews with colleagues, and explains why and how they came to Thailand and what the police officers' views are on them.

Artnarong provides an overview of the defectors' arrival in Thailand. Initially, he details, many came via Vietnam. However, the North Korean government put pressure on the Vietnamese

⁴ "North Korea defectors a 'dilemma'", *Bangkok Post*, January 26, 2016 (<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/838792/north-korea-defectors-a-dilemma>).

government to tighten its crackdown on them. The same is true of Myanmar and Laos. As a result, more were going to Thailand (Artnarong, 2012: 8-9). The Thai government has been arresting 1,000 illegal defectors a year in Chiang Rai Province alone.

NGO organizations have been set up in Thailand to assist, leaving 300-500 North Koreans in Thailand waiting to seek asylum in a third country. In addition, over 5,000 North Koreans are waiting in the border areas between China and Myanmar and China and Laos for an opportunity to enter Thailand (Artnarong, 2012: 2).

The time taken to reach Chiang Saen after leaving North Korea is two to three weeks, at a cost of 100,000 to 200,000 baht (Artnarong, 2012: 58-59, 62). In addition to this, food costs would be required along the way. According to Artnarong, although there are serious risks when crossing the border from North Korea into China, it is often possible to reach the Thai border once in China. North Koreans, unlike people from Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar, look like Chinese and can easily blend in with the Chinese, so they reach Xishuangbanna in Yunnan Province at the border and come to Chiang Saen.

From Xishuangbanna, they take a cargo ship. The boat costs 500 won (2,500 baht) per person. The cargo ship terminates at a port town in Bo-Keo Province, Laos, about 15 km upstream from Chiang Saen. There, they will transfer to another ship. When the Chinese government's crackdown is too severe to travel down the Mekong River, defectors sometimes travel through Myanmar territory.

There is another study on immigration police officers. Ninety-five defectors and 270 police officers in Chiang Rai were surveyed. According to the survey, defectors choose Thailand because 1) it has a long border, making it easy to smuggle them in; 2) if they are arrested, the charges are light, with a fine of 2,000 baht and one month in prison, and they are given a suspended sentence and immediately begin the process of transfer to a third country (Baenyapha et al. 2013 pp. 95-109).

In China, they moved to Yunnan with the help of brokers. Safe passage requires reliance on Chinese brokers who are paid 150,000 to 300,000 baht as a reward. If they need more money, they work in China to earn it. The contingency fee is paid upon arrival in Korea (Baenyapha et al., 2013 p. 105).

Both Artnarong and Baenyapha et al. point out that defectors choose Thailand because the government is more humane than in neighboring countries, punishment is lighter when arrested in Thailand, and Thai people are kind and caring.

4.3 Japanese Views

Ebihara, a Japanese researcher involved in North Korean abductee rescue and assisting North Korean defectors in Thailand, explained in an interview with VOA: "Since 2004, the number of North Korean defectors coming to Thailand has increased rapidly. The total number of defectors since 2004 is about 10,000. This increase can be attributed to a change in policy in Vietnam. In the past, many defectors were heading to Vietnam. The Vietnamese government used to send 200-300 at a time to South Korea. After strong protests by the North Korean government, Vietnam changed its policy.

The main route for defectors was through Mongolia. However, there is a risk of arrest by Chinese officials, and the cold winter temperatures made passage difficult. The southern route, in contrast, is subtropical and thus accessible year-round. One of the reasons why Thailand was chosen as an alternative to Vietnam is that the Thai government does not repatriate North Korean defectors to North Korea.

Ebihara said that, according to interviews with defectors in South Korea, many of them took years to arrive in Thailand from the time of departure. If they are lucky, it takes three to four months. After hiding in northern China, they head to the south. Along the way, they are subjected to human trafficking, prostitution, and other hardships⁵.

Apart from that, the Japanese North Korean Refugee Relief Fund has gone to the Thai-Laos border survey and published a report. The Fund surveyed the border region between Thailand and Laos from January 14 to 19, 2018, interviewing local police officers and officials from diplomatic missions.

The first stop was Nakhon Phanom in northeastern Thailand. Nakhon Phanom is the capital of Nakhon Phanom Province, facing Laos across the Mekong River. Among the several routes by which defectors cross from Laos to Thailand, the city has suddenly come into the limelight in recent years. The landing sites of defectors on the Thai side of the Mekong River include, from upstream, the Golden Triangle, Chiang Saen, and Chiang Khong. Since some Korean NGOs sending defectors were half-openly too active for the Thai authorities to bear, the police tightened their control over Korean NGO activists. As a result, the crossing point was reportedly moved downstream to Nakhon Phanom.

⁵ "North Korean Refugees Seek Freedom Via Thailand", VOA, Dec 29, 2011 (<https://www.voanews.com/a/north-korean-refugees-seek-freedom-via-thailand-136370353/150081.html>).

According to the police in Nakhon Phanom, regarding the future influx of North Korean defectors, "It is difficult to limit the influx of defectors from North Korea because every place in Thai territory bordering the Mekong River is a point of influx. In the past, the average size of one group coming to the police station throughout the year has been five to seven people; in 2017, Nakhon Phanom police detained about 400 people. As for the background to the increase in North Korean arrivals over the past two to three years, Nakhon Phanom police said they heard that it was the result of stricter policing in Chiang Saen and Chiang Khong upstream.

According to Chiang Khong police, until 2015, they had been detaining approximately 1,000 illegal North Koreans per year in accordance with the law; in 2016, they detained approximately 700, and in 2017, approximately 300; in January 2018, the number of detainees was just 2. He said he expected that the number of detainees for the same year would be less than 100. He speculated that the decrease in detainees may be related to the strict checkpoints along the defectors' route.

During an exchange of views at the Japanese embassy, the Laotian police's opinion was revealed that about 1,000 North Koreans were looking for opportunities to enter Thailand on the Laotian side⁶.

5 Conclusion.

The number of defectors reaching South Korea has declined sharply from a high of 2,914 in 2009, 1,137 in 2018, 1,047 in 2019 to 229 in 2020 and 63 in 2022⁷ (see Figure). A human rights worker testified, "[T]he decline in defections does not stem from a diminished desire among North Koreans to escape their oppressive regime... Rather, it reflects the mounting difficulties imposed by China's pervasive surveillance measures⁸".

According to the Daily Yomiuri, "In the past, defectors who fled to China typically used fake ID cards prepared by brokers to impersonate ethnic Koreans in China and traveled by train or bus to the Southeast Asian border. With the current digitization of ID cards, however, forgery is no longer possible. They have no choice but to take passenger cars or taxis to Southeast Asia, but even on

⁶ Kita-chosen nanmin kyuen kikin (North Korean Refugee Relief Fund), "Tai Laosu kokkyo chosa hokoku (Thai-Laos border survey report.)", HUFFPOST, June 18, 2018 (https://www.huffingtonpost.jp/entry/thai-laos-20180618_jp_5c5b7ddce4b0faa1cb68119c).

⁷ King, Robert R. "Number of North Korean Defectors Drops to Lowest Level in Two Decades", Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 27, 2021 (<https://www.csis.org/analysis/number-north-korean-defectors-drops-lowest-level-two-decades>).

⁸ "Defecting From North Korea Is Now Far Harder", *The New York Times*, July 9, 2023 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/09/world/asia/north-korea-china-defectors.html>).

highways they must go through strict security checkpoints⁹.

In 2023, 196 people had arrived in South Korea, but they were not new escapees since they had already been working in China or Russia.

The significant declines in numbers occurred in 2012 and 2020. 2012 was due to a change in North Korea's national leadership. Kim Jong-il died on December 17, 2011, and was succeeded by his son Kim Jong-un. Kim Jong-un steadily progressed through the succession of power, and on April 13, 2012, he officially became the supreme leader, holding the three powers of the party, the state, and the military. Kim Jong-un stepped up his crackdown on defections.

The decline in 2020 derived from COVID-19. During the COVID-19 pandemic, North Korea completely sealed its border in January 2020, cutting off human traffic and making it impossible to defect from the country. In the unlikely event that North Koreans were able to cross the border into China, China enforced a zero-corona policy that severely restricted smuggling from North Korea into China as well as movement within China. China has installed high-tech surveillance systems on its roads everywhere since before COVID-19, making it difficult for North Korean defectors to escape detection. Travel within China used to be by train or bus, carrying a counterfeit identity card. However, counterfeit cards are often found fraudulent and no longer accepted. The means of transportation are now private cars and cabs. Even on highways, there are checkpoints to detect them. According to the *Asahi Shimbun*, during the global outbreak of COVID-19, ID checks were conducted regardless of location or time, and since public transportation was no longer available, non-shared vehicles were used.

The business of assisting defectors in China has become "almost impossible," according to Christian pastor Chun Ki-won. China imposed strict restrictions on entry and exit and even domestic travel during the pandemic; those restrictions were relaxed in 2023, and Chung and other aid workers have received a surge of appeals from the thousands of North Koreans stranded in China. However, the cost of hiring contractors to transport people has skyrocketed. The risk of being caught by Chinese police has increased.¹⁰ Human rights activist Hanna Song told a congressional hearing in Washington in June 2023 "The decline in defections does not stem from a diminished desire among North Koreans to escape their oppressive regime. Rather, it reflects

⁹ Takayuki Nakagawa, "North Korea Reinforces Border with China, Tightens Control to Prevent Defections that Could Threaten Kim Jong Un's Rule", *Yomiuri Shimbun*, October 11, 2023 (<https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/world/asia-pacific/20231011-142174/>).

¹⁰ "Defecting From North Korea Is Now Far Harder", *The New York Times*, July 9, 2023 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/09/world/asia/north-korea-china-defectors.html>).

the mounting difficulties imposed by China's pervasive surveillance measures.” (Hanna, 2023).

Although the door to the "heaven" in Thailand is open, the stairway to that "heaven" is becoming steeper and steeper.

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Interaction between the Taiwan Strait and Korean Peninsula: Are Crises Cascading?

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1. Introduction

In 2021, the "Taiwan contingency" became a popular topic of discussion; in 2022, the Russo-Ukrainian war erupted, demonstrating to the international community that military superpower leaders such as Vladimir Putin could easily make strategic errors and that wars between major powers could occur even in the 21st century. In 2023, Kim Jong-un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK/North Korea) named the Republic of Korea (ROK/South Korea) as his "number one enemy." Moreover, both regions have been expanding their military and are constantly engaging in provocative military actions.

Discussion of the link between the two crises began in Korea; however, it was not a broad discussion but confined to the expert level.¹ In September 2022, President Yoon Suk Yeol responded to a CNN interview about South Korea's position in the Taiwan contingency, stating, "We must deal with the North Korean threat first."² Thus, it is clear that Yoon Suk Yeol avoids discussing this issue publicly. Both South Korea and the U.S. have traditionally avoided linking the Taiwan Strait and Korean Peninsula issues.³

Reviewing the history, it is undeniable that the two regions, located in the contact zone between China and the Soviet Union/Russia and the U.S. and Japan, have built and maintained their unique logic in terms of security while simultaneously potentially interlocking with each other. This study discusses the possibility of interlocking crises in the Taiwan Strait and Korean Peninsula against the background of ongoing US-PRC strategic competition and the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aims to clarify the

¹ Kohtaro Ito, "Taiwan yūji ni kansuru Kankoku de no giron (Discussion on Taiwan Contingency in South Korea)," *NPI Commentary*, March 23, 2023, https://www.npi.or.jp/research/data/npi_commentary_ito_20230323.pdf. The final access date of all the websites in this paper is March 12, 2024.

² "Interview with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol," Fareed Zakaria GPS, Transcripts, CNN, September 25, 2022, <https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/fzgps/date/2022-09-25/segment/01>.

³ Hideya Kurata, "Ado hokku na Bei-Chū kyōchō' to Kan-Chū kankei: Taiwan kaikyō mondai tonō bunri kakuran yōin toshitenō THAAD, ('Ad Hoc U.S.-China Cooperation and ROK-China Relations: THAAD as a Separating and Disturbing Factor with the Taiwan Strait Issue)," in *Shu Kimpei Seiken Kenkyū (Research on Xi Jinping Administration)*, The Japan Institute of International Affairs, 2023, pp. 174-178.

nature of this issue by analyzing whether the Taiwan and Korean Peninsula contingencies can be linked from the perspective of US-ROK relations under US-PRC strategic competition and the impact of US-DPRK proximity and the Russia-Ukraine war on PRC-DPRK relations.

2. Views of Korean Progressives on the Taiwan Contingency

Concerns in the international community, including Japan, about the Taiwan Strait war intensified rapidly in 2021-2022.⁴ The phrase "the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait" was used at the Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee meeting (Japan-U.S. "2+2") in March 2021, and it was mentioned at the Japan-U.S. summit meeting the following month. In March 2022, during a teleconference with President Tsai Ing-wen, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stated, "A Taiwan contingency is both a Japan contingency and a Japan-US alliance contingency." This was a strong message to deter China. In Japan, there has been a flood of discourse about the Taiwan contingency. This indicates a sense of crisis in Japan regarding the Taiwan Strait situation.

The outbreak of war in Ukraine in February 2022 heightened Japan's sense of urgency regarding Taiwan.⁵ According to a poll by *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 74% of respondents favored Japan's involvement in Taiwan's stability. A poll by *Mainichi Shimbun* revealed that 89% of respondents in Japan were concerned about the Chinese invasion of Taiwan. According to a May 2022 poll conducted by the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, when asked how Japan should prepare for a Taiwan contingency, more than 90% of respondents stated, "Japan should prepare as much as possible within the current laws" (50%), and "Japan should enhance its preparedness, including amending its laws" (41%). However, only 4% of the respondents stated they "do not need to be prepared."

A similar phenomenon was observed in South Korea. South Korean President Moon Jae-in referred to the "importance of preserving peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait" in his joint statement at the June 2021 summit meeting with U.S. President Biden. Like Japan, South Korea is a U.S. ally, and the U.S. forces are present in South Korea. The primary role of United States Forces Korea (USFK) is South Korea's defense. However, in 2006, the U.S. and South Korea agreed on the strategic flexibility of the USFK in advancing the War on Terrorism. Despite this, the USFK is not supposed to be deployed outside the region against South Korea's intentions. Thus, the USFK's strategic flexibility can be exercised if the ROK provides a go-ahead. During the Iraq War, some USFK assets were moved to the

⁴ Yasuhiro Matsuda, "Dai 6 shō Taiwan fakutā: akujunkan no kōzōka, (Chapter 6: The Taiwan Factor: Structuring a Vicious Cycle)," in Akio Takahara, Shigeto Sonoda, Tomoo Marukawa, and Shin Kawashima (eds.), *Nicchū kankei 2001-2022 (Japan-China Relations 2001-2022)*, The University of Tokyo Press, 2023, pp. 189-191.

⁵ Yasuhiro Matsuda, "Dai 6 shō Taiwan fakutā: akujunkan no kōzōka, (Chapter 6: The Taiwan Factor: Structuring a Vicious Cycle)," pp. 189-191.

Middle East for use.

The problem is that in the case of the Taiwan Strait War, the target would be China, South Korea's largest trading partner, and China could use its influence over North Korea to provoke military actions that would check the Republic of Korea Armed Forces (ROKA) and USFK. Indeed, the "Taiwan Clause" aforementioned did not necessarily have the security implications of ROKA supporting the deployment of U.S. forces in the event of a Taiwan contingency.⁶ Published in Korea in 2022, the book titled 'U.S.-China Competition and the Taiwan Strait Crisis: Are North and South Korea in the Chains of Alliance?' examines the challenges that South Korea will face during the Taiwan Strait Crisis from a perspective aligned with the views of progressives in South Korea.”

One of the authors, Cheong Wook-Sik, Director of the Hankyoreh Peace Institute, first indicated the concern that, based on information available from the U.S. military and Congress, the U.S. has already established the option of deploying the USFK during the Taiwan Strait War, is promoting strengthening the UN forces to fill the vacuum of the USFK, and there is a trend of enhancing the strategic flexibility of the USFK.⁷ He is pessimistic about the future of cross-Strait relations, indicating that both sides are moving in an unresolved direction with the intention of changing the status quo, while U.S. support for Taiwan is rising.

Specifically, Cheong Wook-Sik said that according to Article 3 of the Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the ROK, "Each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific area on either of the Parties in territories now under their respective administrative control, or hereafter recognized by one of the Parties as lawfully brought under the administrative control of the other, would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes."⁸ The U.S. indicated its concern that an attack by China over the Taiwan Strait would amount to an "armed attack in the Pacific area" and may be a requirement for the exercise of the right of collective self-defense by the ROK, and simultaneously,

⁶ Hideya Kurata, "Ado hokku na Bei-Chū kyōchō' to Kan-Chū kankei: Taiwan kaikyō mondai tonō bunri kakuran yōin toshitenō THAAD, ('Ad Hoc U.S.-China Cooperation' and ROK-China Relations: THAAD as a Separating and Disturbing Factor with the Taiwan Strait Issue)," p. 181.

⁷ Cheong Wook-Sik, "3bu Daemanhaehyeop wigiwa dongmaengui chein: Nambukaneun yeolludoel geosinga? (Chapter 3: The Taiwan Strait and the Chain of Alliance: Will North and South Korea Get Involved?)," Gil Yun-hyung, et.al., *MiJung gyeongjaenggwa Daemanhaehyeop wigi: Nambukaneun dongmaengui cheine yeolludoel geosinga? (U.S.-China Competition and the Taiwan Strait Crisis: Will North and South Korea Become Involved in Chain of Alliance?)*, pp. 147-148. Note that the author's analysis is based on perceptions close to those of China and the Kuomintang in Taiwan, as he notes that the foundation of cross-Strait relations is the 1992 Consensus, agreed to by China and Taiwan in 1992.

⁸ "Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of Korea" United States Forces Korea, October 1, 1953, https://www.usfk.mil/Portals/105/Documents/SOFA/H_Mutual%20Defense%20Treaty_1953.pdf.

the use of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missiles deployed in Seongju and the naval base on Jeju Island. Simultaneously, he indicates the concern that the use of THAAD and launching a sortie from the naval base on Jeju Island would not require "constitutional processes" on the part of South Korea and that South Korea would eventually be involved through the actions of the U.S. military.⁹

This "entanglement theory" regarding the Taiwan Strait in Korea is similar to the argument that has developed in Japan since the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1995-1996.

Another author of the book, Chang Young-Hee, Research Fellow at the Institute for Peace & Security Studies at Chungnam National University, highlighted the following concerns in an interview with TV Tokyo in Japan.¹⁰ The question is: How can we ensure the safety of local Korean companies and nationals in the event of war across the Taiwan Strait? According to the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), only about 100 Korean companies operate in Taiwan, and according to the ROK's Overseas Koreans Agency, only about 4,800 Korean nationals live in Taiwan. Chang Young-Hee indicated that South Korea should consider the 215,000 Koreans living in China. Although it is uncertain how many companies and individuals will be affected in Taiwan, China can easily target Korean companies and individuals staying in the country for retaliation. Thus, economic relations with China could significantly restrict the actions of the ROKA and its governments.

According to a poll conducted by the East Asia Institute (EAI) of South Korea in 2022, 64.5% of the respondents said that if a war broke out across the Taiwan Strait, Japan would have to cooperate with the United States to deal with the Taiwan issue. When asked how the U.S. should respond, 42.0% stated it should be limited to logistical support, and 22.5% said it should participate in military operations.¹¹

In Japan, concerns about the safety of Japanese companies and nationals staying in Taiwan and China, coupled with the Taiwan contingency theory, rapidly increased, and the Japan-US alliance was discussed as a way to deal with the situation. Similar concerns are believed to have rapidly grown in South Korea. Chang Young-Hee explains that the situation in South Korea emphasizes a triangular alliance between the ROK, the U.S., and Japan from the perspective that war in the Taiwan Strait

⁹ Cheong Wook-Sik, "3bu Daemanhaehyeop wigiwa dongmaengui chein: Nambukaneun yeolludael geosinga? (Chapter 3: The Taiwan Strait and the Chain of Alliance: Will North and South Korea Get Involved?)," pp. 190-192.

¹⁰ "Kankoku wa 'Taiwan yuji' ni do mukiaunoka? (How Will the ROK Face the 'Taiwan Contingency') [Seoul Correspondent's Perspective]," TV TOKYO BIZ, December 2, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZBD5NTAe_M.

¹¹ Ibid.

should be deterred.

3. Assumptions about the U.S.-Korea Alliance Response by U.S.-Korea Military Experts

In March 2023, military experts from both South Korea and the United States published two papers on the role of the US-ROK alliance in the Taiwan Strait War. Michael Casey, a U.S. Department of Defense military analyst, divided the Taiwan Strait War into: 1) a PRC joint fire strike campaign intended to inflict sufficient damage to compel Taiwan to negotiate its political status with Beijing; 2) a PRC joint blockade intended to inflict sufficient damage to Taiwan's economy to compel negotiations; and 3) a joint island landing campaign intended to seize Taiwan and bring it under PRC control.¹²

In these three cases, Phillip C. Saunders, Director at the Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs and a Distinguished Research Fellow at the U.S. National Defense University's Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS), indicated the actions the United States may demand of South Korea.¹³ The U.S. usually makes political considerations to avoid South Korea's suffering between the U.S. and China. Once wartime begins, however, "Washington is likely to be less deferential to ROK interests and political concerns than in a peacetime environment," Saunders noted.¹⁴

From the Korean perspective, Alex Soohoon Lee and Choong-Koo Lee, two Associate Research Fellows at the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses (KIDA), quoted retired General Robert Abrams, former Commander of the USFK, as mentioning possible use of USFK in the Taiwan Strait crisis by stating that "all options," "including those assigned to the USFK," are open for the Taiwan Strait crisis because the USFK is under the command of the US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) and part of its area of responsibility (AOR), and speculated on what the US would demand of South Korea.¹⁵

The assumptions made by both sides regarding the US-ROK alliance's responses are summarized in Table 1.

¹² Michael Casey, "Firepower Strike, Blockade, Landing: PLA Campaigns for a Cross-Strait Conflict," Joel Wuthnow, Derek Grossman, Philip C. Saunders, Andrew Scobell, and Andrew N.D. Yang, eds., *Crossing the Strait: China's Military Prepares for War with Taiwan* (Washington D.C.: NDU Press, 2022), pp. 113–138.

¹³ Phillip C. Saunders, "Stressing the Alliance: The United States and the ROK in a Conflict with China over Taiwan," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol. 35, No. 1, March 2023.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁵ Alex Soohoon Lee and Choong-Koo Lee, "The Taiwan Strait and the ROK-U.S. Alliance," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol. 35, No. 1, March 2023, p. 154.

9. Interaction between the Taiwan Strait and Korean Peninsula: Are Crises Cascading?

Table 1: Assumptions by U.S. and Korean Scholars on the Taiwan Strait War

	U.S. Demands and Concerns	Korea's Response and Concerns
Commonality for all scenarios	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to ask strong diplomatic condemnation of China and statement of support for Taiwan to compare Korea's response with those of Japan, Australia, and other allies to implement economic sanctions against China: sanctions focused on individuals and organizations, ban on exports of weapons and dual use goods, travel bans, asset seizures etc. if U.S. forces are taking significant casualties in an actual conflict with China, U.S. leaders will be much less likely to defer to ROK concerns about potential North Korean provocations or attacks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the ROK has demonstrated its support for the United States, such as "importance of the peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait" if the time comes, the ROK's policy options could be limited; therefore, the ROK must prepare well for various options in multiple situations decisions will have to be made promptly in a dynamic situation Seoul will face a dilemma where its involvement in the conflict, whether active or passive, may affect the security landscape of the Korean peninsula; the ROK will have to assess its own risks before making any decisions regarding involvement
(1) a joint fire strike campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> intelligence-sharing the U.S. military may move some U.S. forces off the peninsula to conduct or support combat operations against China, particularly if the ROK government will not allow them to operate from Korean territory to ask the ROK to provide logistics support for U.S. forces (could be done quietly without public announcement) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ROK will have to cooperate with the United States to cope with the Chinese aggression under visible and tangible clashes between China and Taiwan to support the implementation of the U.S. regional strategy by monitoring and deterring aggressive Chinese activities around the Korean Peninsula, particularly on the western front to deny the Chinese military's transit across ROK territorial airspace and seas within 12 nautical miles of the ROK mainland (this would not be difficult) cooperate with the United States in the space and cyber domains
(2) a joint blockade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to make similar requests to South Korea as in the previous scenario in the event of a conflict with China focused on blockade and counter-blockade operations to ask South Korea to provide logistics support for civilian ships and aircraft carrying military goods to the combat theater and for U.S. military ships and planes engaged in non-strike operations such as surveillance, escort duties, and search and rescue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ROK may be able to designate maintenance facilities and bases for the maintenance of U.S. civilian aircraft or ships engaged in non-military missions (it may be the target of the Chinese criticism) there could be a case that Seoul may positively consider its cooperation with Washington and Tokyo the ROK will have to defend the USFK from a Chinese naval offensive the ROK should prepare for a Chinese naval blockade in the Yellow Sea
(3) a joint island landing campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> China would have incentives to encourage North Korean provocations (although probably not a full war) to create strains in the U.S.-ROK alliance and tie down U.S. forces on the peninsula to expect the ROK to deal with low- and medium-level DPRK provocations largely on its own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to keep track of the bilateral relations between China and the DPRK the ROK may be expected to deal with North Korean low-level provocations on its own, a strengthened alliance coordination mechanism may be a must to manage simultaneous provocation in two theaters China's direct offensive to the ROK territory cannot be excluded If Kim Jong-un decides to commence a war on the Peninsula in the midst of a contingency, it will be an all-out war that could possibly develop into a nuclear war

Source: Author's arrangement of the contents of notes 13 and 15 references.

Scenarios (1) and (2) will undoubtedly occur in the first half of Scenario (3), and it is difficult to

determine at the stages of Scenarios (1) and (2) that this will not develop into Scenario (3); rather, it is natural to prepare for Scenario (3). Thus, it is meaningful to compare the U.S. and South Korea for the scenario as a whole.

These are only estimates by scholars; however, they agree on three points. First, the fear of involvement is strong in South Korea. Second, North Korea's military provocation could occur (nuclear use is not excluded in the worst case). Third, since the USFK will be dispatched outside the region, South Korea may have to deal with North Korean military actions independently.

However, the differences between the U.S. and ROK regarding Scenario (2) are relatively significant. Korean scholars are concerned about supporting the U.S. military and civilian aircraft and vessels that would sail into the Taiwan Strait battlefield, whereas U.S. scholars have taken explicit military support for granted. Korean scholars fear a Chinese blockade of the Yellow Sea.

If North Korea were to use nuclear weapons, retaliation by the U.S. (not excluding nuclear use) would be certain. Since both China and Russia oppose North Korea's use of nuclear weapons, the probability of an actual nuclear attack would be considered extremely low. However, since the USFK, after realignment, is concentrated in three garrisons and bases, including Pyeongtaek, Osan, and Gunsan, the risk has increased under a tactical nuclear threat, making the USFK bases more vulnerable to a North Korean nuclear threat.

Will U.S. military assets in South Korea be used on the battlefield in Taiwan? Since 2020, U-2 high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft belonging to the USFK Osan Air Force Base have been conducting reconnaissance flights over the Yellow Sea, Taiwan Strait, and South China Sea.¹⁶ In June 2021, a U.S. military aircraft (C-17) in South Korea visited Taiwan with three U.S. senators.¹⁷ C-17 is a military aircraft capable of transporting M1 Abrams tanks. The fact that the U.S. military operational aircraft made an unprecedented landing in Taiwan, not as an emergency landing owing to an accident but for political use, flying to Taiwan with U.S. senators was greeted with surprise. They were used to deliver a political message to break through the Chinese "vaccine blockade" of Taiwan, a demonstration of clear U.S. intent to support Taiwan.

Thus, it is reasonable to assume that since U.S. military assets in Korea are used for the Taiwan Strait

¹⁶ Cheong Wook-Sik, "3bu Daemanhaehyeop wigiwa dongmaengui chein: Nambukaneun yeolludoel geosinga? (Chapter 3: The Taiwan Strait and the Chain of Alliance: Will North and South Korea Get Involved?)," pp. 153-154.

¹⁷ "Mei canyiyuan fangtuan diTai, xuanbu jiang juanzeng Taiwan 75 wanji yimiao, (U.S. Senate Delegation Arrives in Taiwan and Declares Taiwan Will Receive 750,000 Doses of COVID-19 Vaccine)," *Central News Agency*, June 6, 2021, <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/firstnews/202106065002.aspx>.

and the South China Sea in peacetime, they will also be used in a contingency. When the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), an American policy think tank, conducted simulations of the Taiwan Strait War, it also mentioned the diversion of two of the four squadrons of the 7th Air Force of the USFK to the Taiwanese battlefield and the possibility that Russia, Iran, and North Korea would take advantage of this opportunity to launch military action. The possibility of Russia, Iran, North Korea, and other countries taking advantage of this opportunity for military action has also been mentioned.¹⁸ From a military rationale, it should be assumed that the USFK will play a role in the Taiwan contingency and that the expansion of the front line beyond the Taiwan Strait is also envisioned.

Sounders noted that after the end of the war, "South Korean behavior and support will be critically examined, and this analysis will take place in a politicized and nationalistic United States. The future of US-ROK relations and the long-term fate of the US-ROK alliance will likely depend on U.S. perceptions about whether South Korea did enough to help when the United States needed that help the most."¹⁹ South Korea, too, will have to decide on its actions, considering the type of support Japan and Australia will provide to the U.S. and the nature of the postwar relationship between South Korea and the U.S. Many people have begun to consider future wars after 2021, which did not occur during peacetime. Xi Jinping has opened a Pandora's box by suggesting the use of force.

4. Signs of a Closer Relationship between South Korea and Taiwan?

The rise of the Taiwan contingency theory led to a trend toward closer Japan-Taiwan relations.²⁰ This did not necessarily result in Japan's commitment to the defense of Taiwan or defense exchanges between Japan and Taiwan. Nonetheless, Japan strongly believed that China's aggression against Taiwan must be deterred and that communication with Taiwan should be strengthened. This led to increased visits to Taiwan by Diet members and other activities.

These exchanges between Western countries and Taiwan have increased in recent years.²¹ Although it has not received much attention, there has been a movement in South Korea seeking the development of relations with Taiwan. During the Cold War, Taiwan and South Korea were sometimes referred to

¹⁸ Mark F. Cancian, Mathew Cancian and Eric Heginbotham, *The First Battle of the Next War: Wargaming a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan*, Center for Strategic & International Studies, January 2023, pp. 60-63.

¹⁹ Phillip C. Sounders, "Stressing the Alliance: The United States and the ROK in a Conflict with China over Taiwan," p. 150.

²⁰ Yasuhiro Matsuda, "Dai 6 shō Taiwan fakutā: akujunkan no kōzōka (Chapter 6: The Taiwan Factor: Structuring a Vicious Cycle)," pp. 189-191.

²¹ Yasuhiro Matsuda, "Chūgoku-Ōshū kankei no kōzō henka: Ōshū no taiChūkeikai to taiTai sekkin wa naze okitaka? (Structural Changes in China-Europe Relations: Why Did Europe's Caution Against China and Its Proximity to Taiwan Occur?)," Shin Kawashima, Ayame Suzuki, and Yu Koizumi eds., *Yūrashia no jigazō: "Bei-Chū tairitsu/sin reisen" ron no shikaku, (Eurasia's Self-Portrait: The Blind Spot in the 'US-China Conflict/New Cold War' Theory)*, PHP Research Institute, 2023, pp. 355-360.

as "brotherly countries" as they had something in common: they were both under threat from divided states run by communist parties.²²

The turning point was the development and success of the ROK's Northern Diplomacy, which led to the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Korea in 1992, resulting in the loss of diplomatic relations between the ROK and the Republic of China in Taiwan. Since then, South Korea has "respected" China's "one China" principle and has taken the position that the Taiwan issue is an internal affair of China. This situation is similar to that observed in Japan. The Park Geun-hye administration has accelerated its approach toward China, and, in inverse proportion to this, relations with Taiwan have been soured. In the absence of diplomatic relations, the ROK defined its relationship with Taiwan as an "informal pragmatic relationship" and only sought to build nonpolitical ties centered on economics and culture, such as by holding the "Joint TAITRA-KOTRA Conference" between Taiwan External Trade Development Council and the Korea External Trade Promotion and Investment Corporation of the ROK.²³

However, as aforementioned, a reference was made to the "importance of preserving peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait" at the May 2021 U.S.-South Korea summit meeting. This reference by President Moon Jae-in, seen as having a strong consideration for China, was received with surprise. It is safe to assume that discussions on how to respond to the Taiwan contingency began in the ROK at this time. Unlike during the election period, the Yoon Suk Yeol administration inherited this position while increasing its consideration for China since assuming office.²⁴

In December 2022, reports circulated in South Korea that President Yoon Suk Yeol was considering appointing the former Chairman of the ROK Joint Chief of Staff as his representative to Taipei.²⁵ As of March 2024, this has yet to occur; however, if it does, semi-official relations between South Korea and Taiwan will reach their highest level since the 1992 diplomatic break. In January 2023, Chung

²² Chao Wen-Chih, "Tai-Han guanxi de lishi yanbian yu weilai zhanwang: jiegouxianshizhuyi de guandian, (Historical Transition and Future Prospects of Taiwan-ROK Relations: A Structural Realist Perspective)," Bumsig Ha ed., *Tai-Han guanxi de fazhan: xianzai, guoqu, xianzai yiji weilai, (The Development of Taiwan-Korea Relations: Past, Present and Future)*, Taipei: Hanlu Press, 2018, p. 27.

²³ Bumsig Ha, "Tai-han guanxi de xingcheng yu tezheng: yi jiangouzhuayi guandian tantao, (The Formation and Characteristics of Taiwan-Korea Relations: A Constructivist Perspective)," Bumsig Ha ed., *Tai-Han guanxi de fazhan: xianzai, guoqu, xianzai yiji weilai, (The Development of Taiwan-Korea Relations: Past, Present and Future)*, pp. 44-47.

²⁴ Hideya Kurata, "'Ado hkkū na Bei-Chū kyōchō' to Kan-Chū kankei: Taiwan kaikyō mondai tono bunri kakuran yōin toshitenō THAAD, ('Ad Hoc U.S.-China Cooperation' and ROK-China Relations: THAAD as a Separating and Disturbing Factor with the Taiwan Strait Issue)," pp. 178-180.

²⁵ Yi Hsuan Lu, "Dongya qingshi kaoliang, chuan Nanhān jiang pai qian canmouzongzhang ren zhu Taidaiiao, (In view of the situation in East Asia, Accordingly South Korea will send its former Chief of General Staff as its representative in Taipei)," *Liberty Times*, November 2, 2022, <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/4110128>.

Woo-taik, Deputy Speaker of the ROK National Assembly, visited Taiwan and met President You Si-kun of the Legislative Yuan and President Tsai Ing-wen.²⁶ This was the highest political visit to Taiwan by a politician since the island's diplomatic breakup, and China reacted furiously.

Still, this is not necessarily evidence that the ROK has begun to increase its involvement in Taiwan. This is because the deterioration of cross-strait and PRC-ROK relations could result in the recurrence of past events, but with greater coverage by the Taiwanese media and a stronger reaction from the Chinese government.

On the other hand, Taiwan's relations with North Korea deteriorated in inverse proportion to its development of relations with Western nations. In the past, during the Lee Teng-hui administration (1988-2000), Taiwan and North Korea had repeated reciprocal visits by private organizations over economic and trade relations and continued discussions over the disposal of nuclear waste from Taiwan's nuclear power plants in North Korea. However, this relationship worsened after the birth of the Chen Shui-bian administration in 2000.²⁷ The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government of Chen Shui-bian tended to be more pro-US than the Kuomintang government. Every time North Korea conducted a nuclear test or launched a ballistic missile, sanctions were imposed based on UN Security Council resolutions; however, Taiwan accepted these international norms and implemented sanctions against North Korea even though it has no representation in the UN. The same was true for the Russia-Ukraine War, in which Taiwan aligned itself with the international community to impose sanctions against Russia in 2022. The resurgence of the old Cold War logic is apparent in this case, too. It appears as though East Asia will revert to a bloc of the U.S., Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan and a bloc of China, Russia, and North Korea.

5. PRC-DPRK Proximity under U.S.-China Strategic Competition

As is clear from the strategic confrontation between the U.S. and China, intensifying military confrontation in cross-strait relations, and intensifying conflict between North and South Korea, the logic of the Cold War is partially returning. North Korea can be presumed to be a country with strong expectations of a return to the Cold War based on its experience of receiving support from both China and the Soviet Union during the Cold War while simultaneously suffering the hardships of isolation

²⁶ Lu Chia-rong, "Hanguohui fuyizhang deng ren fangTai, Beijing: dailai yanzhong chongji, (Deputy Speaker of the ROK National Assembly visits Taiwan, Beijing Says It Will Have Serious Impact)," *Central News Agency*, January 5, 2023, <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/acn/202301050272.aspx>.

²⁷ Lin Chih Hao, "Jin Zhengri-Jin zhengen shiqi de tiaozhan waijiaoluxian zhiyanjiu: yi meifang sanjiao, dongnanya he Chao-Tai guanxi wei li, (A Study of Challenges and Diplomatic Paths in the Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong-un Period: The Cases of the Northern Triangle, Southeast Asia and North Korea-Taiwan Relations)," Bumsig Ha ed., *Tai-Han guanxi: Jiaoliu, hezuo yu zhengce bijiao, (Taiwan-Korea Relations: Exchange, Cooperation and Policy Comparison)*, Taipei: Hanlu Press, 2019, pp. 187-189.

after the Cold War. Although China and North Korea may be legally allied, their militaries do not have joint plans, conduct joint training, or take joint actions, which is different from alliances such as those between Japan and the U.S. or South Korea and the U.S. Does a close relationship exist between China and North Korea that would lead to joint action in the event of a Taiwan Strait War? Are there signs of such a relationship being established in the future?

The Kim Jong-un and Xi Jinping administrations were established at approximately the same time—in 2011 and 2012-2013, respectively. However, the relationship between the two governments was initially poor.²⁸ North Korea conducted a satellite launch and its fifth nuclear test around the time the Xi Jinping administration was formed. In December 2013, it executed Jang Sung-thaek, Vice Chairman of the National Defense Commission, who had close ties with China. Moreover, Xi Jinping visited South Korea in July 2014, before North Korea. North Korea launched a ballistic missile, Hwasong-12, on May 14, 2017, when the first Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF), Xi Jinping's key initiative, opened in Beijing. North Korea forced its sixth nuclear test in September 2017, and PRC-DPRK relations remained in the doldrums. When North Korea launched ballistic missiles 23 times in 2016 and 17 times in 2017, China failed to stop its outbursts. In addition, no meetings or mutual visits between the leaders of the two parties were realized. However, there was a visit by Chinese State Vice President Li Yuanchao in July 2013 and a meeting between Xi Jinping and Kim Yong-nam, President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly in the DPRK, at the opening ceremony of the Sochi Olympics in February 2014.²⁹

China's tough response to the U.S. military's deployment of THAAD in South Korea in 2016 also resulted in the Xi Jinping administration's goal of initially seeking good relations with South Korea falling short and simultaneously facing deteriorating relations with North and South Korea.

These changes occurred because of U.S. President Donald J. Trump's policy shift toward China and North Korea.³⁰ The Trump administration imposed sanctions and tariffs on China in March 2018. Combined with China's simultaneous decision to amend its constitution to revoke the term of its president and begin strengthening its dictatorship, the US-China confrontation worsened. However, Trump decided to hold a summit with Kim Jong-un in Singapore in June 2018. After this US-China closeness was finalized, China and North Korea rapidly moved closer. Kim Jong-un visited China

²⁸ Shunji Hiraiwa, "Chū-Chō no aratana 'dentōteki kankei' (New 'Traditional Relations' between the PRC and the DPRK)," *Research Report*, The Japan Institute of International Affairs, March 26, 2021, <https://www.jiia.or.jp/research-report/post-78.html> <https://www.jiia.or.jp/research-report/post-78.html>.

²⁹ "Zhongguo tong Chaoxian de guanxi (Relationship between China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea)," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, updated in December 2023, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/yz_676205/1206_676404/sbgx_676408/.

³⁰ Shunji Hiraiwa, "Chū-Chō no aratana 'dentōteki kankei' (New 'Traditional Relations' between the PRC and the DPRK)."

thrice in March, May, and June 2018.

The PRC-DPRK relations are often described in a way that "each side maintains relations while concealing their intentions toward the U.S. and their distrust of the other."³¹ Faced with the approaching U.S.-North Korea relationship, Xi Jinping significantly reduced the distance with North Korea, which had cold relations since the beginning of his administration: a visit to China by Kim Jong-un in January 2019, the Trump-Kim meeting in Hanoi in February 2019, and Xi's visit in June 2019, all in rapid succession, brought PRC-DPRK relations close. At the Trump-Kim meeting in Panmunjom in June 2019, negotiations regarding the suspension of nuclear development broke down. This was followed by an increase in ballistic missile test firing. Clearly, the US-China rivalry was a factor in the proximity of China and North Korea. An increase in ballistic missile launches under improved PRC-DPRK relations was observed. Thus, the Xi Jinping administration was forced to improve the initially cold Sino-North Korean relationship by Kim Jong-un, who took advantage of the proximity of the U.S.-DPRK.

However, the process of improving PRC-DPRK relations had to be stalled during the COVID-19 pandemic.³² Faced with the pandemic that began in Wuhan, North Korea closed its border with China in January 2020. Since then, human traffic between China and North Korea has ceased. In addition, in October 2020, a total ban was imposed on cargo transport between China and North Korea, which also caused significant damage to the DPRK economy; exports in 2020 were reported to have decreased by 80.9% from the previous year, and imports by 77.7%. The leaders of China and North Korea have been engaged in "congratulatory telegram diplomacy," sending congratulatory telegrams to each other at milestones.³³

6. The Russia-Ukraine War and the PRC-DPRK Relations

In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In September 2021, the trilateral security partnership among Australia, the U.K., and the U.S. (AUKUS) was established, and the first Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) leaders meeting was held, strengthening the U.S. encirclement of China. However, China tacitly approved North Korea's ballistic missile launches. Thus, under the

³¹ Ibid.

³² "Zhong-Chao shige liangnian huifu kache huoyun (China and North Korea Finally Bring Back Cargo Transport after Two Years)," *Rijing Zhongwenwang (NIKKEI Chinese)*, February 16, 2023, <https://zh.cn.nikkei.com/politicsaeconomy/politicsasociety/51433-2023-02-16-10-10-24.html>.

³³ Shunji Hiraiwa, "Dai 3 shō Ukuraina jōsei to Chūgoku Chōsen hantō kankei: higashi Ajia no kōzōteki henyo no kanōsei to Kitachōsen no kokubō kyōka (Chapter 3: The Situation in Ukraine and China-Korean Peninsula Relations: The Possibility of Structural Transformation in East Asia and the Strengthening of North Korea's National Defense)," The Japan Institute of International Affairs ed., *Taikokukan Kyōsō no jidai" no Chōsen hantō to chitsujō no yukue (The Korean Peninsula and the Future of Order in the "Era of Great Power Competition")*, The Japan Institute of International Affairs, 2023, pp. 83-85.

superficially good relationship, North Korea launched ballistic missiles a record number of 59 times in 2022.

North Korea had a zero-COVID policy; however, it experienced a domestic infection outbreak in the spring and summer of 2022. Railroad transportation was partially restored in September 2022, however, Sino-North Korean trade in 2022 was 60% lower than before the pandemic (\$1.028 billion; \$894 million in Chinese exports and \$134 million in imports).³⁴ North Korea resumed truck transportation between China and North Korea in February 2023. In July 2023, Li Hongzhong, the Vice Chairperson of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, visited the DPRK to participate in events marking the 70th anniversary of the armistice in the Korean War and the human traffic that had been halted because of the COVID-19 pandemic was finally restored.

North Korea has repeatedly announced its position of support for Russia in the Russia-Ukraine war. It has also begun to play the "Taiwan card," taking advantage of the timing of Li Hongzhong's visit to the DPRK.³⁵ In the past, North Korea has made few specific statements on the Taiwan issue other than publicly supporting the "one China" principle. However, on August 3, 2023, the Korean Central News Agency of the DPRK quoted a spokesperson from the DPRK's Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticizing U.S. military aid to Taiwan.

Further, with the commencement of the Yoon Suk Yeol administration in May 2022, strategic cooperation with Japan and the U.S. has progressed. A summit meeting between the leaders of the two countries occurred in November 2022, resulting in the landmark "Phnom Penh Statement on Trilateral Partnership for the Indo-Pacific," which refers to "peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as an indispensable element of security and prosperity in the international community."³⁶ Following this, in August 2023, a Japan-U.S.-Korea summit meeting was held at Camp David in the U.S., which called for enhanced cooperation, including security, and a joint statement referred to "peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."³⁷ In response, Kim Jong-un visited Russia in September 2023 and

³⁴ "Zhongguo tong Chaoxian de guanxi (Relationship between China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea)," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, updated in December 2023, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/yz_676205/1206_676404/sbgx_676408/.

³⁵ Lin Chih Hao, "Hou yiqing shidai Beihan hezhanlv dui Tai-Han guanxi zhi yingxiang, (The Impact of North Korea's Nuclear Strategy on Taiwan-ROK Relations in the Post-COVID-19 Pandemic Era)," pp. 179-180.

³⁶ Yasuyo Sakata, "Dai 9 shō Indo-Taiheiyō jidai no Nichi-Bei-Kan anzen hoshō kyōryōku: Punonpen 'sankakoku pātonāshipu' seimei to kongo no kadai (Chapter 9: Japan-U.S.-ROK Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Era: Phnom Penh 'Tripartite Partnership' Statement and Future Challenges)," The Japan Institute of International Affairs ed., "*Taikokukan kyōsō no jidai*" no Chōsen hantō to chitsujo no yukue (*The Korean Peninsula and the Future of Order in the "Era of Great Power Competition"*), 2023, pp. 158-161.

³⁷ "The Spirit of Camp David: Joint Statement of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100541826.pdf>.

strengthened cooperation between the two countries. Soon after, information emerged that Russia had procured arms and ammunition from North Korea.³⁸ The protracted Russia-Ukraine War forced Russia to approach North Korea, which did not fear sanctions from the U.S. among former Eastern countries that shared many of the same standards for weapons and ammunition. Owing to North Korea's opposition to the UN resolution condemning Russia, when North Korea launched a ballistic missile in March 2022, Russia used its veto power to stop the resolution of the UN Security Council sanctions. Russia is a major power capable of providing North Korea with the energy, weapons, and military technology it requires, and there is much room for development between the two countries. Kim Jong-un's regime took advantage of Russia's struggle to promptly move closer to it.³⁹ North Korea has significantly improved its relations with both China and Russia over the years by taking advantage of the new Cold War-like confrontational structure in which the United States is at odds with both China and Russia.⁴⁰

Kim Jong-un is attempting to revive the logic of the Cold War in East Asia, with the election in January 2024 of Lai Ching-te of the DPP, who has poor relations with China and is pro-American. As president, Taiwan will have no choice but to become more dependent on the U.S. Examining the region as a whole, there are now prospects for cooperation between Japan, the United States, and Taiwan, and between Japan, the United States, and South Korea in countering China, Russia, and the DPRK, respectively. However, China and Russia disagreed on Russia's continuing war. To bring them together, North Korea aims to provide military support to Russia and ensure that both Russia and China see the value of checking the USFK. Thus, North Korea is creating strategic cards for China and Russia against the United States.

Therefore, North Korea expects China, Russia, and North Korea to share the same position and benefit from confronting Japan, the U.S., and South Korea. China may not want North Korea to act provocatively in peacetime but may want North Korea to check the USFK in times of war. The fact that North Korea has begun referring to South Korea, which is supposed to be the southern part of the

³⁸ Julian E. Barnes, "Russia Is Buying North Korean Artillery, according to U.S. Intelligence," *The New York Times*, September 8, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/05/us/politics/russia-north-korea-artillery.html>. Keisey Davenport, "U.S. Says North Korea Shipped Arms to Russia," Arms Control Association, November 2023, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2023-11/news/us-says-north-korea-shipped-arms-russia>.

³⁹ Hiromi Kamoshita, "Kitachōsen to Roshia ga kyūsekkin, 'senryakuteki shinraikankei' ni sukeru ryōkoku no ondosa (North Korea and Russia Draw Closer; Difference in Degrees of Enthusiasm between the Two Countries Transparent in 'Strategic Trust Relations')," *Research Report*, Japan Institute of International Affairs, November 13, 2023, <https://www.jiia.or.jp/research-report/missile-fy2023-02.html>.

⁴⁰ Shunji Hiraiwa, "Dai 3 shō Ukuraina jōsei to Chūgoku Chōsen hantō kankei: higashi Ajia no kōzōteki henyō no kanōsei to Kitachōsen no kokubō kyōka (Chapter 3: The Situation in Ukraine and China-Korean Peninsula Relations: The Possibility of Structural Transformation in East Asia and the Strengthening of North Korea's National Defense)," pp. 79-80.

DPRK, as the "Republic of Korea," in addition to signifying its determination to maintain its independence, may be an attempt to make China consider the value of the "North Korea card."

As aforementioned, North Korean diplomacy is accustomed to maximizing its own interests while aiming to maintain independence relative to China's influence, and its approach to Russia can also be interpreted in this context. Moreover, because the UN Security Council resolution on the Korean War remains in effect, if North Korea attacks South Korea, the United Nations Command (UNC) in South Korea can counterattack without having to seek instructions from the UN Secretariat. The Korean Armistice Agreement broadly binds North Korea's actions, and it is unlikely that North Korea will take military action solely for China's convenience. It is only to make South Korea and the United States believe that military provocation is possible, which would create an advantageous situation for North Korea.

7. Conclusion

The discussion presented reveals the following three points.

First, in the event of a Taiwan contingency, it is considered almost self-evident by the U.S. and South Korean experts that some U.S. military assets in South Korea would be sent to Taiwan for defense purposes. A U.S. military expert takes for granted the effective use of military assets available in the region. It is not known whether China will attack the USFK within South Korean territory or outside of South Korean territory after a sortie; however, if the U.S. forces are attacked, there are several decision-making forks in alliance management as to how South Korea should respond to this, and the possibility of South Korea being involved is being indicated at various levels which is a concern.

Second, although there is strong concern in the ROK about "entanglement theory," there exists the prospect that, as an ally, the ROK will have no choice but to provide a certain degree of support to the US. However, South Korea's dependence on China is extremely high, and China's influence over South Korea is significant. Furthermore, the responses may vary depending on whether conservatives or progressives are in power. Although public debate is less advanced in South Korea than in Japan, discussions have begun among intellectuals, and some public opinion polls suggest that the majority believe that the US-ROK alliance will have to respond in some way.

Third, it has been indicated that the Taiwan contingency could escalate into a war between the U.S. and China, which could trigger military action by North Korea. Although North Korea strongly expects a revival of the Cold War, China, the largest beneficiary of globalization, does not support North Korea's military provocations during peacetime. However, many experts speculate that once China decides to launch a full-scale invasion of Taiwan, it will not attack South Korea itself but will expect

North Korea to play its role in stalling the USFK. North Korea's hostility toward South Korea also aligns with China's expectations of stalling USFK. However, even if China expects North Korea to take military action in the event of an emergency in Taiwan, whether North Korea will do as expected is another matter. North Korea should decide on the action that best suits its interests. It is natural to assume that China has insufficient influence to make North Korea invade South Korea. In particular, it is difficult to imagine North Korea committing such a "suicide" act as the use of nuclear weapons, which could destroy its own country for the sake of Taiwan's unification.

Perhaps "the Taiwan contingency is both an ROK contingency and a US-ROK alliance contingency." However, this remains an imaginary event. People have begun to form all types of associations based on the assumption that China will make an extreme and unrealistic choice to use force. China wants to avoid or delay the Cold War and is in the same boat as North Korea, which expects to revive the Cold War. Moreover, China is unlikely to welcome Russia-DPRK proximity. If China and North Korea form relations involving shared strategic interests, the probability that the Taiwan Strait and Korean Peninsula crises will be linked may increase. However, in reality, the answer to the question of the link between the Taiwan Strait and the Korean Peninsula is that the US-Japan alliance, US-ROK alliance, US-Taiwan security partnership, PRC-DPRK alliance, and Russia-DPRK cooperation will all be strengthened in times of peace. North Korea can take advantage of this fear because both the U.S. and South Korea are concerned about North Korea's military provocations. Thus, the interlocking of the two wars in the Taiwan Strait and Korean Peninsula will accelerate preparation for such a war.

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Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un visiting the Vostochny Cosmodrome in Amur region, Russia on September 13, 2023. (Source: Aflo)

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