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# Trends

This issue includes . . .

- Moscow on ABM Treaty adherence
- Private business in USSR
- Sandinista-Contra talks
- Improved PRC intellectual climate
- Syrian Gulf mediation
- Kohl visit to Prague
- Hungarian-Romanian tension
- Pyongyang marks time
- Sino-Soviet border talks
- PLO on Mubarak proposal

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This report examines selected foreign media, with emphasis on the controlled media of communist countries. The analyses are based exclusively on media content and behavior and are issued without coordination with other U.S. Government components.

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## Korea

### Pyongyang Seeks To Ride Out KAL Controversy

*In the two months since the bombing of a South Korean airliner by North Korean agents, Pyongyang has not signaled any fundamental shift in its policy of actively pursuing dialogue with the ROK and the United States and moving toward a more practical approach to lessening tensions on the peninsula. There is also no evidence that Pyongyang is changing its position on the Olympics question.*

As it usually does in such cases, Pyongyang is trying to deflect the plane bombing charges by pointing out that its accusers are guilty of crimes of their own. These periods of damage-control normally result in policy being put on hold, either because the leadership is pondering its next move or that the time is not propitious for major initiatives. Currently, the North appears to be keeping its options open on the question of its final stance toward the Seoul Olympics, to be held later this year, and on the broader issue of relations with the ROK.

While there continues to be low-level criticism of incoming President No Tae-u, there has been no clear, concerted effort to portray the new government as totally unacceptable in advance of its taking office. Overall, recent commentary suggests that there has been no reversal of the policy Kim Il-song laid out in his New Year's address—when he signaled a willingness to deal with No—and that the North is still waiting for the new regime to take power next month, possibly hoping to be able to use the transition as an opportunity to call for both sides to start with a clean slate in their approach toward each other.

Consistent with such a wait-and-see posture, Pyongyang has been careful in its treatment of the South Korean domestic political situation. While sounding the usual warnings to the opposition against being co-opted by the ruling party, the North continues to adhere to the line it has taken since 1986, urging opposition unity and participation in legal activities such as the upcoming parliamentary elections.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Analysis of the North's approach to the South's domestic situation has been hampered in recent months by ROK jamming of the clandestine radio Voice of National Salvation, beamed from North to South Korea. The foregoing view of the North's approach is based on what little monitoring of VNS is now possible, as well as on the tone and content of the limited number of commentaries in Pyongyang media.

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**Domestic Media** In the two months since the KAL incident, there has been no change in the thrust or the tone of North Korean domestic media comment. The focus continues to be on economic tasks. Reacting to reports of possible ROK retaliation, some commentary last month warned of increased tensions, a theme that, in standard fashion, has continued to appear in the context of the U.S.-ROK announcement that the annual "Team Spirit" joint military exercise will begin next month.

There has not been a party plenum in over 13 months, an unusually long delay suggesting that the leadership is having trouble resolving sensitive policy problems. At this point, there is no specific evidence in the media that the KAL incident has had domestic repercussions. However, the next plenum may well have to deal with the incident and its fallout, as did the plenum in November 1983 following the Rangoon incident. That plenum, held seven weeks after the incident, marked an important turning point in policy and signaled, through a number of important personnel changes, the shift in approach toward dialogue.

**Reaction to Sanctions** Pyongyang has reacted in careful, measured fashion to U.S. and Japanese sanctions for its role in the KAL bombing. Responding to the 21 January U.S. announcement on sanctions, a Foreign Ministry spokesman's statement on the 25th underlined the view that improvements in DPRK-U.S. relations are necessary for settlement of the Korean issue, thus essentially reiterating the basic approach laid out by Kim Il-song in his New Year's address.<sup>2</sup> With typical bravado, the statement nevertheless insisted that Pyongyang would not "beg" for improved ties and announced countersanctions to those imposed by Washington.

Pyongyang's measures include halting negotiations on the issue of the remains of U.S. servicemen killed in the Korean war, which were about to produce their first concrete results on 27 January when the North was scheduled to hand over the first remains. According to a 2 February message by the North Korean secretary to the Military Armistice Commission, reported the same

<sup>2</sup> According to brief Chinese media accounts, this emphasis on the need for improvement in DPRK-U.S. ties was apparently also included in some Pyongyang comment marking the 20th anniversary of the North's seizure of the *USS Pueblo*. According to the Chinese, an editorial in the North Korean newspaper *Tongil Sinbo* said that if the United States assumes a correct attitude, the problem of Korean-U.S. relations can be "easily resolved." The editorial was not reported in monitored DPRK media, not unusual because Pyongyang only infrequently publicizes comment in *Tongil Sinbo*. As in past years, monitored DPRK media have not been observed to have reported or commented on the *Pueblo* anniversary.

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day by KCNA, that transfer would have taken place "but for the insolent behavior of the U.S. authorities" who have "impaired and insulted" the sovereignty and "dignity" of the North by accusing it of terrorism in the KAL incident. Pyongyang has only rarely mentioned the issue of the remains since discussions began on the subject in 1986, and it had not previously acknowledged that there had been active negotiations between the two sides on that issue. Its sudden focus on the subject now appears to reflect some hope that the issue can be used as leverage to return DPRK-U.S. relations to what, in the North's view, was the relatively more positive track they had been on last year.

Pyongyang took a week to respond to Japan's 26 January announcement of sanctions, apparently studying Japan's moves carefully and deliberating over its own reaction before issuing an authoritative Commentator article in the party daily *Nodong Sinmun* detailing counteractions. By contrast, the North responded quickly to the imposition of Japanese sanctions in 1983 following the assassination attempt against ROK President Chon Tu-hwan in Burma, but that response was limited to low-level commentaries and was not accompanied by any countermoves against Tokyo.

Just as it had done in reacting to the U.S. sanctions, in responding to the Japanese the North acknowledged negotiations it had previously not openly discussed—"closed-door" contacts in a "third country" to settle the case of two crewmen of a Japanese ship being held by the North for espionage. Pyongyang may calculate that this issue represents useful leverage, a view that may have been reinforced by a reading of Japanese editorial comment in recent weeks urging caution over the imposition of sanctions for this very reason.

**Olympics** Despite the fact that its intentions toward the Olympics have been the subject of intense speculation in Western and South Korean media, the North has said little on the question since announcing last month that it was reserving a final decision on participation in the games. It has ridiculed accusations that it poses a terrorist threat to the games, preemptorily dismissing these as routine attempts by Seoul and Washington to mask their own military-security goals. It has ignored several statements by South Korean Olympic officials that the North is still welcome at the games, thus preserving for itself room for further maneuvering—including a possible redefinition of the terms under which it would consider attending.

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In the wake of announcements by the USSR, China, and all of the East European countries (except Albania) that they will attend the games in Seoul, Pyongyang has tiptoed around the sensitive question of the political implications of participation in the games. Such circumspection suggests both a desire to avoid antagonizing those allies that intend to participate and to keep its own options open.

This caution has been reflected in treatment of the support the North has received from a handful of its friends who have declared that they will not attend the games. The North reported without fanfare announcements by Ethiopia and Madagascar that they will not attend the games if Pyongyang's proposal for cohosting is not realized. It has completely ignored Nicaragua's decision not to attend, possibly because Managua's stated rationale for not participating cited economic grounds and thus did not appear to be a clear gesture of solidarity with the North.

Cuba's decision not to attend the games has drawn a low-key and somewhat ambiguous response. Pyongyang radio reported Castro's letter to the International Olympic Committee in full, but the KCNA version of the letter—the version for international consumers—raised the possibility that the North was not completely satisfied with the Cuban move. It omitted a portion of the Cuban leader's explanation that cast the decision as much in terms of the South Korean domestic political situation as support for the North's demands for cohosting. Caution in handling the Cuban decision was also reflected in the fact that the North waited a week before welcoming it, and then did so only in a 22 January domestic radio commentary rather than in higher level comment in *Nodong Sinmun*. That same radio commentary was the closest Pyongyang has come to criticizing its allies for their plans to attend the games. However, the extremely veiled language and limited dissemination of the commentary underscored the North's reluctance to engage in polemics at this time. (U/FOUO)

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