

A RELUCTANT FRIEND: NEW ZEALAND'S RELATIONSHIP WITH NORTH KOREA 1973-1989

PAUL BELLAMY¹

Introduction

This article aims to outline and explain New Zealand's relationship with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) between 1973 and 1989. The period witnessed North Korea and its supporters continually seeking stronger relations with little success. However, the years provided the foundations for later diplomatic relations, and have not been studied in depth. The period ends in 1989 when the government reviewed relations. New Zealand's cautious position was primarily shaped by the view that the North's foreign policy was aggressive and unsophisticated, growing relations with the Republic of Korea (South Korea or ROK) plus the stance of friends and allies. Finally, post-1989 relations are briefly outlined. The New Zealand Government's perspective is mainly presented as Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (the Ministry) and New Zealand Immigration Service archived records are used. Security Intelligence Service material is also utilised. However, New Zealand-DPRK Society (the Society that supports the North) activities are outlined given its important role organising unofficial contact.

Relations 1973 to 1989

During the 1970s bilateral relations were promoted, generally unsuccessfully, by North Korea and some New Zealanders. Initial attempts to encourage interaction were opposed by New Zealand officials. The DPRK Ambassador in China met Associate Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Walding during his March 1973 Chinese visit. Walding agreed to convey the good wishes of the North's leader Kim Il Sung to Prime Minister (PM) Norman Kirk, but stressed this meeting did not constitute recognition of North Korea.² In August 1973 the New Zealand Table Tennis Association informed the Government of a proposed DPRK table tennis team's visit, and was told the Government was not

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- 1 Please note that the views expressed here are not necessarily those of the author's employer. He is most grateful to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Labour, Archives New Zealand, Security Intelligence Service and interviewees for their kind assistance
 - 2 'NZ seems in no hurry to establish links in North Korea', *Evening Post (EP)* 28 August 1974, p. 33.

'particularly anxious' for the visit to occur.³ No visit ultimately took place, but the DPRK Ambassador in China again met Walding in Beijing during October 1973.⁴ In January 1974 the Secretary of Foreign Affairs (the Secretary) said the Government intended to 'hold the North Koreans at arm's length for some time yet'. While there was no need to 'actively discourage approaches' from the DPRK, diplomats were advised to 'avoid giving any impression that they might lead to an early relaxation of the Government's position'.⁵ In March another proposal was received for a table tennis visit, but the co-host Australia then withdrew support.⁶

Against this background the Society was established. Disquiet over the Vietnam War and fear that New Zealand could become involved in another Korean conflict encouraged academic Wolfgang Rosenberg and Reverend Don Borrie to co-found the group.⁷ The Society's Christchurch branch was formed in March 1974 with 20 foundation members from trade unions, the New Zealand University Students' Association and Christian student movement.⁸ Relations were promoted through approaches to the government, and working with the North Koreans on proposals. Walding told Rosenberg in May 1974 that a private Society-sponsored delegation entering on special travel documents was possible.⁹ The following month North Korea sought help with arrangements but the Government reiterated that, apart from permitting the delegation's entry, it could accept 'no responsibility at all'. Despite this, the Jakarta Embassy felt the North could 'be falling into the trap' of seeing the Society 'in their own terms' and the Government 'would in practice be quietly controlling the visit'. The Ministry felt that assistance could have compromised the Government's 'hands off stance', and confirm the DPRK's belief that the Government was tacitly encouraging the visit. The Embassy suggested that the Society be informed of DPRK concerns but noted 'It is presumably no skin off the Government's nose if the delegation and the Society end up in some disarray?'¹⁰

Originally scheduled to visit in June 1974, four members of the DPRK Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries arrived in Christchurch on 31st July. They sought to promote relations with a cultural exhibition that included showing the first North Korean film reportedly seen in New Zealand. The delegation stayed for three weeks and visited Wellington too. Their leader said that other missions would follow a

3 'Possible visit to New Zealand by North Korean table tennis team', 16 August 1973, 59/519/6 part 1; and 'Possible visit to New Zealand by North Korean table tennis team', 27 August 1973, 59/519/6 part 1.

4 *EP*, 28 August 1974.

5 'Relations with North Korea', 8 January 1975, 236/1/2 part 1. This appears to be dated incorrectly as 8 January 1974.

6 'Visit of table tennis delegation from the DPRK', 17 June 1976, 59/519/6 part 1; and 'Proposed visit by North Korean table tennis team', 1 April 1974, 59/519/6 part 1.

7 'History of the NZ DPRK Society', available from <http://sites.google.com/site/nzdprksociety/history-of-the-nz-dprk-society>.

8 'Korea Society formed', *The Press*, 25 March 1974, p.10.

9 'JA Walding to W Rosenberg', 24 May 1974, 59/519/6 part 1.

10 'North Korean delegation', 6 June 1974, 236/1/2 part 1.

successful visit, and hoped that diplomatic relations would be established.¹¹ The North Koreans felt their visit went 'very well', and Rosenberg termed it a 'great success'. The exhibition attracted 4,000 people with the Ministry deeming it 'very harmless' with a 'low profile'.¹² However, Kirk said a media statement that the North would soon be recognised was 'misleading'.¹³

The delegation's entry corresponded with New Zealand's cautious approach. Kirk indicated that relations would be opened in due course.¹⁴ New Zealand was gradually moving towards recognising the North at its own pace, and developing contacts with all Asian countries. The Secretary felt that the visit's entry 'would be a minor but useful step forward in this process'. Indeed, non-admittance without a good reason 'would give a wrong impression of the Government's general attitude'.¹⁵ It was further facilitated by some positive Peninsula developments. The South in 1973 said it would no longer oppose balanced international recognition of two Korean states.¹⁶ Indeed, Australia established diplomatic relations with the North the same day the delegation arrived after negotiations where Wellington was closely consulted.¹⁷ In early 1974 there was a feeling that Pyongyang was 'emerging from its long isolation', a point reiterated by PM Bill (later Sir Wallace) Rowling in April 1975, who further noted New Zealand's preparedness to help with this.¹⁸

New Zealand's cautious approach continued after the visit. The DPRK Ambassador to Indonesia in July 1974 proposed a visit but was told this would be inappropriate; the Jakarta Embassy noting that the North apparently believed New Zealand had the same approach as Australia with non-official visits eventually leading to formal relations.¹⁹

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- 11 'Koreans' visit postponed', *Press*, 24 June 1974, p.12; 'North Korean visit', *Dominion*, 12 August 1974, p.3; 'North Korea may be recognised', *Press*, 1 August 1974, p.1; 'Relations with North Korea', 6 August 1974, 236/1/2 part 1; and 'Proposed visit by North Korean delegation', 20 May 1974, 22/1/390 part 1.
 - 12 'North Korean delegation', 6 August 1974, 59/519/6 part 1; Wolfgang Rosenberg, New Zealand DPRK Society to Assistant Secretary, Immigration, Department of Labour, 22/1/390, part 1, 18 March 1976; 'Relations with North Korea', 6 August 1974, 236/1/2 part 1; 'Visit of North Koreans', 29 March 1978, 22/1/390 part 1; 'Relations with the North Koreans', *Press*, 8 August 1974, p.10; 'Members of a North Korean delegation', *Press*, 2 August 1974, p.10; and 'Korean display seen by 4,000', *Press*, 9 August 1974, p.8.
 - 13 'Korea', 1 August 1974, 236/1/2 part 1.
 - 14 'Relations with North Korea', 11 February 1975, 236/1/2 part 1.
 - 15 'Proposed visit by North Korean delegation', 20 May 1974, 22/1/390 part 1.
 - 16 *Annual Report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) for the year ended 31 March 1974*, 1974, p.13.
 - 17 'Wellington set to follow Canberra into Korea', *Dominion*, 1 August 1974, p.1; 'DPRK: Australian and New Zealand relations', 29 July 1974, 236/1/2 part 1; and 'Australia-DPRK relations', November 1981, 519/3/1 part 2.
 - 18 *Annual Report of the MFA for the year ended 31 March 1974*, 1974, p.13; 'Proposed visit by North Korean delegation', 20 May 1974; and W.E. Rowling, 'New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific Region', *Pacific Community*, 6 (3), April 1975, p.336.
 - 19 'North Korea', 11 July 1974, 236/1/2 part 1.

In August a Parliamentary delegation was proposed, and the following May a foreign ministry delegation's visit was opposed.²⁰ Later that month the North's Ambassador in Indonesia said Communist victories in Cambodia and Vietnam meant the 'tide' in Asia was 'running strongly in the right direction', and it was 'high time' for diplomatic relations after almost a year's talks. The Embassy said it would await the 'natural course of events'.²¹ However, there was some sympathy for future unofficial visits. The Society, which had established a Wellington branch in 1974, met members of Parliament (MPs) and Ministry staff to promote relations, and the Secretary in February 1975 indicated a visit similar to that in 1974 would be acceptable.²²

With the frequency of DPRK approaches the Government provided guidance for diplomats to ensure that contact remained unofficial. In July 1975 Wellington noted that informal approaches had been made to various posts abroad, especially in South East Asia, but also Geneva and Belgrade. Their 'constant theme' was the desirability of recognising the North, diplomatic relations and entry of official delegations. If approached, diplomats were advised to say that New Zealand was prepared to accord recognition in due course, but not move faster than a 'deliberate pace'. There was no objection to informal contact but official visits would be inappropriate.²³ North Korea approached the Beijing and Jakarta embassies regarding delegations visiting to 'promote mutual understanding and friendship'.²⁴ Visas were refused for proposed delegations in 1976 (another table tennis visit was raised too) and 1977 as members held official or semi-official positions.²⁵ Along with such proposals, North Korea placed advertisements in the *New Zealand Herald* during late 1975 promoting itself.²⁶

The late 1970s witnessed continued efforts by Pyongyang and its supporters to strengthen ties. The Society's network by this stage consisted of about 60 people with approximately 100 people receiving newsletters.²⁷ Society members visited the North, which in June 1976 announced the North Korea-New Zealand Friendship Association (the Association) to promote relations.²⁸ It also expressed interest in trade, especially

20 'Relations with North Korea', 6 August 1974, 236/1/2 part 1; and 'Korea', 5 May 1975, 236/1/2 part 1.

21 'Relations with North Korea', 28 May 1975, 236/1/2 part 1.

22 'Friendship with N. Korea', *Salient*, 2 October 1974, p.23; 'Korea', *Canta*, April 1975, p.23; and 'Relations with North Korea', 11 February 1975, 236/1/2 part 1.

23 'Relations with DPRK', 10 July 1975, 236/1/2 part 1.

24 'Proposed visit by North Korea delegation', 16 March 1977, 22/1/390 part 1.

25 'Visit of North Koreans', 29 March 1978, 22/1/390 part 1; 'Visit of table tennis delegation from the DPRK', 17 June 1976, 59/519/6 part 1; and 'Visit of table tennis delegation from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea', 30 June 1976, 59/519/6 part 1.

26 'Were you puzzled? *Eight O'clock*, 4 October 1975, pp.3-4.

27 Interview with Reverend Don Borrie, 6 November 2010.

28 'No goals – no churches – in North Korea', *Press*, 28 July 1976, p.17; 'Two to visit North Korea', *Press*, 12 May 1976, p.29; 'NZ Association formed in North Korea', *Press*, 3 June 1976, p.3; and 'DPRK: The period between 20 July 1977 and 19 September 1977', 13 October 1977, 519/4/1 part 1.

in hydro-electric and heavy industrial equipment.²⁹ Borrie was told that any delegations had to be bona-fide sporting and cultural groups traveling privately on ordinary passports. The Government 'would have nothing at all to do with any such visits other than authorising the issue of visas' to delegation members. Nor were delegations to do anything likely to embarrass the Government or be politically active. With the 1974 delegation's low-profile, and a proposed cultural delegation not official, governmental or political, a visit was possible.³⁰

In August 1978 another cultural delegation visited. The three members visited Christchurch and Wellington, and met Opposition Spokesperson on Defence MP Warren Freer. The visit was controversial with its reported political activities violating Government guidelines.³¹ The following year Chuji Kuno of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party contacted the Tokyo Embassy. He offered to help promote relations by acting as an intermediary between New Zealand and the DPRK without informing the Japanese and ROK Governments. The Embassy did not indicate that his services would be used.³² In 1979, official New Zealand data recorded 12 North Koreans as visiting, the majority for business and a holiday/vacation.³³ A Society delegation visited the North that year too.³⁴

New Zealand officials remained reluctant to strengthen ties with North Korea into the 1980s. This was despite the North applying almost annually by 1980 to send delegations and non-official groups.³⁵ In March 1980 the Government refused visas for Association members invited by the Society, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Brian Talboys refused to meet the Society.³⁶ The Association had sought to encourage academic discussion on DPRK society and reunification with the South, plus showcase cultural items. However, 112 North Korean visitors were recorded from 1980 to 1984. These visits were primarily for business and holiday/vacation, as was the case throughout the 1980s.³⁷ In December 1983 MP Norman John Kirk said that Labour MPs had visited the North but the Society dismissed the claim.³⁸

29 'Ties with North Korea urged', *Christchurch Star*, 13 December 1977, p.34.

30 'Visit of North Koreans', 29 March 1978, 22/1/390 part 1; and 'Proposed visit by North Korean delegation', 20 May 1974, 22/1/390 part 1.

31 'Reds rumbled as they hide true mission', *New Zealand Truth*, 1 August 1978, p.2; and 'Proposed visit by North Korean delegation', 20 May 1974.

32 'NZ Embassy Tokyo', 31 May 1979, 519/4/1 part 1.

33 These and all forthcoming figures on recorded visits are from Statistics New Zealand (NZ). Not all visits, both of New Zealanders to the DPRK and North Koreans to New Zealand, are necessarily recorded.

34 'North Korea today', *Eastern Horizon*, XIX (1), 1 January 1980, p.39.

35 'Proposed visit by North Korean delegation', 19 February 1980, 22/1/390 part 1.

36 'Muldoon supports South', *Dominion*, 14 March 1980, p.12; 'Talboys refuses meeting', *Dominion*, 15 March 1980, p.3; and 'Muldoon silent on Korean visa ban', *Dominion*, 13 March 1980, p.1.

37 Statistics NZ.

38 'Kirk's travel claims denial', *Christchurch Star*, 19 December 1983, p.28.

North Korea hoped that relations would improve under the fourth Labour Government. However, PM David Lange in 1984 said ‘no contacts that might imply any form of recognition’ should occur, and Ministers were told that it would be ‘inappropriate’ for correspondence with or a visit to the North. Any approaches received should be ignored or referred to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Ambassador in Seoul was informed of this.³⁹ Fifty four North Koreans visited from 1985 to 1987, but the Ministry opposed 1985 visits by North Korean cultural exhibitions and a Taekwondo team.⁴⁰ New Zealanders also recorded North Korea as their primary destination for short-term visits. One hundred and four went during the 1980s, primarily for business and holiday/vacation. Visitors included Society members and reporters.⁴¹

As cold war and Peninsula tensions declined New Zealand’s position became somewhat more relaxed. A total of eighty seven North Koreans visited in 1988 and 1989, with two additional long-term/permanent arrivals during 1988.⁴² New Zealand visits to the North peaked at 76 that year, and included a visit by Porirua Mayor John Burke and MP Graham Kelly linked to North Korea’s 40th anniversary celebrations. According to Kelly, the New Zealand Government felt that an unofficial visit to and from the North would contribute to their understanding about international norms of behaviour. Despite being told by Kelly that an official visit was not possible, but a visit using normal passports could facilitate official delegations in the future, an application for an official visit was initially made. A trade delegation, a cultural delegation and a circus were proposed. Ultimately, an unofficial visit occurred in 1990. The proposal of a circus visit was deemed a private sector issue.⁴³ In 1989 the Government reviewed visits. Agencies discussed implementing steps designed to encourage a modest degree of informal and unofficial relations. These steps included easing restrictions on North Koreans using standard passports, though diplomatic and official passports remained unacceptable.⁴⁴

Explaining New Zealand’s caution

North Korean Foreign Policy

Opposition to the authoritarian regime’s foreign policy was the primary factor behind New Zealand’s overall reluctance to build relations with North Korea. This was especially

39 ‘NZ: Relations with North Korea’, 30 October 1984, 22/1/390 part 1; and ‘Relations with North Korea’, 23 October 1984, 22/1/390 part 1.

40 Statistics NZ; ‘Possible visit by a Taekwondo team from the DPRK’, 7 June 1985, 59/519/6 part 1; ‘North Korea: Cultural delegations’, 24 December 1984, 22/1/390 part 1; and ‘Possible visit by North Korean cultural delegation’, 30 October 1985, 22/1/390 part 1.

41 Statistics NZ; ‘Nuclear stand scrutinised’, *Dominion*, 2 November 1984, p.5; and ‘Expression of solidarity’, *EP*, 29 July 1983, p.12.

42 Statistics NZ.

43 Ibid.; and interview with Graham Kelly, 5 December 2011 plus correspondence, 13 December 2011.

44 ‘North Korea: Facilitation of informal contact’, 1 March 1989, 22/1/390 part 1.

the case given New Zealand's Peninsula commitments and the cold war. New Zealand fought against the North during the Korean War, and guns were occasionally deployed for action when DPRK aggression seemed possible following the 1953 armistice.⁴⁵ The Government emphasised that the 1957 withdrawal of New Zealand's ground force contribution (Kayforce) did not imply any lessening of support for the United Nations (UN) aims in Korea, and a military liaison officer remained on the Commonwealth Liaison Mission, Korea, until 1971.⁴⁶ During the 1960s concern was expressed over North Korean aggression against the South, and attacks on the Demilitarised Zone were mentioned in Parliament.⁴⁷ North Korea's refusal to make their position clear on a free and democratic Korea was questioned too.⁴⁸ In 1969 the Ministry said that 'North Korea seems set upon a course of ugly and aggressive conduct'.⁴⁹

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the DPRK's actions were a source of concern. Attacks on the South and Peninsula tensions in the early 1970s caused anxiety.⁵⁰ When Kirk in 1974 discussed eventual relations with North Korea this was part of a wider move towards Korean reconciliation, and North Korea's friends showing more sympathy for the South's position.⁵¹ Rowling the following year said that the DPRK and its friends needed to formally acknowledge and accept the South's independent existence.⁵² Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Sir Keith Holyoake in early 1976 referred to the DPRK regime as one of the world's most authoritarian and it causing Peninsula tensions.⁵³ Similarly, the Ministry referred to tensions along with failed efforts to encourage direct ROK-DPRK discussions and negotiations, 'primarily because of North Korea's intransigence'.⁵⁴ Tensions were again mentioned in early 1979.⁵⁵ The reluctance to strengthen relations with the North given its behaviour remained under the fourth Labour Government. Lange in October 1984 said that until the North respected the South's 'integrity and security' he did 'not believe it would be proper to make a gesture of friendship towards Pyongyang'.⁵⁶

45 Ian McGibbon, *New Zealand and the Korean War Volume II: Combat Operations*, Auckland, Oxford University Press, 1996, p.352.

46 *Annual Report of the Department of External Affairs (DEA) for the year ended 31 March 1958*, 1958, p.14.

47 'NZ delegate praises South Korea', *EP*, 8 November 1967, p.11; and oral answers to questions 1 (17 May 1967) and 3 (27 November 1968), *Hansard*, Vol. 350, pp.574-75 and p.3348.

48 *Annual Report of the DEA for the year ended 31 March 1959*, 1959, p.17.

49 *Annual Report of the DEA for the year ended 31 March 1969*, p.3.

50 *Ibid.*, pp.3 and 29; *Annual Report of the MFA for the year ended 31 March 1970*, 1970, p.24 and year ended 31 March 1971, 1971, p.27.

51 *EP*, 28 August 1974.

52 Rowling, pp.335-36.

53 'Speak softly in Seoul PM told', *Dominion*, 7 April 1976, p.13.

54 *Annual Report of the MFA for the year ended 31 March 1976*, 1976, p.9.

55 *Annual Report of the MFA for the year ended 31 March 1979*, 1979, p.11.

56 'NZ: Relations with North Korea', 30 October 1984, 22/1/390 part 1.

The North's use of terrorism reinforced New Zealand's cautious approach. The DPRK's August 1974 attempt to assassinate ROK President Park Chung-hee occurred after its delegation arrived in New Zealand, and was labelled a 'terrible thing' by Kirk.⁵⁷ Likewise, an October 1983 attempt in Rangoon to assassinate ROK President Chun Doo-hwan was condemned. The Korean Ministers killed were well-known to their New Zealand counterparts, and the President was scheduled to visit. PM Robert Muldoon labelled the killings an 'attempt to destabilise Korea', and Minister of Foreign Affairs Warren Cooper concluded that 'the costs of maintaining diplomatic relations with North Korea greatly outweigh any advantages'.⁵⁸ In 1984 Lange referred to the bombing when outlining 'considerable obstacles' to closer relations.⁵⁹ The proposed 1985 Taekwondo visit was opposed within this context, the North having 'done little' since the bombing 'to improve either its international image or its domestic human rights record'.⁶⁰ In 1986 policy guidance on North Korea noted New Zealand's approach had been particularly 'coloured' by the North's post-war 'violent record'.⁶¹

The North's November 1987 bombing of an ROK airliner prompted further condemnation. Minister of Foreign Affairs Russell Marshall declared that threatening airline safety and trying to disrupt the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games "will not help North Korea to achieve the improved relationship with New Zealand that it has long claimed to be seeking". Marshall further noted that North Korea had 'committed acts of state terrorism before', and these 'horrendous acts are futile and only add to North Korea's isolation'.⁶² The following year Lange said that the North had an 'internationally recognised reputation for direct involvement in terrorist activity'.⁶³

North Korea's diplomacy with New Zealand was viewed as unsophisticated and aggressive, thus strengthening negative perceptions. In June 1974 New Zealand's Jakarta Embassy complained that the DPRK Ambassador did not take the broadest hints that a meeting was not possible.⁶⁴ The next month the Ambassador was described as a 'first-class creep'.⁶⁵ In February 1975 the Secretary expressed frustration the DPRK did not understand that New Zealand was 'not prepared to be bludgeoned into early recognition [of the North]'. Apparently this 'message' had 'not yet got across' or 'more likely, we suppose, it is being ignored or misread deliberately'.⁶⁶ The Secretary's recommendation in March 1977 against a visiting DPRK delegation noted it could be

57 'Death of Madam Park Chung-Hee', Prime Minister's Office, 16 August 1974.

58 'Korean President may visit NZ next year', *New Zealand Herald* (NZH), 11 October 1983, p.5; and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Press statement, 7 November 1983.

59 'NZ: Relations with North Korea', 30 October 1984, 22/1/390 part 1.

60 'Possible visit by a Taekwondo team from the DPRK', 7 June 1985, 59/519/6 part 1.

61 'Policy guidance – Relations with the DPRK', 4 November 1986, 22/1/390 part 1.

62 'Bombing of KAL Flight 858', Minister of Foreign Affairs, 27 January 1988.

63 'PM Lange to Hon S.J. Rodger', 25 October 1988, 22/1/390 part 1.

64 'Jakarta to Wellington', 29 June 1974, 59/519/6 part 1.

65 'North Korea', 11 July 1974, 236/1/2 part 1.

66 'Relations with North Korea', 13 February 1975, 236/1/2 part 1.

assumed the group would seek meetings with trade union and student leaders 'to drum up support' for the North.⁶⁷ Indeed, the 1978 delegation's reported political activities that violated Government guidelines, and the South's accusation the visitors had disguised their status to enter, encouraged the March 1980 refusal of visas.⁶⁸ In November 1981 the Ministry noted the North's diplomacy to gain wider international recognition 'frequently has been unsophisticated, heavy-handed and counter-productive'.⁶⁹

Attempts to change New Zealand's policy on Korea at the UN elicited further critique. In October 1975, the North's Ambassador in Jakarta requested that New Zealand be 'absent' at UN resolutions on Korea. The Ambassador did not tailor his instructions to his audience, and was forceful in his request. When the Embassy identified 'hurdles' the Ambassador merely 'cleared them nimbly or (more usually) booted them out of the way'.⁷⁰ Later that month another request for New Zealand to 'abstain' or be 'absent' at UN resolutions on Korea had 'unpleasant undertones'. The DPRK told the Jakarta Embassy that 'since the former reactionary government which sent New Zealand forces into Korea had been toppled by the Labour Party we had hoped you would be more understanding of the aspirations of the Korean people'.⁷¹

North Korea's aggressive diplomacy was again apparent to New Zealand with its attempts to strengthen relations with South Pacific island states. For example, in mid-1981 North Koreans arrived unannounced in Western Samoa, Kiribati and Fiji.⁷² Indeed, with the visit to Fiji the North Koreans were described as trying to 'bulldoze' through diplomatic protocols.⁷³ They also visited the Solomon Islands despite being told a visit was inconvenient, and that the government lacked the resources to enter formal relations with many countries.⁷⁴ Similarly, Papua New Guinea was visited despite the North being told the visit's timing was unsuitable.⁷⁵ Distaste for such tactics was reinforced by concern they could encourage greater rivalry between the Koreans in the Pacific. The South took an 'intense interest' and 'perhaps an overly pessimistic view' of the DPRK increasing its regional diplomatic presence.⁷⁶ For instance, the South requested New Zealand help discourage the development of Vanuatu-DPRK relations.⁷⁷ Ministry officials felt a 'low-key' approach to the issue would be best as an 'over-zealous' ROK approach could cause 'detrimental results in that it stimulates competitive diplomatic activity' by the North.⁷⁸

67 'Proposed visit by North Korea delegation', 16 March 1977, 22/1/390 part 1.

68 '*New Zealand Truth; Dominion*, 14 March 1980, p.12; and *Dominion*, 15 March 1980.

69 'North Korean Embassy misdemeanours', 23 November 1981, 519/3/1 part 2.

70 'Korea', 4 October 1975, 236/1/2 part 1.

71 'Korean Question', 28 October 1975, 236/1/2 part 1.

72 'Visit of North Korean delegation', 11 June 1981; 'DPRK delegation', 29 May 1981; and 'Visit to Fiji of DPRK delegation', 5 June 1981, 519/3/1 part 2.

73 'Visit to Fiji of DPRK delegation', 5 June 1981, 519/3/1 part 2.

74 'DPRK delegation', 20 May 1981, 519/3/1 part 2.

75 'DPRK delegation', 13 May 1981, 519/3/1 part 2.

76 'DPRK visit to Western Samoa', 30 June 1981, 519/3/1 part 2.

77 'Vanuatu/DPRK relations', December 1981, 519/3/1 part 2.

78 'Vanuatu/North Korea', 4 December 1981, 519/3/1 part 2.

Nor were some moves by Pyongyang and supporters in New Zealand likely to win Government sympathy. The 1975 North Korean newspaper adverts were called 'dry and near-unreadable' by the media, while the delegations arrived with unpopular ideological items they could not sell and held press conferences labelled 'very doctrinarian' and 'very long'.⁷⁹ The North labelled Muldoon South Korea's 'chief sycophantic apologist' in New Zealand, while Society members harshly criticised the Government and ROK.⁸⁰ Against this background questions were raised in the Ministry regarding the healthiness of the Society's interest in the North's regime.⁸¹

Importance of the ROK

As expected given New Zealand's support for South Korea during the Korean War and growing links, the South's position was a key factor influencing policy. There were some negative perceptions of South Korea and serious misgivings expressed over its periods of authoritarianism and political upheaval from 1961 until democratic elections in 1987, but relations grew from the early 1960s.⁸² A goodwill mission visited in July 1961, diplomatic relations were established in March 1962, Park and PM Holyoake exchanged visits during 1968, and embassies opened in 1971.⁸³ South Koreans immigrated to New Zealand, and the ROK became a major trading partner.⁸⁴ The South's sensitivity towards New Zealand-DPRK interaction was evident with its critique of the North's 1974 and 1978 visits. Moreover, a 1984 article by a New Zealand journalist who visited the North reportedly upset the South through saying North Korean people 'looked happy'.⁸⁵

New Zealand carefully assessed South Korea's position when interacting with the North. In 1973 the reluctance to allow a table tennis visit was shaped by concern their entry from the South's viewpoint would clearly have 'political overtones', and as the situation on the Peninsula was 'relatively fluid' bilateral relations must be considered.⁸⁶ When Kirk indicated that a gradual opening of New Zealand-DPRK relations was sought, he noted the decision to establish diplomatic relations would be influenced by consultation with other interested countries, including the ROK 'whose position we

79 *Eight O'clock News*; 'North Koreans seeking friendship and unity', *Press*, 5 August 1978, p.12; and interview with Borrie.

80 'Asian models', *Salient*, 11 September 1978, p.3; 'Korean journalists write to Tribune', *New Zealand Tribune*, 26 July 1976, p.7; 'No one will miss Park', *EP*, 29 October 1979, p.7; and 'Iron curtain' round NZ', *Press*, 2 April 1980, p.21.

81 'North Korean cultural delegation', 20 December 1984, 59/519/6 part 1.

82 McGibbon, *New Zealand and the Korean War Volume I: Politics and Diplomacy*, Auckland, Oxford University Press, 1992, p.359; and Ben Simkin, 'New Zealand relations with Korea, 1962-1971', in Yongjin Zhang (editor), *New Zealand and Asia*, Auckland, Asia 2000 Foundation and University of Auckland, 1999, pp.58-59.

83 Simkin, pp.58-64.

84 Statistics NZ; and Paul Bellamy, 'New Zealand and South Korea', *New Zealand International Review (NZIR)*, January/February 2009, 34 (1), pp17-20.

85 'North Korea: closed but happy', *Dominion*, 11 December 1984, p.17.

86 'Possible visit to NZ by North Korean table tennis team', 27 August 1973, 59/519/6 part 1.

have long supported'.⁸⁷ With the 1974 visit the Ministry felt that an 'adverse reaction' from the South was possible, and indeed its Embassy criticised North Korea when the delegation arrived. However, Seoul was 'well aware' of moves towards establishing relations 'at a suitable time and not at the expense of our long-standing relationship with the South'. The South was informed in advance of the visit and the rationale for allowing their entry too.⁸⁸ Rowling acknowledged that New Zealand 'has had a long association with the Republic of Korea and this has lately been reinforced by important trading relations'. Contrasting this, contact with the DPRK was 'restricted to a few informal contacts between officials and some private trading arrangements'.⁸⁹

Close relations with the South were important for Muldoon. The PM admired South Korea's economic growth and viewed trade as vital. Hence, March 1976 DPRK visits were deemed 'untimely' with Muldoon's visit to the South the following month.⁹⁰ Indeed relations were close enough for Park to entrust Muldoon with a message for the Chinese leadership aimed at reviving ROK-DPRK dialogue.⁹¹ Later that year the reluctance to allow a table tennis visit arose with the need for wider reconciliation on the Peninsula.⁹² Under Muldoon New Zealand's close relationship with the South was often evident, as shown by a May 1979 visit by the ROK PM. A joint communiqué said 'If and when communist countries establish relations with the Republic of Korea, New Zealand would be prepared to consider doing the same with North Korea'.⁹³ In March 1980 Muldoon said 'I am much more concerned to demonstrate continued support and friendship for the Republic of Korea at this time than I am to open the door to representatives of the Communist North'.⁹⁴ The following year the Secretary noted that New Zealand's attitude towards relations with the DPRK had been largely conditioned by relations and support for the South.⁹⁵

The South's position remained influential in the 1980s. The 1985 Taekwondo visit was opposed partly because entry would 'certainly displease' the South.⁹⁶ Similarly, a cultural visit that year would 'displease' the South Koreans, who 'have always been quick to make representations to us' when a DPRK visit was possible. It was 'important that the bilateral relationship [with the South] not be disrupted' given the 'prospect

87 *EP*, 28 August 1974.

88 'Mr Chi has one of those weeks', *Press*, 3 August 1974, p.1; and 'Proposed visit by North Korean delegation', 20 May 1974, 59/519/6 part 1.

89 Rowling, pp.335-36.

90 'Muldoon's South Korea visit important political gesture', *Dominion*, 19 April 1976, p.4; and 'Proposed visit by North Korean delegation', 26 March 1976, 22/1/390 part 1.

91 Simkin, p.69

92 'Visit of table tennis delegation from the DPRK', 30 June 1976, 59/519/6 part 1.

93 'High-powered welcome for South Korean PM', *EP*, 4 May 1979, p.4; and 'North Korea a divisive peace factor', *EP*, 4 May 1979, p.4.

94 'North Korean cultural delegation', 20 December 1984, 59/519/6 part 1.

95 'Proposed visit by North Korean delegation', 19 February 1980, 22/1/390 part 1.

96 'Possible visit by a Taekwondo team from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea', 7 June 1985, 59/519/6 part 1.

of some significant developments in the commercial sphere in the near future'.⁹⁷ Furthermore, the South might feel relations with New Zealand were threatened, it had an important role maintaining East Asian stability, and was a major market.⁹⁸ The 1986 policy guidance acknowledged commercial interests in the ROK were 'obviously an important consideration' shaping relations with the North.⁹⁹ Lange also believed that the South could influence greater co-operation among Pacific Rim countries.¹⁰⁰ Two years later Marshall said that the South's position on the North had New Zealand's 'full support'.¹⁰¹ North Korean visits were reviewed in 1989 with the South trying to ease Peninsula tensions and supporting some modest gestures to reduce the North's isolation. This was because Seoul feared that if Pyongyang felt increasingly isolated it could become 'unpredictable and dangerous'.¹⁰²

Other countries

New Zealand policy was shaped by the positions and experiences of other friends and allies too, many of who had problematic relations with the DPRK. According to Marshall, during the 1970s and 1980s the cold war influenced policy towards North Korea with New Zealand reluctant to 'move too far ahead of US policy'.¹⁰³ The Ministry noted in February 1974 that the European Economic Community 'firmly' believed moves towards recognising North Korea were not possible until some communist countries recognised the South. Indeed, any European enthusiasm for recognising Pyongyang had waned following the experiences of those who had gained no economic or political advantages from establishing diplomatic relations but had suffered reduced trade with the South.¹⁰⁴ The Secretary said later that year a visit by North Korea's Ambassador in Jakarta was unlikely as it would 'inevitably' be taken as a decision to 'move more quickly to establish relations. It would be difficult to persuade a number of our friends, and we have the Japanese in mind particularly, that the situation was otherwise'.¹⁰⁵

Australia's experiences were especially influential given trans-Tasman relations. The South, along with the US and Japan, had been unhappy with Australia establishing diplomatic relations with the North in 1974.¹⁰⁶ However, the North during October 1975 abruptly withdrew its diplomats and issued a note labelled insulting by the Australian Government, apparently mainly because Australia failed to accept

97 'Possible visit by North Korean cultural delegation', 30 October 1985, 22/1/390 part 1.

98 'North Korea: Cultural delegations', 24 December 1984, 22/1/390 part 1.

99 'Policy guidance – Relations with the DPRK', 4 November 1986, 22/1/390 part 1.

100 'Korean PM apologises', *EP*, 11 March 1986, p.5.

101 Russell Marshall, 'The Korean Peninsula', 25 July 1988.

102 'Relations with the DPRK', 4 January 1989, 22/1/390 part 1; and 'London to Wellington', 3 March 1989, 22/1/390 part 1.

103 Interview with Marshall, 19 November 2010.

104 'North Korea', 11 February 1974, 519/3/1 part 2.

105 'North Korea', 5 July 1974, 236/1/2 part 1.

106 'DPRK: Australian and New Zealand Relations', 29 July 1974, 236/1/2 part 1.

DPRK officials were Korea's only legitimate representatives.¹⁰⁷ Before withdrawing a North Korean crashed an Embassy car outside the ROK Ambassador's residence and fled too. Australian diplomats were then expelled from Pyongyang in November, where restrictions had made work very difficult.¹⁰⁸ This widely publicised 'sharp deterioration' of relations influenced New Zealand's decision to disallow the 1976 table tennis visit.¹⁰⁹ South Korea was also 'grateful' for New Zealand's decision not to follow Australia when it opened negotiations with the North.¹¹⁰ Australia ultimately refused the North's requests to re-establish diplomatic relations unless the DPRK accepted the South's existence, and let friends recognise it. Furthermore, the North left unpaid debts to Australian businesses.¹¹¹

Other countries continued shaping policy in the 1980s. The reluctance to allow a cultural delegation entry in 1985 was influenced by 'a real risk of being misunderstood internationally' if it appeared closer New Zealand-DPRK relations were developing. This would also 'send out the wrong signals' to the US.¹¹² Negative consequences identified with allowing the Taekwondo visit included it being interpreted by Australia, the US and Association of Southeast Asian Nations as a 'significant gesture' towards the North.¹¹³ In 1986 'the desirability of keeping in step with like-minded countries' was noted, and the 1989 review occurred while countries like the UK and Australia evaluated greater contact with the North.¹¹⁴

Finally, New Zealand was aware of illegal activities by DPRK diplomats. These included Sri Lanka asking North Korea to close its Embassy in April 1971, reportedly as it had been supporting left-wing groups responsible for violent demonstrations. Such activities though were 'demonstrated most dramatically' in 1976 when the North's diplomats were forced to leave three Scandinavian countries and Finland after revelations of illegal tobacco, alcohol and drug dealings.¹¹⁵ The High Commissioner to Vanuatu was advised by Wellington in 1981 such incidents could be mentioned when New Zealand's concerns regarding Vanuatu-DPRK relations were expressed.¹¹⁶

107 'Australia-DPRK relations', November 1981, 519/3/1 part 2; and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'DPRK country brief', April 2011, available from http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/dprk/dprk_brief.html; and 'Australian Embassy shut down', *NZH*, 7 November 1975, p.1.

108 'Korea quits Canberra in a diplomatic huff', *Dominion*, 1 November 1975, p.7; Adrian Buzo, 'The 21 year freeze: Australia's relations with the Democratic Republic of Korea', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 1997, 51 (1), p.26; and 'North Korea ousts Australian envoys', *Dominion*, 8 November 1975, p.7.

109 'Visit of table tennis delegation from the DPRK', 30 June 1976, 59/519/6 part 1.

110 'Proposed visit by North Korean delegation', 20 May 1974, 22/1/390 part 1.

111 'Australia-North Korea', 27 October 1981, 519/3/1 part 2.

112 'North Korea: Cultural delegations', 24 December 1984, 22/1/390 part 1.

113 'Possible visit by a Taekwondo team from the DPRK', 7 June 1985, 59/519/6 part 1.

114 'Policy guidance – Relations with the DPRK', 4 November 1986, 22/1/390 part 1; 'London to Wellington', 3 March 1989; and Buzo, p.30.

115 'North Korean Embassy misdemeanours', 23 November 1981, 519/3/1 part 2.

116 'Vanuatu/DPRK relations', December 1981, 519/3/1 part 2.

The New Zealand media also reported during 1983 that a DPRK diplomat had pleaded guilty to a sex abuse charge in New York after hiding at his country's UN mission there for ten months.¹¹⁷

Diplomatic relations

The cold war's conclusion and increased ROK-DPRK interaction provided the background for semi-official New Zealand-DPRK dialogue. This was further encouraged by re-evaluations of relations with the North by countries like Australia, recognition that dialogue was vital in resolving Peninsula issues, and interest in exploring avenues for further engagement.¹¹⁸ In 1990 a North Korean delegation visited to promote relations and met Labour Party members.¹¹⁹ The following year the DPRK Ambassador to Jakarta visited (they returned in 1999), and in 1992 the Foreign Affairs Ministers of both countries met in Indonesia. Other DPRK visits included a Korean Worker's Party delegation (1991) and Institute of Disarmament and Peace officials (1996 and 1998). New Zealand visits including MPs like Helen Clark (1991), New Zealand Post (1991), the Labour Party (1992) and the New Zealand Dairy Board (1997). New Zealand's first diplomat visited in 1997 for a Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation ceremony. Overall, there were more recorded contacts in the 1990s than during the 1980s.¹²⁰ Economic ties remained minimal but New Zealand provided aid and unofficial interaction continued.¹²¹

Diplomatic relations developed with the 21st century. In May 2000 Prime Minister Clark said that New Zealand would eventually establish diplomatic ties, the Foreign Affairs Ministers met in Thailand during July 2000, and a Ministry delegation visited the DPRK in September. New Zealand announced the establishment of diplomatic relations in March 2001. It believed these would facilitate engagement with the North on various issues and economic ties might development, Kelly visiting with three others that July to raise the issue of human rights. He was followed in November by the first accreditation visit by New Zealand's Ambassador in Seoul, who is cross-accredited to the DPRK.¹²² Since then 14 official visits have occurred, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs (2007). Here the DPRK expressed interest in closer relations, and areas of potential co-operation were covered.¹²³ The North's Ambassador to Canberra has visited twice (2002 and 2007), and a credentials visit by the Ambassador to Indonesia is scheduled for August 2012. Relations have been challenging but the Society and others in New Zealand promote ties.

117 'Diplomat hid from sex charges', *Dominion*, 28 July 1983, p.11.

118 Paul Bellamy, 'Preparing for an uncertain Korean future', *NZIR*, November/December 2011, 36 (6), p.17.

119 Interview with Kelly, 5 December 2011 and correspondence, 13 December 2011.

120 Bellamy, 2011, p.17.

121 Bellamy, 'New Zealand and North Korea', *NZIR*, July/August 2010, 35 (4), pp.4-5.

122 Bellamy, 2011, p.17.

123 'North Korea coming out of its shell, says Peters', *NZH*, 19 November 2007, p.8.

Conclusion

New Zealand-DPRK contact was limited and unofficial from 1973 to 1989 despite frequent attempts by North Korea and its supporters to strengthen relations. These events provided the context within which post-cold war dialogue increased and diplomatic relations were finally established. New Zealand's negative perception of the North's foreign policy and much greater importance attached to ROK relations primarily shaped its cautious approach to interacting with Pyongyang. Wellington was also influenced by its friends and allies, many of whom were reluctant to establish official relations with the DPRK, and had negative experiences interacting with the authoritarian regime.

A peaceful Peninsula is vital for New Zealand's interests. New Zealand must consider the impact of future possible scenarios for North Korea, including regime collapse, conflict and reunification. As in the past, a cautious approach towards relations with North Korea is sensible given the authoritarian regime's aggression against the South, nuclear weapons program, appalling human rights record, and illegal activities. Nor has the North under Kim Jong-Un shown strong indications of fundamental change facilitating reconciliation, and perhaps peaceful and gradual integration with the South. Despite this, communication and interaction with North Korea are useful tools that can contribute to constructive dialogue fostering mutual trust, transparency, and cooperation on the Peninsula.

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Biographical note

Paul Bellamy is a former university lecturer and has undertaken work for various international organisations and published in diverse areas, including co-leading an international study of human security. He has published various articles on Korea and visited South Korea twice in 2009 and then in 2011 as a guest of the Korea Foundation. He is currently co-authoring a book on civil wars. The views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of his current employer.