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BRIEFS AND COMMENTS

NORTH KOREA: Moderate Reaction to Pak Assassination

[redacted]  
[redacted] *it has adopted a moderate public posture since South Korean President Pak was assassinated.* [redacted]

In a lengthy editorial in the party newspaper yesterday, North Korea noted that the North and South face an "historic opportunity" to reunify the country, offered to "let bygones be bygones," and reaffirmed its desire for a political dialogue and other cooperative efforts. As in January of this year, Pyongyang stated it is seeking a "broad-based" dialogue--the codeword for talks that would include opposition representatives from the South. The editorial placed special emphasis on economic cooperation, suggesting Pyongyang plans to pursue the indirect trade started earlier this year with South Korea. [redacted]

The editorial also renewed North Korea's longstanding offer to reduce military tension along the Demilitarized Zone. Such offers are usually linked to North Korea's interim objective of achieving a total withdrawal of US forces from South Korea. In an additional move intended to reinforce Pyongyang's conciliatory posture, a North Korean security official at Panmunjom on Tuesday proposed that he and his US counterpart continue informal efforts to reduce tensions. [redacted]

In the past, aggressive behavior on North Korea's part usually has led to a closing of ranks in the South and a corresponding diminution in dissident activity. North Korea probably believes that its moderate stance will undercut efforts by the interim government in Seoul to justify any repressive measures on the basis of national security concerns. [redacted]

North Korea is continuing its efforts to weaken US - South Korean security ties, noting for example, that the US was unable to protect Pak. Pyongyang also is portraying the recent US reaffirmation of its treaty commitment to South Korea as a tactic to intimidate the opposition there and perpetuate the continuation of Pak's associates in office. [redacted]

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10 November 1979



Director of  
Central  
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National Intelligence Daily

Saturday  
10 November 1979

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10 November 1979

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