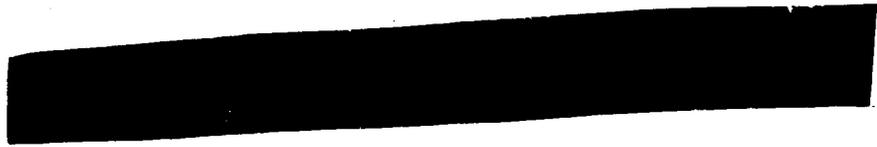


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9 November 1983
FB TM 83-045

TRENDS In Communist Media



This issue includes . . .

- Soviet leadership
- Moscow warning on Middle East
- Pyongyang on Rangoon bombing

Foreign Broadcast Information Service

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Korea

Pyongyang has expressed surprise and regret at Rangoon's decision to break relations over North Korea's alleged part in the bombing attack on visiting ROK President Chon Tu-hwan last month. Pyongyang's cautious reaction suggests that it hopes eventually to restore its once close relationship with Rangoon. In denying complicity in the bombing, Pyongyang has further elaborated its longstanding public posture against acts of international terrorism.

Rangoon's decision has caught Beijing in a dilemma of conflicting loyalties to its Northeast Asian ally and to its oldest friend in Southeast Asia. Beijing has been forced to moderate its initially open support for Pyongyang in the affair. Moscow has only gradually and almost imperceptibly risen to Pyongyang's defense.

DPRK Expresses Regret at Break With Burma, Reiterates Denials

Throughout the period when the Burmese were investigating the bombing incident, Pyongyang seemed concerned to limit the damage the incident might cause to its relationship with Rangoon. Even after Rangoon broke relations on 4 November, North Korea seemed to continue to hold out hope that the damage was reversible, hope which was reflected in an authoritative Foreign Ministry statement on 5 November expressing regret and disappointment over Rangoon's decision. The statement, which asserted that Pyongyang would "invariably develop friendly relations with the Burmese people," failed to directly blame the Burmese for the break in relations and focused criticism instead on the United States, Japan, and the ROK for pressuring Rangoon on the issue. That cautious approach contrasted with the one Pyongyang had followed in treating previous instances of breaks in diplomatic relations—such as with Argentina and Mauritania in 1977. On those occasions, Pyongyang portrayed the other side as directly responsible for the action.

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Slightly harsher, more direct criticism of Burmese authorities did appear, however, in lower level DPRK media treatment. For example, a 6 November *Nodong Sinmun* commentary claimed that the Burmese had given in to external pressure and could be considered an "accomplice" of the United States, Japan, and South Korea and that the Burmese authorities were "bereft of self-respect and dignity." The commentary went on to charge that the Burmese action aids only the "imperialists and their stooges," who want to "drive a wedge" between newly emerging and nonaligned countries—a theme the Koreans had also used following Mauritania's severing of ties. Criticism was also voiced in a 7 November KCNA report which, citing a North Korean educator, said that the Burmese action "gives us misgivings that the Burmese authorities might have sought to get something from the U.S. and Japanese ruling quarters and the South Korean puppets by getting involved in their intrigues."

Overall, however, Pyongyang media have continued to shield Burmese authorities from direct criticism and slowly have begun to address the question of DPRK-Burmese ties. On 6 November Pyongyang radio reported the remarks of a North Korean worker regretting the Burmese decision because of "the friendly relations between our people and the Burmese people." And on the 7th, KCNA cited a low-level North Korean official claiming that by "forcing" Burma to sever relations with the North, the United States is pursuing the "heinous political aim of estranging the peoples of the two countries from each other."

Background In the period after the 9 October bombing but before Rangoon's 4 November severing of relations, DPRK media had treated Pyongyang's relationship with Rangoon with some caution. A 15 October KCNA report of an *Asahi Shimbun* article noted that "relations between the North and Burma have become very close," and another KCNA report on the 18th cited an Indian newspaper in arguing that the North would not have involved itself in the bombing for fear of damaging its "friendly relations" with Burma.

Desiring to limit the damage and possibly even expecting that the Burmese would not take severe action, Pyongyang made no hint of criticism of the Burmese or of their handling of the investigation of the bombing. In fact, as late as 27 October a *Nodong Sinmun* commentary claimed that the Burmese Government had warned the South Korean Government that the investigation was continuing and that it should not act "arbitrarily." The commentary even

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seemed to defend the Burmese, criticizing the South for "disgraceful behavior" in putting pressure on Rangoon and characterizing the South's actions as "defiling the Burmese Government and people."

Denials of Terrorism In denying involvement in the bombing incident, Pyongyang has again attempted to dissociate itself from acts of terrorism, reaffirming its unchanged public position on that issue of at least the past decade. In line with previous comment, the Foreign Ministry statement argued: "We, by nature, have never resorted to individual terrorism and such a thing is alien to us."

A KCNA authorized statement on 12 October had made the same point, while a *Nodong Sinmun* Commentator article on the 18th pegged to the Rangoon incident had claimed that terrorism and assassination are means "exclusively used by the South Korean puppets and have nothing to do with us at all." A 7 November *Nodong Sinmun* commentary went even further. Echoing comment from the North in denying charges of North Korean involvement in an assassination plot against President Chon in Canada in 1982, it stated: "By nature, we have no connection with terrorism against individuals, and we do not even want such terrorism to exist." After the bombing Pyongyang also called attention to its stand on terrorism by reporting foreign comment critical of such acts.

In rehearsing traditional disclaimers against involvement in acts of terrorism, the recent North Korean statements have elaborated Pyongyang's rationale that communist states "by nature" are averse to such acts. The Foreign Ministry statement claimed that South Korean rulers were only U.S. "stooges" and that replacing one with another made no difference as long as the United States remained in South Korea. Similarly, in an interview given to a Peruvian delegation early this summer and publicized by North Korean media at the end of October, Kim Il-song claimed that Americans "dismiss and appoint" the South Korean president and that if the man who holds the presidency "is not to their liking, the U.S. imperialists kill him, to be replaced by another." This represents a shift in line from that enunciated by Kim Il-song in September 1974 when, addressing charges that the North had tried to assassinate ROK President Pak Chong-hui the previous month, Kim claimed that "a communist, by nature, opposes terrorism against an individual" but went on to explain that removing an individual ruler made no sense without changing the "fascist system itself."

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In keeping with its public posture on terrorism, Pyongyang has been particularly careful not to be seen condoning the attack on Chon in Rangoon. During the first week after the bombing in particular—when Pyongyang media were still portraying the episode as directed against rather than carried out by Chon—Pyongyang appeared to take special care in transmissions intended for international audiences. The closest that KCNA came to stating that the bombing was justified was in a 14 October report that cited a North Korean worker as saying that “a mad dog is fated to be flogged everywhere it goes.”

By contrast, Pyongyang radio—aimed at the domestic audience—moved closer to justifying the incident but stopped short of openly endorsing it. On the 13th, for example, the radio quoted a North Korean professor as claiming that Chon was “attacked with bombs even outside the country because of his crimes, which incur the wrath of heaven and man.” Only the clandestine Voice of the Revolutionary Party for Reunification radio, beamed from North to South Korea and typically allowed more latitude to comment on such sensitive issues, boldly stated that the bombing was “due punishment” for Chon. A 12 October RPR spokesman’s statement said the bombing was “deserved” and that “dictators will not go unpunished,” language omitted from the KCNA report on the statement. (U/FOUO)

Beijing Caught Between Conflicting Loyalties, Moscow Mute

Beijing has avoided direct comment on the Rangoon bombing of President Chon’s party and its aftermath, but has given the developments considerable reportorial treatment in its domestic and international media. The attack was reported promptly and straightforwardly by Xinhua in a dispatch from Rangoon on the 9th, as was Burma’s formation of a commission of inquiry the following day.

In the days immediately following the attack, the Chinese replayed DPRK versions of the incident, lending implicit support to Pyongyang’s initial denial of culpability and to its countercharge that Seoul was responsible. Xinhua on the 12th carried a lengthy report on a KCNA statement issued that day which Xinhua said “refuted South Korean allegations” of Pyongyang’s involvement. Xinhua’s account of the KCNA statement included its description of the South’s charges as an “absurd pretext” aimed at heightening tensions on the peninsula and its admonition that the United States and Seoul should be held

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responsible for any consequences. On the 18th, Xinhua gave only slightly less attention to a *Nodong Sinmun* Commentator article that described the explosion as "the work of Chon Tu-hwan" and ridiculed evidence cited by Seoul to implicate the North.

After the Burmese Government had issued its findings laying blame for the explosion on the North and announced the breaking of diplomatic relations with Pyongyang, however, Beijing disengaged and went to some lengths to show outward neutrality. Chinese media on the 5th reported the Burmese Government's announcement that it had "firmly established" DPRK culpability as well as Pyongyang's denial and description of the Burmese action as "inappropriate" and "regrettable." Reports of precisely equal length on the two statements were transmitted sequentially by Xinhua and by Beijing's central domestic radio on the 5th, and the two reports were printed side by side on page 6 of the party daily *Renmin Ribao* the following day.

Despite this outward show of scrupulous neutrality, Chinese treatment of the opposing statements from its two "fraternal neighbors" suggests greater concern for North Korean sensibilities than for those of the Burmese. The juxtaposition of the two statements meant holding the Burmese statement, publicized 16 hours before the DPRK response, until that response was in hand. And while Beijing has not reported the Burmese findings in its broadcasts beamed to Korea, Pyongyang's denial was reported promptly in China's broadcasts in Burmese.

Moscow Apart from initial reports on the 9 October explosion, Soviet media have virtually ignored the Rangoon bombing. Although Soviet accounts claimed on several occasions that Seoul was using the bombing as a pretext to "intensify suppression" and "whip up tension" on the peninsula, Moscow has done little else to show support for Pyongyang's position on the issue. For example, a TASS report in *Krasnaya Zvezda* on 13 October reported the KCNA authorized statement of the 12th, the North's first authoritative response to the bombing, but cited neither the North's explicit denial that it was involved in the incident nor its disclaimer that Pyongyang engages in terrorism.

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A brief TASS report, datelined 9 November from Pyongyang and appearing in the first edition of *Pravda* on the 10th, acknowledged the DPRK denial of responsibility for the incident for the first time and noted the North's claim that the incident was actually planned by Chon Tu-hwan. Moscow's Korean-language service on 6 November beamed to Korea a terse report on the statement but included neither of these two points.¹ (U/FOUO)

¹ Before that, KCNA had claimed that TASS on the 5th had reported the DPRK Foreign Ministry statement responding to Burma's decision to sever relations with Pyongyang, but neither TASS English nor TASS Russian transmissions are known to have carried such a report. Although it is unusual, it is not unprecedented for North Korean media to cite TASS reports that have not been carried on TASS transmissions monitored by FBIS.

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