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PRC-DPRK

Sino-North Korean Ties Strained in Wake of Rangoon Bombing

The October assassination attempt in Rangoon against ROK President Chon Tu-hwan appears to have irritated China's relationship with North Korea. Beijing has registered its disapproval of the North's apparent role in the bombing with care and circumspection, treatment that suggests the Chinese are seeking to make their point without engaging in the kind of public acrimony that could threaten their relationship with North Korea. Pyongyang has obliquely acknowledged that strains have developed but, like Beijing, seems interested in preventing further damage in bilateral relations.

Beijing continues to indicate sensitivity on the issue of DPRK involvement in the Rangoon bombing. Since 6 November, when *Renmin Ribao* reported Burma's announcement blaming the North Koreans for the bombing and Pyongyang's official denial of the charges, there have been no references in Chinese media to the incident itself, to the ensuing diplomatic maneuvering, or to the trial in Rangoon of captured North Koreans charged with carrying out the bombing—even though Xinhua reporters are attending the trial.¹

Chinese sensitivity was also apparent during CPC General Secretary Hu Yaobang's just concluded visit to Japan. In a lengthy report on 24 November on talks between Hu and Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone, Xinhua omitted Nakasone's references—reported in Japanese media—to the Rangoon incident and to the need to prevent such acts of terrorism in the future. At the same time, Xinhua also failed to report Hu's remarks—*noted in the Japanese press*—that China is “opposed to any terrorist activities by any country.”

PRC media did, however, report Hu's broad condemnation of actions aggravating tension on the Korean peninsula. Using language that appears implicitly to condemn Pyongyang's actions in Rangoon, Hu, according to Xinhua on the 24th, told Nakasone that China holds that all actions likely to

¹ See the *Trends* of 9 November 1983, pages 15-16.

aggravate tension in Korea should be avoided "no matter where they are from." Hu reiterated this same point during an interview on Japanese television on the 28th in remarks that were reported by Xinhua the same day.

The dissemination of Hu's finely-honed criticism of Pyongyang on selected Beijing international foreign language broadcasts also seems to underscore China's sensitivity over the bombing issue and its impact on China's relationship with North Korea. Beijing's Korean-language service ignored the Hu-Nakasone meeting of 24 November altogether, and a 29 November broadcast covering Hu's television interview the day before reported only selectively his remarks on Korea, conspicuously omitting his statement of opposition to acts aggravating tension on the peninsula. China's international service in Burmese similarly has failed to report Hu's comments in this regard. By contrast, broadcasts beamed to other Asian countries—in Thai, Malay, Indonesian, and Mandarin—fully reported Hu's remarks on Korea.

Hu's remarks in Japan come against a backdrop of other evidence—from both Beijing and Pyongyang—suggesting that the Rangoon incident may have clouded the atmosphere of Sino-DPRK ties:

- In reporting on the recent 30th anniversary of the PRC-DPRK agreement on economic and cultural cooperation, the Chinese failed to reiterate for either domestic or general foreign audiences their usual characterizations of the special closeness of PRC-DPRK relations. These "militant" and "blood-sealed" ties were noted by Chinese media only in the anniversary message sent by PRC leaders to their Korean counterparts, which was carried only on China's Korean-language service. The usual characterizations, attributed to both Chinese and Korean speakers, did appear in North Korean accounts of the anniversary observances in both Pyongyang and Beijing. By contrast, in late September, on the 25th anniversary of the founding of the DPRK-PRC friendship associations, Chinese media had noted several references to the special nature of Sino-Korean ties.
- Chinese media accounts of Hu Yaobang's remarks on Sino-Korean friendship to visiting North Korean delegations on 15 and 20 November seemed to convey less warmth than has been evident in recent years. On the 15th, according to Xinhua, Hu referred only to the need to carry forward the "revolutionary friendship" between the two sides, while on the 20th he merely described relations as "very good" and stated they will further develop. By contrast, last May, according to Xinhua, Hu told one Korean

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delegation that "we will cherish Chinese-Korean friendship like our own eyes," and told another that the close relations between the two sides "are more important and valuable than anything else."

- PRC media failed to note that at the meeting on the 20th Hu reportedly characterized Sino-Korean relations as those of "trusting and learning from each other" and "supporting and respecting each other," remarks attributed to him in a KCNA account of the meeting. PRC media had previously noted Hu routinely using such formulations with Korean visitors.
- KCNA's characterization of the atmospherics at Hu's meetings with Korean delegations in November was only "friendly." By contrast, KCNA has described every meeting in the past two years that Hu has had with a visiting North Korean delegation with a warmer formulation, either "cordial and friendly" or, in some cases, "comradely and warm." (U/FOUO)

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