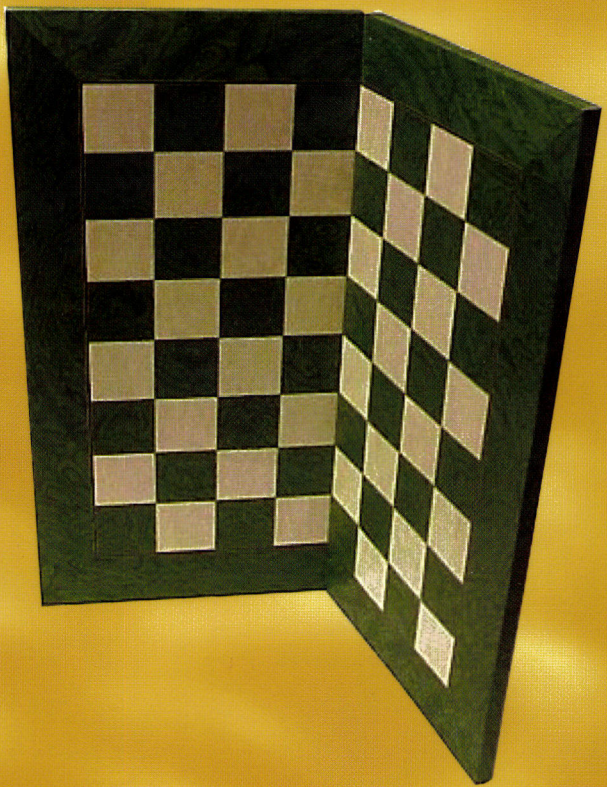
BURMA'S NORTH KOREAN GAMBIT
A CHALLENGE TO REGIONAL SECURITY?



Andrew Selth

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ABSTRACT

Bilateral relations between Burma and North Korea were abruptly severed in 1983, after Pyongyang sent secret agents to Rangoon to conduct a terrorist attack against a visiting South Korean presidential delegation. Formal diplomatic ties have still not been restored. Over the past few years, however, these two economically stricken but highly militarised pariah states seem to have found some common ground. Depending on how it develops, this relationship could extend beyond mutual support to have much wider strategic implications. In particular, reports that the military government in Rangoon has sought to acquire strategic weapon systems from Pyongyang, such as submarines and ballistic missiles, have aroused concern in regional capitals and in centres like Washington. There have even been suggestions that North Korea is secretly helping Burma to build a nuclear reactor, raising the spectre of a future Burmese nuclear weapons program that could be used as a bargaining chip against the United States.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew Selth has twice been a Visiting Fellow at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre. He is the author of five books on international terrorism and contemporary Burma, including *Against Every Human Law: The Terrorist Threat to Diplomacy* (Australian National University Press, Sydney, 1988) and *Burma's Armed Forces: Power Without Glory* (EastBridge, Norwalk, 2002).

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

After the creation of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in September 1988, Burma's name was officially changed from its post-1974 form, the 'Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma', back to the 'Union of Burma', which had been adopted when Burma regained its independence from the United Kingdom in January 1948. In July 1989 the military government changed the country's name once again, this time to *Pyidaungsu Myanmar Naing-Ngan*, or the 'Union of Myanmar'. At the same time, a number of other place names were changed to conform more closely to their original Burmese pronunciation. These new names were subsequently accepted by the United Nations and most other major international organisations. Some governments and opposition groups, however, have clung to the old forms as a protest against the military regime's continuing human rights abuses and its refusal to hand over power to the civilian government elected in 1990.

In this study the better known names, for example Burma instead of Myanmar, and Rangoon instead of Yangon, have been retained for ease of recognition. Formal titles, however, have been used as appropriate to describe organisations created (or re-named) since 1988. Similarly, the more common names of North Korea and South Korea have been used for those countries, rather than their formal titles – the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Republic of Korea (ROK) respectively. In all cases, quotations and references have been cited as they were originally published.

In Burma, the use of honorifics is customary. *U* (literally meaning 'uncle') is roughly equivalent to 'Mr', and *Daw* (literally meaning 'aunt') is the equivalent of Mrs or Miss, depending on the age and marital status of the person concerned. In this paper, these titles have been included in the name when certain Burmese characters are first introduced, on the grounds that, in some cases, the titles have become so closely associated with them that they are often taken to be part of the person's name. Korean names have been given according to Korean custom, with the surname first, followed by generational and personal names. The latter two are usually separated by a hyphen, but can be found written as two separate words. The exception to all these rules is Syngman Rhee (Yi Sung-man), the South Korean President between 1948-1960. Here, the more common Westernised version of his name is used.

This paper represents the author's views alone. It has been drawn entirely from open sources, and has no official status or endorsement.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
AMRAAM	advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles
ANSP	Agency for National Security Planning
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CRPP	Committee Representing the Peoples' Parliament
DPA	Democratic Patriotic Army
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
DVB	Democratic Voice of Burma
FEER	Far Eastern Economic Review
FPF	Federation of People's Front
GDP	gross domestic product
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ILO	International Labour Organisation
JDW	Jane's Defence Weekly
KAL	Korean Air Lines
KCIA	Korean Central Intelligence Agency
KCNA	Korean Central News Agency
KMT	Kuomintang
KWP	Korean Workers Party
MIS	Military Intelligence Service
NAM	Non Aligned Movement
NCGUB	National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma
NCUB	National Council of the Union of Burma
NIS	National Intelligence Service
NLD	National League for Democracy
NPT	(Nuclear) Non-Proliferation Treaty
PAEC	Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission
PSI	Proliferation Security Initiative
ROK	Republic of Korea
SAM	surface-to-air missile
SEATO	South East Asia Treaty Organisation
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SRBM	short-range ballistic missile
SSM	surface-to-surface missile

UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNC	United Nations Command
UNCOK	United Nations Commission on Korea
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
US	United States (of America)
USS	United States Ship
UWSA	United Wa State Army
VOPB	Voice of the People of Burma
WMD	weapons of mass destruction

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Andrew Selth

Introduction

Burma's contacts with the two Koreas go back to their creation in 1948, the year that Burma regained its own independence from the United Kingdom (UK). After the Korean War bilateral relations with both countries grew steadily, with official ties between Burma and North Korea becoming particularly close. These ties were abruptly severed in 1983, after Pyongyang sent secret agents to Rangoon to conduct a terrorist attack against a visiting South Korean presidential delegation. Formal diplomatic relations between Burma and North Korea have still not been restored. However, according to a number of recent reports, over the past few years these two economically stricken but highly militarised pariah states seem to have found some common ground.[1] It is still too early to make any definitive judgements but, depending on how it develops, this relationship could extend well beyond mutual support to have strategic implications for the entire Asia-Pacific region.

Burma and the Koreas Before 1983

In the years immediately following Burma's Independence, the fledgling government of Prime Minister U Nu was preoccupied with its own survival in the face of several armed insurgencies and the invasion of the country by Nationalist Chinese (*Kuomintang* or KMT) forces. Rangoon subscribed to a non-aligned foreign policy, and had neither the resources nor the inclination to focus on complex world issues such as the advances of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, the civil war in Greece or the Berlin blockade. While concerned about the struggle between the two major 'power blocs', as Burma termed the forces of the United States (US) and the Soviet Union, the main arenas of global conflict seemed far away. This included the growing tensions between West and East on the Korean Peninsula.[2] Still, the Nu Government was keen to play a positive role in the United Nations (UN) and, on 12 December 1948, Burma voted in favour of the US motion to recognise Syngman Rhee's government in Seoul as 'the only legal government of Korea'.[3] The same motion in the Political and Security Committee established a UN Commission on Korea (UNCOK), to promote the unification of the peninsula. At the time, however, Burma's UN Representative stated that

Rangoon would not be granting formal diplomatic recognition either to Seoul, or to Kim Il-sung's new communist government in Pyongyang, as Burma did not wish to contribute to the division of the country. It urged all parties to find a peaceful resolution of their differences.

The outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 was immediately recognised by Rangoon as an Asian problem, and one that warranted Burma's close attention. It was also seen as a major test of the United Nations Organisation, an institution that the rather idealistic young government in Rangoon hoped would exercise an important role in maintaining global security.[4] In July that year, the Nu Government fully endorsed the Security Council's action in declaring North Korea the aggressor in the war, and sending armed forces to fight on the Korean Peninsula under the UN flag. However, given its own security problems, Burma did not feel in a position itself to contribute any troops to the newly formed United Nations Command (UNC). Burma also expressed its support for the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution, which was proposed by the US in September 1950 to permit the UN General Assembly (UNGA) to take collective measures against aggression whenever deadlock prevented the Security Council from acting.[5] In answer to the Soviet Union's claim that the resolution was contrary to the UN Charter, the Burmese Representative stated that his government viewed the plan 'not so much from the legal point of view but rather as an instrument to make the United Nations effective in its primary function of preventing threats to the peace in any part of the world'.[6]

Given Rangoon's advertised non-aligned foreign policy, its prompt support for the anti-communist cause in Korea surprised many and resulted in some harsh criticism of the government from within Burma. Yet U Nu firmly believed that Burma's neutral position demanded a non-partisan, and principled, approach. He told the Burmese parliament that:

> If we consider a right course of action is being taken by a country we will support that country, be it America, Britain or Soviet Russia. If wrong, we must object which ever country it be, in some way or other.[7]

Rangoon's voting pattern in New York also reflected U Nu's personal conviction, which he again shared with parliament, that the UN's action in Korea established 'a noble precedent', and one that had direct implications for Burma. He felt that:

> Henceforth, if aggression occurs elsewhere, there too the United Nations must step in ... This is the great hope, the only hope for small member nations like us.[8]

As the Korean War progressed, however, and the harsh realities of great power politics became more apparent, Burma's faith in the UN's collective security system began to wane. It came to realise that the UN was really only as effective as the major powers were prepared to let it be. By the time of the General Assembly resolution in January 1951 that named China as another aggressor in the war, the Rangoon government had become more sensitive to its long shared border with China and the need to avoid antagonising the communist bloc. Burma and India were the only two non-communist states to oppose the US-sponsored motion.[9] In May that year, when the UN's Additional Measures Committee voted on an arms embargo against North Korea and China, Burma abstained.[10]

Burma's increasingly cautious attitude towards the Korean question, both in the UN and at home, was a reflection of its strategic concerns and a growing sense of vulnerability. The government's non-aligned foreign policy position was further strengthened by the example provided by Korea, of the terrible suffering that could be experienced by a small country caught up in the global competition between the major powers. U Nu was determined that Burma would not share the same fate.[11]

The Korean War did have one tangible benefit for Burma, however, and that was the increased global demand (including from South Korea) for its agricultural produce. As William Johnstone has written:

> However much the Burma representatives might deplore the devastation in Korea or the international tensions produced by the conflict, the fact remained that the very considerable increase in the world market price of rice provided the government with far greater foreign exchange earnings than anticipated.[12]

As Burmese rice exports had been nationalised, and placed under the control of the State Agricultural Marketing Board, the Nu Government was able to fix the purchase price of paddy (unhusked rice) and make huge profits by exporting it at twice the domestic price. This windfall was very timely, and enabled U Nu and his Ministers to forge ahead with their ambitious economic development programs, to rebuild a state which had been devastated by the Second World War and subsequent internal conflicts.[13] It also 'gave the government financial latitude to pursue an independent foreign policy and even to order a curtailment of United States aid because of American assistance to the KMT troops in Burma'.[14] Unfortunately for the Nu Government, when the world rice price slumped at the end of the war it was slow to react, and suffered the loss of several key markets. The consequent drop in GDP (by an estimated 3 per cent in 1958) contributed to

the political crisis that led to the installation of a military 'caretaker' government in November that year.[15]

After the signing of the Korean armistice agreement in July 1953, the lack of formal diplomatic ties did not prevent Burma from developing contacts with both Koreas. In 1957, in a speech to the Burmese parliament, U Nu stated that:

> So far as Korea is concerned, the unfortunate division of the country poses for us the same problem that Vietnam does. Consequently we do not recognise the Government of either North or South Korea as the *de jure* government of Korea but this has not prevented us from having economic and cultural contacts with them.[16]

From 1961, these contacts were pursued through separate consulates in the Burmese capital. A similar approach was taken to other divided countries, such as Germany and Vietnam. (China was a special case, its proximity and enormous strategic weight demanding Burma's immediate recognition of the People's Republic when it was declared in December 1949). In May 1975, the government of General Ne Win (who overthrew U Nu's democratic administration in March 1962) established formal diplomatic relations with both Koreas, and links with Seoul and Pyongyang were raised to full embassy level.[17]

During the 1970s and 1980s the primary arena for international competition between the two Koreas was in their relations with the four major powers. As Ralph Clough wrote in the mid-1980s:

> Relations with all the other countries of the world have been of secondary importance. Yet with each passing decade rivalry between Seoul and Pyongyang in this secondary arena has become more important.[18]

Both North Korea and South Korea actively engaged in open competition for Burma's recognition, and support in international forums like the United Nations. If Seoul sent an official delegation of any kind to Rangoon, it was invariably followed by a similar group from Pyongyang, and vice versa. Privately, the Ne Win regime expressed exasperation with the succession of special envoys, parliamentary friendship groups and cultural troupes from the two Koreas. These visits placed a heavy burden on Burma's slim resources, as occurred for example when a 100-member North Korean dance ensemble visited Rangoon in 1971.[19] However, in keeping with Burma's avowed policy of strict neutrality in international affairs, it gave both Koreas

roughly equal attention, and the correct protocols were always scrupulously observed.[20] In addition, the diplomatic interests of one country were weighed against those of the other. For example, a 1961 understanding with North Korea to promote reciprocal trade was followed by trade talks with South Korea (and a formal trade agreement in 1967). Official visits to Pyongyang, such as that made by the Burmese Foreign Minister in 1982, were usually followed by similar visits to Seoul.[21]

Despite this broadly even-handed approach, Rangoon's relations with Pyongyang during this period tended to be warmer than those with Seoul. North Korea was seen to be more independent than US-backed South Korea which, under President Park Chung-hee, had consciously rejected Burma's example of a military government.[22] North Korea was an ally of China, which was considered the greatest long-term threat to Burma's security. Also, after the 1962 coup in Burma, there was the opportunity for North Korea to capitalise on Ne Win's (albeit rather idiosyncratic) socialist system of government, and his deep-seated suspicion of the Western powers. The two sides were able to refer to their 'common anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggle'.[23] In 1966 the News Agency of Burma signed an exchange agreement with the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). After a visit to Pyongyang by Ne Win in 1977, North Korea became the first communist state to establish fraternal links with the ruling Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). A BSPP delegation subsequently attended the Sixth Congress of the Korean Workers Party (KWP) in Pyongyang, in 1980.[24] Under a trade agreement negotiated during Ne Win's visit, North Korea helped Burma to build and operate a tin smelter, a glass manufacturing plant, a hydroelectric station, a ceramic manufacturing centre and a synthetic textiles plant.[25] Reflecting their different stages of economic development, North Korea provided Burma with industrial products, including machinery, tools, cement and chemicals. In return, Burma exported cotton, rubber, wood, rice and minerals to North Korea.

The BSPP's readiness to establish links with the KWP may have also been prompted by suspicions that, like the Chinese, the North Koreans were pursuing a dual-track policy, and using informal party-to-party links to assist armed anti-Rangoon groups in northern and eastern Burma. Firm evidence is difficult to obtain, but Pyongyang's involvement with various insurgency movements in Burma is said to have begun as early as the 1960s. It was always at a low level and, according to one well-informed US analyst, consisted of 'sporadic deliveries of small arms, the provision of guerrilla warfare training, and small financial grants'.[26] During the 1970s this 'intermittent' aid was reportedly directed mainly to the Communist Party of

Burma (CPB) which, with Beijing's generous assistance, had by this time become the most powerful and best equipped of all Burma's insurgent armies.[27] Some of this guerrilla training may have taken place in North Korea, but a few sources have claimed that personnel from the Korean People's Army (possibly including members of its special forces) were sent to Burma to provide instruction and advice.[28] According to one British news magazine, some of these officers actually fought alongside the CPB against the Burmese armed forces in the battle of Hsi-Hsinwan, which was waged near the Chinese border in November 1986.[29] There was one unconfirmed report that in 1976 Pyongyang provided training and weapons to members of the 'Federation of People's Front' (FPF). This group cannot be identified, but the report may refer to a short-lived CPB-led coalition known as the United People's Front.[30]

While most seem to be based on reliable sources, there are a number of curious aspects to these reports. For example, a propaganda booklet entitled *Burma's Insurgent Communists*, published under the (unacknowledged) auspices of the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in 1969, refers to the CPB's links with China but does not mention North Korea.[31] There were no references to the KWP in the CPB's comprehensive 1978 'Political Report', or in any other official statements broadcast by the CPB's clandestine Voice of the People of Burma (VOPB) radio station in 1979, when the party's fraternal links were described at some length.[32] Nor does North Korea or relations with the KWP seem to figure in any later VOPB broadcasts.[33] Veteran Burma-watcher Bertil Lintner, who lived with the CPB for several months during the mid-1980s, cannot recall any CPB leaders ever mentioning North Korea in their discussions with him. Nor, despite some suggestions of external aid in the Western news media, did he see any foreign advisors in their ranks.[34] It is possible that North Korea was unusually successful in concealing or disguising its activities in northern Burma during this period. It is also possible, however, that the Ne Win regime fed stories about North Korea's involvement to the US, either to win greater sympathy for Rangoon's struggle against the CPB, or out of simple mischievousness.[35] Another explanation that needs to be considered is that Washington or Seoul deliberately leaked reports of Pyongyang's involvement in Burma's insurgencies, as part of a disinformation campaign against North Korea.

Assuming that assistance of some kind was provided to anti-Rangoon groups, why Pyongyang should wish to involve itself in Burma's internal affairs in this manner is unclear, particularly as bilateral relations with Ne Win's socialist regime were improving at Seoul's expense. During the Korean War there was an ambitious US plan to use the KMT remnants in northern

Burma to attack China from the south, and distract it from operations against UNC forces in Korea, but that threat had long since dissipated.[36] One possible explanation is that Kim Il-sung directly translated his own formative experiences as a guerrilla fighter into his later political leadership style, and he never lost his belief in the efficacy of violent struggle.[37] He also felt that 'solidarity with the international revolutionary forces' was important, not only in spreading communism but in forcing the 'US imperialist aggressors' out of South Korea.[38] Kim was thus keen to encourage communist revolutions around the world, and reportedly established 30 centres in North Korea to train foreign guerrillas, mostly from Third World African countries.[39] If Pyongyang did indeed assist any Burmese insurgents, the struggle of Burma's communists against the military government in Rangoon may have been seen in this light. It is also possible that Pyongyang was providing aid to the CPB insurgents as a way of currying favour with Beijing, on which Pyongyang still depended for political support and economic assistance.

In 1983, however, Burma's relationship with the two Koreas changed dramatically, and in a way that would affect relations between all three countries for the next 15 years.

The 1983 'Rangoon Incident'

In October 1983, South Korean President Chun Doo-hwan paid a state visit to Burma on what was planned to be the first leg of a six-country tour of Southeast Asia, South Asia and Australia. After a controversial accession to the presidency in 1980, amid widespread criticism for the brutal suppression of popular protests earlier that year, the tour was designed to improve Chun's legitimacy at home and strengthen his relations with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region.[40] Before his arrival in Burma on 8 October, however, Pyongyang smuggled three agents into the country with the aim of killing Chun and as many members of his entourage as possible. This 'direct action' team was trained in Kaesong by the Reconnaissance Bureau of the Ministry of People's Armed Forces, but the operation was managed by the Liaison Department of the KWP. At the same time, a second team was trained, with orders to attack the South Korean president in Kandy, Sri Lanka, if the Rangoon operation was unsuccessful or had to be aborted.[41] On 21 September, the first team slipped into Burma from a visiting North Korean cargo ship, which then continued on its way to deliver the second team to Sri Lanka.[42] In the days leading up to Chun's visit, the first team was sheltered and assisted in its preparations by members of the North Korean embassy in Rangoon, at least one of whom appears to have been an intelligence officer.

South Korea's security authorities knew that Chun was taking a risk by making an overseas trip at this time.[43] It was one of the reasons why the presidential aircraft took a circuitous route around the communist states of China and Vietnam, to reach Burma.[44] Yet, despite specific warnings from South Korea's Agency for National Security Planning (ANSP), and the security measures put in place by Burma's Military Intelligence Service (MIS), on 7 October the North Korean agents succeeded in planting three remotely-controlled bombs in the roof of the Martyrs' Mausoleum.[45] On the morning of 9 October the South Korean party was scheduled to pay its respects at the outdoor shrine, which was dedicated to Burma's nationalist hero, Aung San, and the eight others assassinated with him in 1947.[46] Due to a last minute and unannounced change to his schedule, however, Chun did not arrive at the shrine at the expected time.[47] The three agents, who were watching from a nearby hill, apparently mistook the South Korean ambassador's arrival (with a Burmese police escort, and at the originally scheduled time) as signalling the president's arrival. A Burma Army bugler stationed at the shrine apparently made the same mistake, and began to play. The agents waited until the ambassador had entered the mausoleum and, believing him to be the president, detonated the bombs. Seventeen South Koreans, including four Cabinet ministers and the ambassador, were killed as a result of the explosion. Fourteen other South Korean officials were injured. Four Burmese citizens were killed and 32 were injured.[48]

President Chun was already on his way to the shrine when the attack occurred. Alerted by radio, he returned immediately to the State Guest House where he was staying.[49] He decided to cut short his regional tour and fly back to Seoul. Before he left Rangoon, Chun was visited by BSPP Chairman Ne Win, who offered his condolences and his personal apologies for the breach in security.[50] At the airport, President San Yu assured his South Korean counterpart that 'those responsible for this odious and cowardly act will not go unpunished'.[51] On his arrival back in South Korea, Chun issued a statement accusing 'the North Korean Communists, the most inhumane group of people on earth', of being responsible for the terrorist attack.[52] A Ministerial-level investigation team was despatched to Rangoon and, up to a point, was permitted by the Burmese authorities to participate in the investigation of the incident. South Korea urged Burma to support a move to bring the affair to the attention of the UN but, sensitive to sovereignty issues, the Burmese insisted on viewing the investigation purely as a national matter. Also, they were smarting from the blow to their pride. Not only had the three North Korean agents been able to come ashore and reconnoitre the mausoleum, but they had been able to enter the shrine and plant their bombs

undetected.[53] To add insult to injury, President Chun's advance security team had specifically alerted the Burmese to the danger of a bomb in the mausoleum roof. However, this warning was ignored by the MIS, which claimed that its security measures were adequate.[54]

After the attack, the three agents planned to return to one of the North Korean diplomatic residences, to hide until they could board a cargo vessel for home. Due to increased security measures in the Burmese capital, they were unable to do this, so they decided to split up and head straight for Rangoon harbour. However, in Burma's tightly controlled and highly integrated society it was very difficult for such foreigners to evade capture for long, and within three days all had been discovered by local townspeople. The team's leader, Major Jin Mo, was captured, but lost a hand and an eye after unsuccessfully attempting to commit suicide with a hand grenade. In a separate incident, the other two agents, Captains Sin Ki-chol and Kang Min-chul, were found and taken to a police guard post by a police officer and a member of the local People's Committee. When an attempt was made to search their bags they tried to escape, using grenades and automatic pistols. Sin was shot dead by the police, but Kang escaped. He was later found hiding, and was quickly surrounded by hundreds of soldiers, policemen and local residents. He too tried to commit suicide with a hand grenade and sustained serious injuries, including the loss of his left hand. Three Burmese soldiers were killed in the incident.[55]

The Burmese security authorities arrested 12 others suspected of complicity in the terrorist attack, but they were later released.[56] Initially, suspicion had fallen on the insurgent Karen National Union, which in the past had carried out small but largely ineffective bomb attacks around Rangoon. The CPB was apparently considered too, but quickly discounted as the culprit, as it had no history of urban terrorism. Besides, it would not have attacked Chun and his colleagues without Beijing's specific approval, something that the Burmese correctly surmised was unlikely to be forthcoming. There was also some speculation about the involvement of Burmese army officers loyal to Brigadier Tin Oo, the former heir-apparent to Ne Win who had fallen from grace earlier that year. His removal from office was followed by the dismissal of a number of his supporters, including several senior MIS officers.[57] However, the Burmese authorities quickly concluded that local dissidents and insurgents were not responsible for the terrorist attack, arguing that none of these groups would gain anything from the death of the South Koreans.[58] Also, the Burmese felt that the plot was too sophisticated, and the bomb too powerful, for it to have been planned locally. All the available evidence pointed to foreign involvement. Briefly

arrested too was the ANSP security officer who had initially warned the Burmese of the danger of a bomb in the mausoleum ceiling. Despite his impeccable credentials, his apparent foreknowledge of the plot made him an immediate suspect in the eyes of the demoralised MIS investigators.[59]

On 17 October 1983, the Burmese investigation team issued an interim report on the incident, strongly hinting at North Korea's direct involvement. On 4 November, it was formally announced that the terrorist attack was perpetrated by North Korean agents with the help of North Korean officials based in Rangoon. Diplomatic relations with Pyongyang were immediately severed. The North Korean embassy was closed and its 12 members of staff given 48 hours to leave the country.[60] Such was Ne Win's anger and embarrassment at the incident, which he felt was a personal betrayal by Kim Il-sung, that his government took the further step of withdrawing recognition of North Korea as a sovereign state.[61] Between 22 November and 9 December, the two surviving North Korean agents were tried, found guilty and sentenced to death. At appeal hearings the following January and February, these sentences were upheld. Major Jin Mo was hanged at Insein Gaol in April 1985. However, the death sentence against Captain Kang Min-chul was commuted to life imprisonment, largely because he had cooperated in the official investigation. It appears that Kang not only confessed his own role, but also gave the Burmese and South Korean authorities full details of the events leading up to the attack.[62] He remains in Rangoon's Insein Gaol to this day, enjoying certain privileges (such as separate living quarters and occasional visits by prostitutes) and studying Buddhism.[63]

At first, Pyongyang denied that it was responsible for the attack, labelling suggestions of North Korean involvement 'preposterous slander'.[64] In later statements and officially sanctioned publications, the North Koreans blamed the US and South Korea.[65] They were able to point out several inconsistencies in published accounts of events. Also, some of the explanations initially offered by Rangoon and Seoul for specific aspects of the incident simply did not ring true. For example, the oft-repeated statement that the President's car was late arriving at the mausoleum because it was caught in traffic, ignored the fact that even the light traffic of the Burmese capital was stopped by police to permit official vehicles to pass. Also, the suggestion that the army bugler was simply practising when the ambassador arrived at the mausoleum was equally implausible.[66] However, the weight of evidence against North Korea was so overwhelming that, by the time the Burmese announced their official findings, the Pyongyang propaganda machine had

largely fallen silent. This was despite the fact that the blame for the attack was quickly sheeted home to Kim Il-sung. It was inconceivable that, in such a highly regimented and centralised state as North Korea, such an operation could have been mounted without endorsement at the very highest level of government. Indeed, just two months before the attack, President Kim had visited the unit responsible for training the terrorists, and awarded it the 'red flag of three revolutions', an honour reserved for model units.[67] According to several sources, the operation itself was under the personal supervision of Kim Jong-il, Kim Il-sung's son and publicly acknowledged heir.[68]

North Korea's motives for the attack had nothing to do with Burma, which seems to have been chosen as the venue in the belief that the blame for any assassination attempt would fall on domestic insurgent groups.[69] Pyongyang's main aim was to create an atmosphere of fear and confusion in Seoul and, in this regard at least, it was highly successful. South Korea's armed forces and police were immediately placed on a higher state of alert. President Chun described the attack as tantamount to a declaration of war and warned that, should another such provocation recur, 'there will be a corresponding retaliation in strength'.[70] The US too increased its military readiness levels, in case the North Koreans attempted to capitalise on the shock of the Rangoon incident to launch a major incursion across the Demilitarised Zone that separated the two Koreas. The aircraft carrier USS *Carl Vinson* and its accompanying battle group were kept in Korean waters beyond their scheduled departure date. 'No unusual North Korean troop movements were observed, but a few weeks later South Korean officials charged that Pyongyang had planned to launch commando raids after Chun's expected assassination'.[71] During the visit of US President Ronald Reagan to Seoul from 12-14 November 1983, a joint statement was issued which called for effective international sanctions against North Korea, and reiterated the US's commitment to the South Korea-US mutual defence treaty.[72] Tensions on the peninsula remained high for months.

The Rangoon attack was also designed to prevent Chun Doo-hwan from consolidating his position as the true successor to President Park Chung-hee, who was assassinated by his own intelligence chief in October 1979.[73] South Korea's economy was forging ahead and, since the 1979 normalisation of Sino-US relations, the international environment had turned against Pyongyang. Seoul had won its bids to host the 1986 Asian Games and 1988 Olympic Games, and after 1981 the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), (of

which Burma was a founding member), declined to pass its annual pro-North Korea resolutions. There were also deeper and subtler factors at play, as noted by Adrian Buzo:

> Kim Il Sung had a world view of deep, permanent and desperate struggle between the Party and its enemies. He continued to glorify the guerilla (sic) tradition with its modes of irregular warfare and terrorism and had already shown a profound lack of judgement in international affairs in such areas of state policy as foreign trade management and relations with the Non-Aligned Movement. Kim was explicitly committed to a view that the ROK leadership was unrepresentative and that it played a major role in the suppression of social forces in the South. In his view, the removal of Chun and many of his advisers would constitute a major step towards unleashing the revolutionary potential in ROK society while also going some of the way toward slowing the rate at which the ROK was now outperforming the DPRK economically and diplomatically.[74]

The essence of Kim's governing philosophy of *juche* (or self reliance) was that fate could be defied, and unfavourable trends could be changed through active measures. 'Rather than remaining passive, *juche* compels people to struggle against a hostile environment to turn it favourable'.[75] The attempt to assassinate Chun Doo-hwan in Burma was part of that struggle.

Not long after the 'Rangoon incident', as it became widely known, North Korea appears to have come to the conclusion that it had made a major tactical error, which was costing it dearly in terms of international recognition and support. For example, following the Burmese government's announcement of the results of its investigation, the Comoros Islands, Costa Rica and Western Samoa also withdrew their recognition of North Korea. Japan imposed economic sanctions against Pyongyang. Largely because of Rangoon's recognised non-aligned credentials, it was widely seen to have been as much of a victim as Seoul. When the Burmese Representative presented his formal report to the UN's Sixth (Legal) Committee in September 1984, and denounced the terrorist attack, none of North Korea's allies spoke up in its defence.[76] Pyongyang subsequently made a number of attempts, mainly through intermediaries like China and the members of the Soviet bloc, to restore bilateral ties with Rangoon. It even offered to pay a considerable sum of money in indemnity and to provide millions of dollars in economic aid, as a way of compensating for the terrorist attack.[77] Pyongyang also undertook to send a high-ranking envoy to Rangoon to

offer Kim Il-sung's personal apologies to Ne Win, but all to no avail. Bilateral trade was permitted to continue and, until the mid-1980s, even to grow, but in other ways Burma kept North Korea at arm's length.[78]

The Ne Win Government's reluctance to re-establish diplomatic relations with Pyongyang was strengthened in December 1987, when two North Korean terrorists sabotaged a South Korean Boeing 707, killing all 115 people on board. One later committed suicide, but the other was captured alive and confessed to the crime.[79] Ironically, the mid-air bombing of Korean Air Lines (KAL) Flight 858 occurred in Burma's air space, over the Andaman Sea, as the aircraft was travelling from Abu Dhabi to Bangkok. The aircraft's last radio communication was with the control tower at Rangoon's Mingaladon International Airport.[80] Burma actively facilitated the search for the remains of the South Korean aircraft, a measure greatly appreciated by Seoul. The attack against Flight 858 was part of a plan 'to destabilize the South Korean Government and disrupt the 1988 Olympic Games to be held in Seoul in September and October'.[81] As a result of that operation, and the earlier attack against President Chun and his party in Rangoon, North Korea was added to the United States' official list of international terrorism sponsors.[82] Not only did this prohibit any commercial contacts between the US and North Korea, but it effectively blocked Pyongyang from receiving any development funds from the World Bank and other key international lending institutions.

Burma and South Korea After 1983

After 1983, bilateral ties between Burma and South Korea grew rapidly, as Seoul made a major effort, including in the United Nations, to capitalise on the collapse of the special relationship between Rangoon and Pyongyang. South Korean Foreign Minister Lee Won-kyun made an official visit to Rangoon in July 1984, the first high level visit to Burma since the terrorist attack nine months before. Seoul's diplomatic offensive coincided with a growing trend among the Asia-Pacific countries and members of the NAM towards non-partisanship on the Korean question. Under these circumstances, Burma felt more comfortable about developing its diplomatic links with South Korea.[83] President San Yu made a state visit to Seoul in 1987 and a Burmese embassy was opened there in 1989.[84] Economic relations also strengthened, aided by South Korea's export led industrial growth under President Chun and his successors. Two-way trade fluctuated greatly from year to year, but showed a gradual growth (albeit with a widening gap in the balance of trade caused by Burma's inability to pay for imports). South Korea provided Burma with tyres, electrical goods, medicines, printing paper, and iron and steel products. The main commodities exported from

Burma to South Korea were teak and other hardwoods, refined lead, tungsten, copper concentrates, duck feathers, rattan, mother of pearl and pulses.[85]

Given Burma's chronic economic problems, and the restrictions imposed on foreign access by the doctrinaire BSPP government, direct investment from South Korea between 1983 and 1988 was slight. The only project of note was the supply of plant and equipment for two government garment-making factories, and even in that case special arrangements had to be made for payment.[86] However, South Korean companies were successful in winning several large contracts related to investment projects funded by multilateral agencies. The most important project was the construction of the massive Nyaunggyat Dam in central Burma. Funded by the World Bank to the tune of US$75 million, it was the largest construction project ever undertaken in Burma. Other projects included the supply of railway locomotives and coaches (paid for by the Japanese government's Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund), and the supply of machinery for a shoe factory (funded by the Asian Development Bank).[87] Indirectly, these projects made Seoul a major supplier of Burma's capital goods and raw materials.

After the Burmese armed forces (or *Tatmadaw*) brutally crushed a massive democratic uprising in 1988, and took back direct control of the country, the new military regime (known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council, or SLORC) was severely criticised by the international community, in particular the Western democracies and Japan. Rangoon was also made the target of a range of political and economic sanctions. Since that time, however, Burma's bilateral relationship with South Korea has grown significantly. Fearful of losing potential economic opportunities to China, South Korea was one of the few countries that maintained its economic assistance programs after the 1988 military takeover. Seoul has provided the Rangoon regime with both loans and grants, and conducts a volunteer program along the lines of the US Peace Corps. In addition, South Korean firms were quick to capitalise on the SLORC's new 'open door' economic policies and easier access to Burma's cheap, disciplined labour force. Thirteen companies entered into joint venture agreements with the regime after 1988, paying large signature bonuses for the privilege of doing so.[88] As David Steinberg wrote at the time, Seoul 'has no compunctions regarding human rights'.[89] There is some evidence that a South Korean company made at least one shipment of M-16 automatic rifle ammunition to Burma soon after the military takeover. Probably under pressure from Washington, however, Seoul subsequently agreed to observe the arms embargoes that were being applied against Rangoon.[90]

Seoul's policy approach was more pragmatic than principled. It did, however, caution against the admission of Burma into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1996-7, and supported calls from Thailand and the Philippines for such admission to be conditional on the restoration of a democratic government in Rangoon.[91] This attitude was significantly strengthened after the election of Kim Dae-jung to the South Korean presidency in December 1997. Kim was imprisoned by Park Chung-hee's and Chun Doo-hwan's military governments for his dissident views, and in 1980 was even condemned to death by a military court for sedition. He was a strong supporter of Burmese democratic leader and fellow Nobel Peace Prize laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and lent South Korea's assistance to the campaign for democracy and human rights in Burma. For example, Seoul co-sponsored a UN General Assembly resolution on Burma in 1998 that was the strongest since the creation of the SLORC ten years earlier. The resolution was notable for its implicit recognition of the National League for Democracy's (NLD) controversial Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP), a body established by the main opposition party in September 1998 to symbolise the parliament elected in 1990, but never convened.[92] The resolution also requested that the UN Secretary General report on Burma throughout the year, not just when the UNGA was sitting.[93] South Korea supported the US in introducing another UN resolution critical of the Rangoon regime in 1999.

Despite these policy differences, bilateral trade continued to flourish. This seems to have been largely because of the 'textbook complementary' nature of the economic relationship, with Burma able to provide primary products and raw materials while South Korea could export light industrial products and other finished goods.[94] There were also continuing opportunities for direct investment in Burma, encouraged in part by spiralling costs in South Korea, and increased levels of regulation imposed on local industries by the popularly elected Seoul government.[95] By 2000, these investments amounted to about $100 million in a variety of projects, including some with the armed forces. Two of Burma's largest garment factories, for example, are based on South Korean capital and expertise, and Korean fishing companies have been granted rights to operate in Burmese waters.[96] Before the imposition of additional US economic sanctions in June 2003, prompted by an attack against Aung San Suu Kyi by an officially organised mob, South Korean investments in Burma were running at about US$120 million.[97] The impact of the latest sanctions on Burma's light industrial sector, however, has been dramatic, and South Korean joint ventures have been among those that have suffered.[98]

Memories of the 1983 Rangoon incident are still strong in South Korea, and occasionally resurface in dramatic fashion. Each year a memorial service is held at the national cemetery in Seoul for the victims of the terrorist attack. In October 2000 this ceremony had particular significance, as it coincided with moves towards the establishment of formal ties between the US and North Korea, and the possibility that North Korea might be removed from the US's official list of terrorist sponsors.[99] That month, Cho Myong-nok, the First Vice Chairman of the North Korean National Defence Commission visited Washington, and Secretary of State Madelaine Albright paid a return visit to Pyongyang. There was speculation that an agreement on diplomatic relations would follow. The issue was used to put pressure on President Kim Dae-jung, whose 'Sunshine Policy' of wooing North Korea with financial grants and other concessions had aroused the ire of more conservative elements in the South Korean parliament. A number of politicians publicly called for North Korea to apologise for the attack in Rangoon and the 1987 bombing of KAL Flight 858, before relations with either the US or South Korea were normalised.[100] South Korea's Unification Minister subsequently undertook to seek a public apology from Pyongyang, either before or during a proposed visit to Seoul by Kim Jong-il.[101] These comments prompted a strong riposte from Pyongyang, which once again firmly denied any involvement in the 1983 terrorist attack, and accused South Korea of attempting to undermine the efforts being made by North Korea to improve its relations with the US.[102]

In mid-2003 the mass circulation South Korean newspaper *Chosun Ilbo* raised the prospect of repatriating convicted terrorist Kang Min-chul to Seoul.[103] The argument put forward at the time was that, after 20 years in Insein Gaol, he had paid for his crime and should be permitted the same rights and freedoms as those enjoyed by other North Korean agents who had renounced their previous activities and allegiances.[104] It is not clear whether this suggestion will be taken up by President Rho Moo-hyun but, in any case, it is unlikely that the Rangoon regime (known since 1997 as the State Peace and Development Council, or SPDC) would agree to release Kang. He was convicted of a major offence committed in Burma, and few Burmese would wish to see him escape the maximum punishment. Not only are there questions of national pride involved, but the Burmese regime has a strong policy of retribution for crimes against the state. Also, to release Kang now would send the wrong signals, not only to domestic dissidents and extremists outside the country, but also to the US, which has welcomed Rangoon's strong public commitment to the global war against terrorism.[105] In addition, at a time when Rangoon and Pyongyang are developing closer relations, it is unlikely that the SPDC would risk offending Kim Jong-il by

releasing Kang into South Korean custody. North Korea still considers Kang a traitor for failing to commit suicide, and for telling Burmese and South Korean investigators of Pyongyang's involvement in the plot to kill Chun Doo-hwan. If Kang were free to speak about the 1983 incident, North Korea would again be severely embarrassed.

Burma and North Korea Since 1988

Since 1988, the Rangoon regime has implemented a far-reaching military expansion and modernisation program. It has consistently spent a greater proportion of central government outlays on defence than any other country in the Asia-Pacific region. This includes North Korea, with 1.2 million men and women under arms, the most militarised country in the world today.[106] The Burmese armed forces have doubled in size, making them the second largest in Southeast Asia and, by some calculations, the fifteenth largest in the world.[107] New command and control structures have been put in place, and capabilities in key support areas like intelligence, communications and logistics have been substantially upgraded. The country's military infrastructure has been greatly improved. In addition, all three Services have received major injections of arms and equipment. The Burma Army has acquired a wide range of tracked and wheeled armour, towed and self-propelled artillery, air defence weapons, transport, small arms and communications equipment. The air force has taken delivery of more than 150 helicopters, fighters, ground attack, transport and training aircraft. The Burma Navy too has expanded dramatically, with new corvettes, missile patrol boats, offshore patrol boats and riverine craft.[108] Most of these new weapon systems have come from China at special 'friendship' prices, but there have been a number of other suppliers, including North Korea.

Over the past 20 years, Rangoon has occasionally thought of restoring diplomatic relations with Pyongyang. The issue came up in 2000, for example, after North Korea joined the ASEAN Regional Forum.[109] To date, however, Rangoon has been reluctant to take this formal step. Privately, many Burmese officials remain critical of Kim Jong-il for his personal role in the terrorist attack against President Chun Doo-hwan, the international embarrassment Burma suffered, and for the way that North Korea violated the sanctity of the Martyr's Mausoleum. Also, while the failure of Burma's internal security apparatus in 1983 was largely the result of his own actions, Ne Win preferred to blame the MIS leadership.[110] Soon after the Rangoon incident, he implemented a major restructuring of Burma's intelligence services. The MIS chief was dismissed, and replaced by one of Ne Win's protégés, who was directed to undertake a complete review of Burma's 'shattered' internal security apparatus and rebuild it.[111] The army officer

appointed to reform the discredited MIS was the then Colonel Khin Nyunt, now the third most powerful member of the country's ruling body. This turbulent period is thus still fresh in the minds of the current military leadership. The regime would doubtless also recall unconfirmed reports in 1988 and 1989 that North Korea gave some training and arms to the CPB-backed Democratic Patriotic Army (DPA), a group of about 250 students who fled to northern and eastern Burma after the SLORC first took power.[112]

These memories would presumably add to the concerns of Burma's rulers that Pyongyang still could not be trusted. Faced with continuing arms embargoes by its traditional suppliers, however, and the perceived need to acquire a wide range of new weapons for its greatly expanded armed forces, the Rangoon regime could not afford to be too discriminating. While China and several other countries had met most of the Tatmadaw's immediate needs, North Korea offered an attractive alternative source of arms and military equipment. Pyongyang felt no qualms about defying the international community and selling arms to a pariah state like Burma. The items in its inventory were comparatively cheap, a factor that became increasingly important as Burma's economy struggled during the 1990s. Also, North Korean arms and equipment tended to be based on tried and tested Russian and Chinese designs. As such, they were of a similar pattern to many weapon systems already in the Tatmadaw's order of battle. They were also at the same broad level of technical sophistication, making them easier to maintain and operate. Given the needs of both countries, there were opportunities for barter deals to be struck. It is possible too that, for strategic reasons, the SPDC was keen to further diversify the source of its arms, even at the risk of upsetting its close ally, China.

Given the closed nature of both the Rangoon and Pyongyang governments, and their shared obsession with secrecy about any issues deemed to be connected with national security, details of such arms sales are very difficult to obtain. However, it would appear that in 1990 Burma purchased 20 million rounds of 7.62mm AK-47 rifle ammunition from North Korea.[113] Several observers have suggested that the ammunition was destined for the United Wa State Army (UWSA), an ethnic insurgent group based in Burma's far northeast which had just signed a controversial ceasefire agreement with the SLORC. The price demanded by the Wa for suspending their military campaign against Rangoon included the right to retain their weapons, continued control over their existing territory and the freedom to keep trading in narcotics. The latter practice was officially condemned by China, however, so it would have been embarrassing for the Burmese authorities to ask China for this ammunition; hence the approach to

Pyongyang.[114] Also, in late 1998, Rangoon is believed to have purchased between 12 and 16 130mm M-46 field guns from North Korea.[115] While based on a 1950s Russian design, these weapons were battle tested and reliable. They significantly increased Burma's long range artillery capabilities, which were then very weak.

The frequent visits of North Korean freighters to Rangoon in recent years, and the secrecy surrounding their cargoes, have led to speculation that other deliveries of conventional arms and military equipment have occurred. These suspicions have been strengthened by reports of North Korean technical experts visiting Burmese military bases.

In July 2003 it was reported in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (FEER) that between 15 and 20 North Korean technicians had been seen at the regime's main naval facility at Monkey Point in Rangoon, and at a Defence Ministry guest house in a northern suburb of the capital.[116] According to this report, the technicians were believed to be helping Burma to equip some of their naval vessels with surface-to-surface missiles (SSM). This is quite possible. Burma currently has six *Houxin* guided missile patrol boats, which were acquired from China in the mid-1990s. Based at Monkey Point, each vessel is armed with four C-801 'Eagle Strike' anti-ship cruise missiles.[117] It has been speculated that similar SSMs would be mounted on the three new corvettes that were built at Rangoon's Sinmalaik shipyard over the past five years, and have recently been commissioned.[118] The C-801 systems were acquired from China, however, and if there were any requirement for repairs or upgrades, Rangoon would probably turn to Beijing for that help. It is more likely that the North Koreans are installing SSMs of some kind on the navy's four new *Myanmar* class coastal patrol boats, which were also built in local shipyards. Displacing 213 tons, these vessels are 45 metres long and have a complement of 34 officers and men. It has long been suspected that they would eventually be fitted with SSMs to give them a greater offensive capability.[119]

The first of these arms deals appears to have been arranged through Thai, Singaporean or possibly even Chinese intermediaries, probably because of the continuing lack of formal diplomatic relations between Rangoon and Pyongyang. The purchase of the 130mm field guns may have been initiated by China, as some have suggested, but that particular deal followed an unofficial visit to North Korea by the Burma Army's Director of Procurement in June 1999.[120] A Burmese government delegation made another secret trip to North Korea in November 2000. This was followed in turn by the visit to Rangoon from 20-22 June 2001 of a high-ranking North Korean delegation, led by Vice Foreign Minister Pak Gil-yon. The latter

visit, which preceded the arrival of North Korean technical experts at the Monkey Point naval facility, was reportedly 'to discuss cooperation in the defence industry with Myanmar's Deputy Defence Minister Khin Maung Win'.[121] The changing nature of the contacts made in recent years clearly reflects the rapidly improving ties between Rangoon and Pyongyang in the defence field.

In the arrangements made for the sales of both the AK-47 ammunition and the 130mm field guns, there appears to have been a strong element of barter trade involved.[122] This is also likely to have been the case with any SSM sale. Burma was, and remains, desperately short of foreign exchange, but produces rice and other primary products for export. While the SLORC and then the SPDC have been squandering the country's natural heritage for short term gain, it still has large areas of untouched forest and its marine resources have never been fully exploited.[123] For its part, North Korea has a massive domestic arms industry, and is happy to sell weapons of all kinds to whichever country wants them. For a variety of reasons, many to do with the regime's economic mismanagement, during the 1990s Pyongyang was facing a widespread famine and, even now, malnutrition remains a major problem.[124] The way was thus open for the Rangoon regime to pay for its North Korean weapons purchases with rice – even second grade broken rice that was unacceptable for sale on the world market.[125] It could also offer timber and marine products. The needs of both sides were well served. It would appear, however, that such barter arrangements have not been sufficient to meet Rangoon's wish in recent years for more sophisticated, and expensive, weapon systems.

The Tatmadaw has been interested for some time in acquiring one or more submarines, and has even sent a number of Burma Navy officers to Pakistan to undergo unspecified 'submarine training'.[126] It is not known whether the Rangoon regime ever actively investigated the possibility of acquiring a boat before 2002, but it is unlikely that the response to any such approaches would have been positive. Burma's questionable ability to pay, its low level of technological development and the likely reaction of regional countries would have all been factors weighing heavily against such a sale. According to *Jane's Defence Weekly* (JDW), however, North Korea has held no such reservations. In early 2002 the SPDC opened discussions with Pyongyang on the purchase of one or two small submarines.[127] One design considered was the Yugo class midget submarine, a 23 metre long diesel electric boat which displaced 70 tonnes dived. Another was the Sang-O class mini submarine. Displacing 360 tonnes dived, it could be built for either attack or reconnaissance. North Korea has already sold two boats of

this class to Vietnam.[128] According to JDW, Rangoon ultimately opted to purchase one Sang-O class boat, but was forced to abandon the deal in late 2002. It appears that the cost of the submarine, and perhaps belated recognition by the Burmese military leadership of the technical difficulties of keeping it fully operational, has scuppered the project, at least for the time being.[129]

In addition to submarines, the SPDC is believed to want to acquire some short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs).[130] In the late 1990s, there was an unconfirmed report circulating among the diplomatic community in Rangoon that China had agreed 'in principle' to sell Burma a batch of M-11 SRBMs, similar to those which Beijing had reportedly provided to Pakistan in the mid-1990s.[131] None of these missiles, which have a range of about 300 kilometres, appear ever to have been delivered to the Tatmadaw. Several reasons have been suggested for the failure of these missiles to arrive, ranging from the cost, to reluctance on China's part to sell them. It is of course also possible that the initial rumour was false, and can be discounted as another of those wild stories that seem to enjoy a brief life in the hot-house environment of the Rangoon diplomatic circuit. More recently, however, there has been a series of unconfirmed reports that Rangoon is interested in acquiring a number of Hwasong (Scud-type) SRBMs from North Korea. A secret meeting to discuss such a deal was reportedly held in Rangoon in August 2003, while another was supposedly held in Phuket, Thailand, in October.[132] The latest variants of this missile are capable of ranges of up to 500 kilometres with a 770 kilogram conventional warhead.[133] North Korea has already sold between 300-350 ballistic missiles to a range of overseas customers, probably including Iran, Pakistan, Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Libya, the United Arab Emirates and Vietnam.[134] Missile parts and technologies have also been made available.

A few news media outlets have stated that China has brokered a deal between Burma and North Korea for the purchase of 'missiles', but these reports may reflect confusion between SSMs like the C-801 and SRBMs like the Hwasong.[135] For China to sell M-11s to Burma, or actively to assist in the regime's purchase of North Korean SRBMs, would be a highly provocative step that would severely damage Beijing's vital (and currently quite positive) relationship with Washington. The reaction from Burma's neighbours, notably Thailand and India, would be particularly strong. Any such missile sales would also be quite harmful to China's long term interests in the Asia-Pacific region, where in recent years Beijing has made a number of important diplomatic gains. Yet North Korea has few such concerns. It desperately needs the foreign exchange (or barter goods) commanded by arms sales

that, technically at least, are currently legal under international law. This includes the sales of missiles and missile components.[136] Based on its past history of such weapons deals, Pyongyang would probably not be inclined to place much weight on the feelings of other countries. Indeed, it could argue that the sale of SRBMs to isolated and poverty-stricken Burma would be no more controversial than the sale of such missiles to Yemen. Despite being intercepted on the high seas by the US and its allies in late 2002, these weapons were eventually permitted to reach their intended destination.[137]

Other reported links between Rangoon and Pyongyang are even more difficult to identify and confirm, but they could include cooperation in narcotics trafficking, and in attempts to track down North Korean refugees.

After Afghanistan and Burma, North Korea is believed to be one of the largest opium producers in the world.[138] Its global drug smuggling operations are managed by Bureau 39, a shadowy wing of the KWP directly controlled by Kim Jong-il, as part of a wide range of illicit activities conducted by Pyongyang to secure desperately needed hard currency. The full extent of these activities, and the profits made from this illegal trade, are unknown, but there have been accusations that Burma, or at least Burmese nationals, are actively assisting North Korea in this field. For example, there have been news media reports, quoting North Korean defectors, that drug merchants from Burma have visited Pyongyang. Some of these visitors have apparently advised the North Koreans on ways to improve the quality of their own locally produced heroin.[139] It would also appear that Pyongyang is buying Burmese heroin to help meet its criminal needs. For example, the 125 kg of heroin seized from the North Korean cargo vessel *Pong Su* off the eastern coast of Australia in April 2003 was packaged in bags carrying the distinctive Double U O Globe brand, a trademark of narcotics trafficking groups based in the Burma-Thailand-Laos Golden Triangle region.[140] Another North Korean ship has been caught smuggling Double U O Globe brand heroin into Taiwan, and Russian police recently seized Burmese heroin being carried by North Korean intelligence agents across their mutual border. According to a recent story in the FEER, quoting US intelligence officials, agents from Pyongyang have also been seen in the Golden Triangle.[141]

The Rangoon regime too is clearly complicit in narcotics trafficking, indirectly profiting from Burma's role in the trade.[142] The State Department's International Narcotics Control Strategy Report for 1997, for example, reported that 'there is reason to believe that money laundering in Burma and the return of narcotics profits laundered elsewhere is a significant factor

in the overall Burmese economy'.[143] The US government later estimated that Burma received between US$700 million and $1 billion in foreign currency from heroin exports annually, or about the same as the total of all other exports.[144] It can be assumed that a good proportion of these funds eventually finds its way into the government's hands, and are drawn upon to help pay for arms imports. It has even been suggested that the Rangoon regime may be using the drugs themselves as barter goods, to help pay for its new North Korean arms.[145] This is possible, but it is considered unlikely that the SPDC would itself directly provide Pyongyang with heroin, or that the North Koreans would seek narcotics direct from the Rangoon regime. The discovery of deals of that kind would be very embarrassing to both governments and invite further international action against them. Any such connection is likely to be more indirect. In the case of the *Pong Su*, for example, the drugs found on the ship were probably purchased from drug barons (including Burmese traffickers) in the Golden Triangle, for resale in places like Australia. It is also possible, but less likely, that North Korea tried to disguise the origins of its own heroin by using the Double U O Globe brand on its packages.

A possible source of friction between Burma and North Korea in the future could be the issue of North Korean refugees escaping across the Chinese border, and travelling south to Burma and Thailand. Details are sketchy but, according to one US news report, 'Despite intense pressure and protestation from North Korea, several Asian countries, including ... Myanmar ... have offered North Korean refugees some haven'.[146] If this story is true, then it is highly unlikely that such support is being provided by the SPDC, which tends immediately to expel any foreigner found in the country without proper authorisation. Private Burmese groups or even criminal gangs may be providing some assistance, perhaps in passing such people on to pro-South Korean organisations in Thailand, but it is difficult to see how they could do so without coming to the notice of Burma's ubiquitous security services. Another hazard for any North Koreans attempting to flee to Burma would be the danger of retribution from Pyongyang. There is some evidence to support the claims made by various non-government organisations that North Korean agents are active throughout the Asia-Pacific region, looking for and, if given the chance, trying to murder any 'runaways'.[147] In March 1999, for example, Bangkok was outraged when Pyongyang sent a team of four agents to Thailand to kidnap a North Korean diplomat who had defected. Had the team not been involved in a car accident, the diplomat would have been successfully spirited across the border to Laos. Two of the agents are still in custody in Thailand.[148]

Before 2003, some observers were suggesting that, despite signs of occasional contact between Burma and North Korea, both sides were still treating each other with reserve. After Pyongyang's highly provocative declaration of a nuclear weapons program, and the further deterioration in US-North Korean relations, it was thought unlikely that Rangoon would want to rush into a close relationship with Kim Jong-il's highly volatile and unpopular government. The SPDC was trying to develop closer relations with the governments of its ASEAN and South Asian neighbours, and this campaign would not be assisted by any sudden revelation of defence links between Rangoon and Pyongyang. Also, such a dramatic policy shift would inevitably attract criticism from the US and the European Community countries, which are the key to unlocking assistance to Burma from the world's most important financial institutions. Developments over the past year, however, have prompted a reconsideration of this view. Stories in the news media during 2003 of North Korean naval technicians in Rangoon, and reports of the Rangoon regime's interest in acquiring North Korean submarines and ballistic missiles, all suggest that the bilateral relationship is much further advanced than was earlier believed. Rather than seeing North Korea's international pariah status as a problem, the SPDC seems instead to be embracing Pyongyang as a potential ally in its struggle to resist the pressures being applied against Rangoon by the US and some of its allies.

Since the SPDC's violent attack against Aung San Suu Kyi on 30 May 2003, and the strong international reaction to her subsequent imprisonment, Burma has joined North Korea as one of the world's most vilified and isolated states. Several politicians and commentators in the US and UK have even suggested that Burma should be added to President Bush's 'axis of evil', and made to suffer accordingly.[149] Statements like these carry the implication that Burma should be treated the same way as Afghanistan and Iraq, and be forced to change its approach to human rights, if not its entire system of government.[150] Burma's fellow ASEAN states have publicly condemned the SPDC's latest crackdown on the NLD and other pro-democracy elements, one influential member even hinting at Rangoon's possible expulsion from the regional grouping. These criticisms have exacerbated fears on the part of Burma's military leaders that, at times, have smacked of paranoia. Ever since 1988, the SLORC and SPDC have been fearful of armed intervention by the Western democracies to overthrow the military regime and restore an elected civilian government. Given the statements being made in Washington and elsewhere, and the highly visible examples of US military action against undemocratic regimes around the world, the SPDC is feeling more threatened and insecure than ever before. It is thus even more anxious

to increase the deterrent capabilities of its armed forces.[151] If Burma's military leadership cannot obtain the modern weapon systems it feels it needs from other arms suppliers, then it is clearly prepared to turn to North Korea.

To most observers, the Burmese armed forces have no strategic rationale for submarines or SRBMs. The effort required to maintain and operate such sophisticated systems would stretch Burma's technological capacities to the limit. Nor can the regime afford them, given the parlous state of the Burmese economy and the other pressing demands on the SPDC's scarce resources. However, in the past, the military government in Rangoon has not been dissuaded by such arguments from embarking on ambitious acquisitions of this kind – as evidenced by its purchase in 2001 of MiG-29 interceptors from Russia.[152] Questions of status and prestige are strong factors driving Burma's military acquisition programs, but the interest shown in these more advanced weapon systems seems to reflect the regime's determination to deter any attempt by the US, or a multinational coalition of some kind, from intervening in Burma's internal affairs. For example, faced with such a challenge, any ballistic missiles acquired from Pyongyang would most likely be aimed at Thai cities, to help dissuade the Bangkok government from allowing its territory to be used, as was Kuwait, as the launching pad for a major ground and air assault against its neighbour. SRBMs may not be very accurate but, if launched from near the Burmese border, they could easily reach greater Bangkok, a city of some nine million people. Even if armed only with a conventional warhead, such a threat would certainly concentrate the minds of Thai leaders. The possibility of Rangoon using a chemical warhead, perhaps derived from a revitalised Burmese chemical weapons program, or supplied by North Korea, would be even more serious.[153]

The submarine sale seems to have been shelved for the time being and, even if a missile deal has already been struck, any delivery of SRBMs is likely to be a few years away. They remain a worrying prospect, but of even greater concern to strategic analysts at present is the possibility that the SPDC may have drawn the same conclusions from the 2003 Iraq War as North Korea appears to have done, and is also seeking to acquire a nuclear weapon to use as a bargaining chip against the US and its allies.[154]

Burma's Nuclear Program

Burma's nuclear program dates back at least to December 2000, when the SPDC's Minister for Science and Technology, U Thaung, paid an official visit to Moscow and held discussions with the Russian Minister of Atomic Energy. U Thaung expressed interest in the construction of a nuclear reactor

in Burma, 'with the capacity of ten megawatt for peaceful research'.[155] He spent four days in Russia, during which time he inspected a number of institutes that specialised in the training of nuclear scientists. He reportedly told his hosts that he wanted to send Burmese technicians to Russia, to learn how to operate nuclear reactors. There were press reports around the same time that the Burmese had approached China, and made its interest in a nuclear reactor known to potential vendors there too.[156] U Thaung also created a Department of Atomic Energy in his Ministry, which appears to have been made responsible for pursuing this project, including contacts with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna.

In October 2001 it was revealed in leading nuclear trade magazines that, the month before, the Rangoon regime had formally approached the Director General of the IAEA, Mohammed el Baradei, for assistance in obtaining a nuclear research reactor.[157] According to *Nucleonics Week*, the Agency initially decided to ignore this request as 'it has no confidence that Burma either needs a reactor or has the infrastructure and funding required to support such a project'.[158] Many of the IAEA's concerns about Burma were broadly similar to those which had been raised in connection with other less-developed countries, where there was a worrying absence of adequate safety standards and physical protection for research reactors. More specifically, the Agency had doubts about Burma's low economic status, its poor technological base, and the collapse of its public education system under the SLORC and SPDC.[159] Another reason suggested for the IAEA's reluctance to assist the Burmese was that, since the Agency was a United Nations body, any support to Burma would probably have triggered questions from the UN's International Labour Organisation (ILO). The previous June, the ILO had adopted a resolution objecting to the widespread use of forced labour in Burma. 'Forced labour, critics allege, is used to produce agricultural goods which, Russian officials have said, could be the basis for a barter deal for a reactor'.[160] Despite these reservations, an IAEA inspection team was sent to Burma in November 2001. The team's assessment, however, simply confirmed the Agency's original views.

There were rumours circulating in Rangoon during early 2002 that, without the IAEA's help, the regime could not meet the cost of the nuclear project, suggested by some to be in excess of US$5 million.[161] However, the Russian ambassador had already signalled his country's willingness to receive at least part of the payment in primary goods such as teak, fish and rice, and a deal was eventually struck.[162] In May 2002 it was announced in Moscow that Russia's Atomic Energy Ministry (Minatom) had agreed with the Rangoon regime to 'cooperate in designing and building a nuclear

studies centre that will include a research nuclear reactor with a thermal capacity of 10 megawatts and two laboratories'.[163] According to the Russian statement, Minatom had undertaken to design the centre, help choose the site, deliver the nuclear fuel, and supply all essential equipment and materials. Russian experts would assemble, install and help operate the centre's 'main technical equipment'. The agreement included structures for the disposal of nuclear waste and a waste burial site. Russia would also train Burmese technicians to help build and operate the reactor. Foreign Minister U Win Aung, accompanied by the ministers for defence, energy, industry and railways, travelled to Moscow in July 2002 to finalise the deal. At the time, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov described Burma as a 'promising partner in Asia and the Pacific region'.[164]

There was initially some speculation that the nuclear facility would be built in Rangoon, to serve the main university there.[165] According to one well-informed Burma-watcher, however, a ground breaking ceremony for the nuclear facility was scheduled to take place at a secret location near the town of Magwe, in central Burma, in January 2003.[166] The reactor and associated equipment were to be delivered later that year. The Rangoon regime said that it expected the reactor to built 'within a few years'.[167]

The reasons behind Burma's interest in a nuclear reactor have never been made entirely clear. There were several official statements during 2002 to the effect that the reactor was to be used for 'peaceful medical purposes', an apparent reference to the production of radioisotopes, of which there was then a shortage in Southeast Asia.[168] The Burmese Foreign Minister was reported as saying too that the reactor could be used 'possibly to generate nuclear power'. He added that Burma was interested in studying 'the different uses of nuclear energy'.[169] Yet the construction of such an expensive and highly specialised facility seemed an illogical thing to do. Burma was one of the least developed countries in the world and could barely maintain its basic civil infrastructure. Its level of technological development was very low. The production of isotopes could be achieved far more economically, and reliably, in places like Australia. While it regularly suffered from electricity shortages, Burma had ample natural gas and was constructing a number of new hydroelectric power stations.[170] The real impetus behind the nuclear reactor project seemed to be status and prestige, driven by the personal enthusiasm of the Minister for Science and Technology, who believed that nuclear research was necessary for 'a modern nation'. Revealingly, Burma's Deputy Foreign Minister drew attention to the large number of countries, including several in the region, which already had such facilities. He was reported as saying that 'it was imperative for

developing countries like Burma to seek to narrow the development gap and avoid their being marginalised'.[171]

The international response to the announcement of the nuclear project was predictable. A number of serious concerns were expressed, relating largely to the safety and security of any reactor built in Burma. With the example of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster clearly in mind, the Thais in particular were worried about Russia's involvement in the construction project, and the nature of the facility that was due to be built. Also, there were real fears in Thailand and other neighbouring countries that the Burmese would be unable to operate and maintain the reactor properly.[172] The IAEA team that visited Burma in November 2001, to assess the country's preparedness to use and maintain a nuclear reactor safely, did nothing to dispel these fears. Its report was highly critical of the regime's standards, which were 'well below the minimum the body would regard as acceptable', even for conventional power plants.[173] Burma's record of earthquakes was also raised. In 1975, for example, Burma experienced a series of major tremors around the ancient capital of Pagan, destroying or damaging many large temples and pagodas. Pagan is less than 100 kilometres from the area believed to have been chosen for construction of the nuclear reactor.

There were security concerns too. Despite ceasefire agreements with most of Burma's armed insurgent groups, some were still bitterly opposed to the Rangoon regime, and posed a potential risk to any nuclear reactor. General Bo Mya, the Chairman of the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB), a broad-based alliance of forces opposing the regime, has already condemned the project and characterised it as a serious security, environmental and health risk.[174] It can be expected that extensive measures will be taken by the Tatmadaw to protect the facility, but it would remain an attractive insurgent target. Despite the crushing of the pro-democracy uprising in 1988, and the imposition of tight controls over popular protest since then, there was also the danger of civil unrest, arising from decades of repression by the military government and its inept handling of the economy. A nuclear reactor would represent a potent symbol of the regime's penchant for costly high status projects, pursued at the expense of basic services like health and education. With the international terrorist threat in mind, the US State Department has demanded assurances from the SPDC that it could safely secure such sensitive facilities and materials. As one observer wrote in mid-2002, 'In light of the risks of terrorists using improvised explosive devices and "dirty bombs", the movement of radioactive and fissile materials into and out of a tinderbox country [like Burma] must worry security analysts'.[175]

After the initial announcement of the nuclear project, very little additional information has been made publicly available about the reactor, its location, or the safeguards being put in place to ensure that it is built and operated according to international standards.[176] This has inevitably led to considerable speculation, and given rise to a number of additional concerns.

There have been a number of reports that the reactor is not going to be built near Magwe, but on an island off the coast of southern Burma. In April 2003, for example, the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), an expatriate radio station based in Norway, reported that two freighters carrying 5000 tons of Russian equipment for the construction of a nuclear plant had arrived at the naval base on Zadetkyi Kyun, a large island near Kawthoung on the southern-most tip of Burma. The DVB report stated that the reactor was going to be built on Kalagok Island, north of Ye in Mon State.[177] An earlier DVB broadcast had reported that a group of 32 Russian experts, led by officers from the Ministry of Energy in Rangoon, had been seen surveying the island between 25 March and 3 April.[178] In a related story, it was stated that more than 300 acres of land on Kalagok Island had been appropriated by the Rangoon regime, to be used as the site of the reactor.[179] However, all these DVB reports must be treated with caution. There is no supporting evidence for such claims, and it is highly unlikely that a nuclear reactor would be built in such an isolated, undeveloped and potentially vulnerable location. A more likely explanation for any Russian visit, and for the reported land acquisition on Kalagok Island, is that the SPDC plans to install some new radar equipment there, or possibly even build a small naval facility.

There have also been several stories in the news media to the effect that a large number of Burmese – both members of the armed forces and civilian officials – have gone to Russia for training in nuclear technology. Between 200 and 300 were reported to have studied there in 2002, possibly at the Atomic Reactors Scientific Research Institute's Scientific Training Centre in Dimitrovgrad.[180] An additional 328 officers were reported to have departed for Moscow from Mandalay's Tada-U International Airport in October and November 2003.[181] Another story in the expatriate press later that year claimed that, according to a Burmese intelligence source, '1,000 Burmese, including army officers and civil engineers, are receiving nuclear training in Russia'.[182] While some technical training in Russia was always part of the deal negotiated with Moscow, these numbers seem too high. Also, while a large number of Burmese may indeed be studying or training in Russia at present, it should not automatically be assumed that they are all there in connection with the nuclear reactor project. Other explanations are possible. For example, in the mid-1990s the Burma Air Force took delivery of about a

dozen Russian Mil Mi-17 utility helicopters, and in 2001 the Tatmadaw closed a deal for ten MiG-29 fighter aircraft.[183] Both contracts reportedly incorporated extensive training packages, including periods of instruction for both pilots and ground crew in Russia. Moscow may have provided the Burmese armed forces with other arms and materiel, including communications equipment. It is probable that some of those listed as receiving nuclear-related training in Russia are in fact there for other purposes.

Another story appearing in the news media over the past few years is that Pakistan has been helping Burma with its nuclear reactor project, or is at least highly supportive of it. One Indian publication, for example, has stated that 'In his meetings with Russian president Vladimir Putin, General Parvez Musharraf has been pressing for a civilian nuclear reactor for Burma'.[184] To support this and similar claims, attention has been drawn to the close relationship which has developed between the military governments of Burma and Pakistan, particularly in the defence field, and their shared strategic relationship with China.[185] One Pakistani vernacular newspaper reported that Burmese nuclear scientists had attended a training workshop in Islamabad in 2000, organised by the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) and the IAEA. The same story cited a Pakistani official declaring his country's readiness to export peaceful nuclear technology.[186] In addition, there were rumours circulating in Bangkok in 2001 that Burma had sought Pakistan's help with construction of a reactor, but that this had been refused. These rumours were denied by the Thai authorities, and later news reports sourced to US intelligence officials included an assurance that there had not been any technology transfer from Pakistan.[187] However, these and similar stories have continued to surface. They were given further impetus by reports in the news media that Burma was harbouring two renegade nuclear scientists from Pakistan.

In November 2001 it was reported that two Pakistani scientists, both with experience at their country's most secret nuclear facilities, had fled to Burma following the 11 September terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. Dr. Suleiman Assad and Dr. Muhammad Ali Mukhtar were accused of leaving for Burma when the CIA expressed its interest in interrogating them about their alleged links to terrorist leader Osama bin Laden, who Washington feared wanted to develop a nuclear weapon.[188] A request to grant the scientists 'temporary asylum' in Burma was reportedly made to the SPDC by President Musharraf.[189] According to one Western journal, the Pakistani government gave Rangoon its assurances that the two scientists were not terrorists, nor in any way linked to the Taliban.[190] The two were later said to be conducting 'unspecified research' (possibly

relating to the disposal of nuclear waste) with their Burmese counterparts at Sagaing, near Mandalay.[191] However, regardless of any possible connections to Al Qaeda, there is no clear evidence to link these scientists to Burma's nuclear reactor project. Indeed, the two Pakistanis in question may have never even gone to Burma. Both Islamabad and Rangoon have strongly rejected claims that the scientists were hiding there. The Pakistan government has even denied employing any nuclear specialists named Assad or Mukhtar. It has suggested that the US had misinterpreted the attendance by two members of the PAEC at a meeting in Rangoon sponsored by the IAEA in November 2001. Both of these scientists had returned to Pakistan immediately after its conclusion.[192]

Following the announcement of Burma's nuclear reactor project, a few commentators and expatriate groups immediately expressed fears that Burma would become a rogue state, and try to develop a nuclear weapon. One Indian publication hinted darkly that Burmese officials were known to have attended meetings and seminars related to nuclear weapons which were held in Singapore and Malaysia.[193] Even if a nuclear weapons option was not available, it was argued, the presence of a nuclear reactor would at least give the Rangoon regime the capability to develop a 'dirty bomb', which could spread radioactive material through a conventional explosion. Although no target was specified, Burma's new MiG-29 fighter aircraft were seen as providing an appropriate delivery vehicle for such a weapon.[194] At the time, these suggestions tended to be dismissed as rather far-fetched, and self-serving. They seemed to be based largely on the judgement that the Rangoon regime was contemptuous of international opinion and was prepared to do anything to survive, even act as a surrogate for another country. These accusations were also clearly directed at winning support for the anti-regime cause from the Bush Administration, which had already expressed its strong opposition to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Few objective observers question the ruthlessness of the military government in Rangoon or its determination to cling to power. However, an attempt to acquire a nuclear weapon seems completely out of character for a government that, ever since Independence, has had a long history of active participation in global disarmament initiatives.

Despite a few rather odd suggestions to the contrary, there was never any sign before 2000 that Burma had ever seriously considered the acquisition of a nuclear reactor, let alone nuclear weapons.[195] Indeed, since 1948, successive Burmese governments have consistently sought to counter nuclear threats and enhance the country's security by opposing the

manufacture, deployment and use of nuclear weapons by anyone, anywhere in the world. Burma has an impressive record of supporting international legal instruments designed to limit nuclear weapons proliferation and use. It has been a full member of the IAEA since the Agency was created in 1957. It was among the first countries to become a State Party to the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, banning nuclear weapons tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water. It has signed and ratified the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, which prohibits the placing into orbit around the earth of any objects carrying nuclear weapons, the installation of such weapons on celestial bodies, or any other manner of stationing weapons of mass destruction in outer space. Burma is also a State Party to the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that, *inter alia*, prohibits the transfer by nuclear weapons states, to any recipients whatsoever, of nuclear weapons or of control over them. Similarly, Burma has signed (but not yet ratified) the 1972 Seabed Treaty, prohibiting the emplacement of nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction or related structures, on the ocean floor beyond the limits of a 12-mile seabed zone.[196]

Since 1988, this policy stance has been repeatedly confirmed by the SLORC and SPDC. In 1995, for example, Burma entered into a safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency, as required under the NPT. Burma has always supported the concept of nuclear free zones, and in December 1995 signed the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (the Bangkok Treaty). This agreement, which was ratified in 1997, includes a reaffirmation by the ten signatory states of the obligations assumed under the NPT, and contains a ban on the development, manufacture, possession, control, stationing or transport, testing or use of nuclear weapons.[197] In the United Nations General Assembly the regime has also confirmed Burma's longstanding opposition to nuclear weapons and pressed for their complete abolition. In September 1996, for example, the then Burmese Foreign Minister, U Ohn Gyaw, told the UNGA:

> The proliferation of arms, particularly weapons of mass destruction, remains the greatest potential threat to mankind's survival. All states, large and small, nuclear and non-nuclear, have a vital interest in ensuring the success of negotiations on disarmament ... It is essential that nuclear weapon states show the political will to accommodate the concerns of non-nuclear weapon states to achieve a mutually acceptable basis for universal disarmament.[198]

Ohn Gyaw also noted that Burma regarded the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty as 'an essential step towards nuclear disarmament', and welcomed its adoption by the General Assembly earlier that month.[199] There has been no change in Burma's formal position since then. Burma is also an active member of the UN Conference on Disarmament.[200]

Notwithstanding this record, the possibility of Burma acquiring a nuclear weapons capability is now being accorded greater attention. In late 2003, it was revealed that the nuclear reactor deal with Russia had been shelved earlier that year, apparently because the SPDC had been unable to reach final agreement with Moscow regarding the payment of costs. While no firm evidence is yet available, there have been reports in the international news media that the Rangoon regime may have turned instead to North Korea to help build its nuclear facilities. This, in turn, has raised the spectre of a Burmese nuclear weapons program.

In November 2003 the *Far Eastern Economic Review* published an article suggesting that North Korea had taken over from Russia as the primary source of Burma's nuclear technology.[201] North Korean technicians were reportedly seen unloading large crates and heavy construction equipment from trains at Myothit, 'the closest station to the central Burmese town of Natmauk, near where the junta hopes to build a nuclear research reactor'.[202] In addition, aircraft from North Korea's national airline, Air Koryo, have reportedly been seen landing at military airfields in central Burma.[203] The clear implication of the article was that Pyongyang was providing equipment and materials to help build a nuclear reactor. These developments apparently coincided with the arrival in Rangoon of representatives of the notorious Daesong Economic Group, a sub-division of Bureau 39. As reported by the FEER:

> Daesong-affiliated companies have a documented history of exporting sensitive missile technologies. In the past, North Korea has also used Daesong-affiliated companies to purchase and import dual-purpose technologies used in Pyongyang's nuclear-weapons programme.[204]

The small research reactor Burma was getting from Russia was said to be unsuited for the manufacture of fissile material, but Pyongyang has the expertise to provide Rangoon with other options. North Korea also has a record of proliferating nuclear technologies, for example through the Daesong Group to Pakistan.[205]

In what seems to be a related report, the DVB suggested in November 2003 that 80 Burmese military personnel had recently departed for North

Korea to study 'nuclear and atomic energy technology'. Of the 80, 36 were said to be from the Artillery and Air Defence Division, while the remaining 44 were from the Artillery and Armoured Division.[206] If true, this story would appear to confirm North Korea's readiness to share its nuclear expertise with Burma. Yet, once again, some care needs to be taken with such reports. As noted above, the Tatmadaw has taken delivery of some North Korean artillery pieces and has probably acquired other conventional weapons, the details of which have not yet been made public. The presence of North Korean technicians at Monkey Point naval base, for example, suggests that other weapon systems have been purchased by the Rangoon regime. If they include surface-to-surface missiles like the Burma Navy's C-801 SSMs, then some training in North Korea in their maintenance and use would be a logical part of the arms deal. The reference in the DVB report to air defence officers also raises the possibility that the regime has purchased some surface-to-air missiles (SAM), the acquisition of which has been a priority for the Tatmadaw ever since the first Iraq War.[207] It can be assumed that any SRBM sale would be accompanied by appropriate training programs in North Korea. As in the case of the Burmese personnel reportedly going to Russia, it does not automatically follow that all members of the Burmese armed forces leaving for Pyongyang are going there to study nuclear technologies – peaceful or otherwise.

For its part, the Rangoon regime has firmly denied that it has any plans to acquire missiles (presumably SRBMs) or weapons of mass destruction.[208] SPDC spokesman Colonel Hla Min has been quoted as saying:

> There has been speculation going on for quite some time regarding Myanmar and North Korea military-to-military exchanges ... Logically, why would Myanmar want to develop WMDs (weapons of mass destruction) when the country needs all her strength and resources in pursuing a peaceful, stable and smooth transition to a multiparty democracy and an open-market economy.[209]

The nuclear reactor, which was apparently still on the regime's list of priority projects, was said to be for 'peaceful research purposes'.[210] Hla Min further stated that Burma was 'everyone's friend and nobody's ally or enemy'. He said that it had no ambition to arm itself with nuclear weapons and firmly rejected the idea that Burma would ever threaten any of its neighbours. He did not, however, specifically address the issue of whether Burma was negotiating the sale of SRBMs from North Korea, or whether North Korean technicians were working in Burma, as reported by the *Far Eastern Economic Review*.[211]

The thought of Burma seeking to acquire a nuclear weapon is the stuff of nightmares in the Asia-Pacific region, and in capitals like Washington. Given Rangoon's strong record on international disarmament initiatives, however, the potential repercussions of such a dramatic policy change, and the enormous practical difficulties involved, it must still be considered highly unlikely. Nevertheless, it is a scenario that is made more credible by Rangoon's continuing fears of external intervention, its growing defence relationship with Pyongyang, their shared political isolation and the readiness of both pariah regimes to do almost anything to survive.

Implications for Regional Security

In considering the strategic implications of all these developments, it is important that the spate of reports in the news media over the past few years be kept in the proper perspective. Firstly, it needs to be borne in mind that there is very little verifiable information available about Burma's apparent interest in acquiring submarines and SRBMs.[212] There are a number of official statements about Burma's plans for a nuclear reactor but, as with all such pronouncements by the Rangoon regime, their reliability is sometimes questionable. Nor is there very much hard evidence regarding Rangoon's developing bilateral relationship with Pyongyang, and there is none at all regarding the SPDC's possible interest in acquiring a nuclear weapon. Secondly, even if some of these open source reports are accurate, it is likely to be years before Burma can take delivery of any strategic weapons, integrate them into its existing order of battle and deploy them operationally. North Korea could hand over some of its existing submarines or missiles but, given the threat that it believes it faces from the US at present, Pyongyang is unlikely to deplete its own arsenal for a quick infusion of cash or barter goods from Burma. New submarines and missiles would probably need to be built for Rangoon, and that would take time. Similarly, if the nuclear reactor project goes ahead, it would take at least three years to build and bring on line, even if the entire reactor was imported from abroad.[213] The subsequent development of a nuclear weapon would take much longer than that, assuming that the political will was there, the technical expertise could be found, and the resources could be made available. For a country like Burma, these would constitute formidable obstacles.

In international affairs, however, the perception often becomes the reality. Countries make national policy on what they believe to be the case, or fear might happen, as much as on the objective truth. Already there have been concerns expressed, both in the region and further afield, about Burma's potentially dangerous relationship with North Korea and the destabilising policies Rangoon seems to have adopted.

Little has been said publicly, but Thailand is becoming increasingly nervous about Burma's apparent moves to acquire a power projection capability, something that at present the Tatmadaw does not possess. The Thais are also worried about the safety and security of any nuclear reactor built in Burma, fears that cannot have been allayed by reports in late 2003 of North Korea's possible involvement.[214] While a distant prospect, the possibility alone that the military government in Rangoon might try to develop a nuclear weapon with Pyongyang's help is a major concern. Thailand is unlikely to respond in kind, but already its armed forces leadership has recommended that it should at least keep pace with the Tatmadaw's developing conventional military capabilities. Bangkok's purchase of 16 F-16 fighter aircraft in 2000, and its more recent purchase of advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles (AMRAAM) from the US, can perhaps be seen as part of this broad strategy.[215] Any acquisition of submarines by the Burma Navy would almost certainly see renewed demands for the Royal Thai Navy to do the same, and a similar reaction is bound to follow any delivery of SRBMs to Rangoon.[216] One of Bangkok's first responses to suspicions of a Burmese nuclear weapon would be to turn to the US for support, thus further complicating Washington's relationship with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Already, there have been suggestions that the US is using Thailand as a proxy to bring pressure on Burma and, through it, Rangoon's ally China.[217]

Even if Burma has no intention of building a nuclear weapon, or finds after investigation that it lacks the ability to do so, the prospect alone of such a development carries the risk of misinterpretation or manipulation by other regional countries and thus adds to the potential for greater instability in the strategic environment. Some academics and commentators, for example, have already cast Burma in the role of a Chinese satellite, which is being encouraged to develop its military capabilities in order (with Pakistan) to complete Beijing's encirclement of India.[218] Rangoon's acquisition of strategic weapon systems like submarines and SRBMs would fit that scenario, which has recently been modified by some observers to include Rangoon's apparent interest in acquiring a nuclear weapon. As one Indian commentator has put it:

> The suspicion is that China is financing the deal, both to prop up Burma as a nuclear fallback to North Korea, in case North Korea is busted by the US, and also to set up a nuclear rival in India's eastern flank.[219]

Should North Korea fail to provide Burma with nuclear weapons, so the thesis runs, then Pakistan 'may decide to become a more brash partner in the China-North Korea-Burma deal', and do so itself.[220] This line of argument is easily demolished, but even more sober assessments of Chinese security policy allow for the provision of WMD technologies to 'strategic proxies', able to distract the US and discourage its engagement activities in the Asia-Pacific region, in particular the Taiwan Strait.[221]

Any prospect of Burma being used as a Chinese stalking horse in the Asia-Pacific region, let alone a nuclear-armed strategic partner against India, must be seen as a cause for concern. However, Beijing's influence with Rangoon has never been as strong as is sometimes portrayed, and the military government would pay a very high price to protect Burma's national sovereignty and independence of action.[222] Also, Indian fears of encirclement by China, with Burma being used to secure India's eastern flank, have been exaggerated, often by commentators who lack any real understanding of Burmese affairs. Some of these expressions of concern probably reflect partisan positions on the part of sectors of the Indian polity or armed forces, interested in securing certain responses from the government in New Delhi. For its part, the Rangoon regime has very shrewdly manipulated fears of increased Chinese influence to win greater concessions from regional governments.[223] Beijing may even welcome such perceptions of its influence in Burma. However, it is unlikely to be happy about the prospect of Rangoon acquiring a nuclear weapon, given Burma's proximity to China, its internal instability, and the unpredictable behaviour of its military government. Beijing has also demonstrated a degree of nervousness over Pyongyang's own rather erratic and aggressive policies and, despite suggestions to the contrary, a closer relationship between these two pariah states on China's borders would not be seen as a strategic asset. China may even resent Pyongyang's interference in what until now has been a Chinese sphere of influence.[224]

Beijing would also worry about the possible response of the US to closer Burma-North Korea ties. The Bush Administration has taken a very hard line towards both Rangoon and Pyongyang over a range of issues, and has made the issue of WMD proliferation in particular a high policy priority. Recent developments can only mean even greater attention from Washington.

According to one expatriate Burmese journalist, Burma is on the CIA's "C" list, indicating that it is considered a country of minor strategic importance to the US.[225] Whether or not this listing is true, it remains a fact

that ever since the 1970s successive US Administrations do not seem to have given a very high priority to Burma. It has tended to be seen simply as an inward looking, economically insignificant and diplomatically isolated Third World state.[226] This is curious, given Burma's critical geostrategic position between two competing nuclear powers and, since 1988, its burgeoning defence relationship with China.[227] There are some signs, however, that strategic analysts in Washington are beginning to pay Burma closer attention. Rangoon is seen to have a role to play in the global war against terrorism. In addition, the US is becoming 'increasingly worried that the renewal of ties between Burma and North Korea could prompt the two internationally isolated regimes to establish military cooperation'.[228] When Burma's nuclear project was announced, the State Department was quick to remind the Rangoon regime of its obligations under the NPT. Also, according to the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, concern that Burma may buy ballistic missile or nuclear weapons technology from Pyongyang was one of the issues raised when US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Daley met U Tin Win, Burma's minister in the Prime Minister's office, at the UN in New York on 3 October 2003.[229]

Increasingly, Burma's strategic importance seems to be recognised by the US Congress. For example, Senator Mitchell McConnell, the ranking Republican on the Senate Appropriations Foreign Relations Subcommittee, has warned that Rangoon's military expansion program could destabilise Southeast Asia.[230] Referring to more recent shifts in Burmese policy, the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Richard G. Lugar, called Burma a potential 'source of instability throughout South and Southeast Asia'. Noting the contacts between Burma and North Korea, he stated 'the link-up of these two pariah states can only spell trouble'. He continued:

> These developments have been largely overlooked as we concentrated on the war in Iraq, challenges in the Middle East and unpredictable developments on the Korea peninsula. But they are the seeds of a major threat to Asian security and stability. The world should take notice, and the United States needs to make Burma a priority in its relations with Russia, China, India and ASEAN so that we can forge a multilateral plan to turn the generals from their dangerous course.[231]

A senior Senate staffer has told journalists that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is currently monitoring developments at Natmauk, where it is said that Burma's nuclear reactor will be built.[232] Also, the US Congress has apparently asked the Secretary of State to report back to it on North Korea's arms exports to Burma within 90 days of the enactment of a law to finance Fiscal Year 2004 diplomatic activities. According to Kyodo News Agency, Congress is concerned that North Korea is trying to sell 'missile technologies and related parts' to the Rangoon regime.[233]

If the reports in the news media are true, and Burma plans to acquire SRBMs, it would be highly destabilising for the entire region. Not only would the missiles give the Rangoon regime a power projection capability that at present it lacks, but it would further spread technologies that readily lend themselves to the delivery of weapons of mass destruction. Burma already has a record of clandestine chemical weapons production, and is now accused of interest in acquiring a nuclear weapon. The security stakes in the region would inevitably go up, raising the prospect of other countries feeling obliged to improve their own inventories of strategic weapons. Even before then, the sale of SRBMs or nuclear components to the Rangoon regime could conceivably lead to pre-emptive action against Burma by one of its neighbours, in an attempt to remove a potential security threat before it could be used. While it may only be against a particular missile or reactor site, the danger of such an attack escalating into a wider conflict would be real. Also, the sale of strategic weapons to Burma raises the possibility of military action of different kinds by the US and its allies. Thus, rather than deter military intervention, any efforts by Rangoon to acquire strategic weapon systems could in fact have the opposite effect.

Such military action could occur at an early stage. For example, North Korea could try to send SRBMs and nuclear components to Burma by air, perhaps using its Ilyushin Il-76 'Candid' heavy transport aircraft. However, that would require permission from China to use its air space. Given the sensitivity of the cargoes, and China's wish to maintain its current good relationship with the US, that permission may not be forthcoming. Should Pyongyang try instead to send missiles or nuclear components to Burma by sea, then that would raise the possibility of the ships being intercepted and their cargoes seized. The US is currently working with its allies and other regional governments to implement a Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), aimed specifically at interdicting 'shipments of WMD and missile related equipment and technologies' from countries like North Korea.[234] Under the PSI, the US would be under considerable pressure to act to prevent any SRBMs or WMD technology from reaching Burma. It could use the US

armed forces to achieve this or, as in the case of the missiles sent to Yemen in December 2002, Washington could ask a friendly regional country to act on its behalf. They would probably be reluctant to interfere in the affairs of a fellow ASEAN member, and the legal basis of any interdiction in international waters is still unclear. However, countries like Thailand or Singapore could feel that their longer term security interests were better served by taking such action.

On several occasions, North Korea has publicly stated that any attempt by the US and its allies to interdict its ships on the high seas would be tantamount to a blockade, and thus constitute an act of war.[235] Rangoon has neither the same strategic weight nor the same options for retaliation as Pyongyang, but it is unlikely to let such an action go unanswered. Depending on the circumstances, and which country was involved in any seizure, this could go beyond a verbal or diplomatic response, and include some form of military action.

Conclusion

Burma and North Korea have in common a long history of isolation, and an apparent inability to engage productively in international discourse. They both have prickly and unrepresentative governments, supported by enormous security forces, and a tendency to pursue provocative and self-defeating policies. Their record of economic management is very poor. Both countries have been repeatedly condemned by the international community for human rights abuses, narcotics trafficking, money laundering, forced labour and their failure to take adequate measures to prevent human trafficking. Partly as a result, both see themselves as being under grave threat from the US and its allies, and feel the need to take whatever measures are necessary to deter an invasion and ensure regime survival. Despite the long break in their bilateral relationship, following the 1983 Rangoon incident, Burma and North Korea have in recent years quietly been developing closer ties. The main impetus for this reconciliation seems to be their shared pariah status, their common perception of an external threat, and the coincidence of their respective needs. Burma wants arms, while North Korea wants food and funds. The interests of both are served by working together more closely.

Something else that Burma and North Korea may have in common is a belief that possession of strategic weapons provides a guarantee against invasion. Rather than draw the conclusion from the second Iraq War, that such weapons programs are more likely to attract the attention of the

international community than deter it, both Rangoon and Pyongyang seem to have made the judgement that, only by possessing such weapons, will Washington take them seriously and be prepared to negotiate on terms favourable to them. By noting the differences between the Bush Administration's military action against Saddam Hussein, and its more measured approach towards an arguably more dangerous Kim Jong-il, Rangoon's interest in acquiring strategic weapons of its own seems to have grown. While still only speculation, it is possible that this calculation extends to the acquisition of WMD.

Yet, in a number of important ways, Burma and North Korea are not the same. While benefiting to a certain extent from its geostrategic position and vast natural resources, Burma is infinitely weaker and more vulnerable. Also, despite the constant fears of the military leadership in Rangoon, no country or coalition is poised to invade Burma. Nor, despite occasional rhetorical flourishes by politicians and columnists in the US and UK, and Burmese expatriates elsewhere, is this likely to happen.[236] No government wants to become engaged in a war against Rangoon, no matter how compelling the argument might occasionally appear to some.[237] Yet, by seeming to follow Pyongyang's lead, and trying to acquire strategic weapons, Rangoon is drawing the attention of strategic analysts in the region and world centres like Washington and London. Indeed, by doing so, the military government may in fact be encouraging the very development that it fears the most, namely the active intervention of other countries in Burma's internal affairs.

Notes

1 See, in particular, Frank Downs, 'Myanmar and North Korea: Birds of a feather?', *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, Vol.29, No.7, October 2003, pp.36-40; and Bertil Lintner and S.W. Crispin, 'Dangerous Bedfellows', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 20 November 2003, pp.22-4.

2 Isabelle Crocker, *Burma's Foreign Policy and the Korean War: A Case Study* (Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, 1958), p.1.

3 The vote to recognise the Rhee Government as 'the only legal government of Korea' followed the declaration of the Republic of Korea in Seoul on 14 August 1948, and the creation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in Pyongyang on 9 September the same year. The UN resolution, however, carefully avoided recognising the Republic of Korea as the national government of Korea. See Cho Soon-sung, *Korea in World Politics, 1940-1950: An Evaluation of American Responsibility* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1967), p.221.

4 Following Independence, Burma's new generation of politicians was quick to demonstrate a shrewd grasp of power politics in the domestic sphere, but they seemed to retain a rather idealistic and at times even naive view of state behaviour at the international level.

5 Crocker, *Burma's Foreign Policy and the Korean War*, pp.11-13.

6 Cited in Crocker, *Burma's Foreign Policy and the Korean War*, pp.12-13.

7 Cited in Josef Silverstein, *Burma: Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1977), p.168.

8 Hugh Tinker, *The Union of Burma: A Study of the First Years of Independence* (Oxford University Press, London, 1967), pp.343-4. See also Richard Butwell, *U Nu of Burma* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1963), pp.175-6.

9 The final vote was 44 in favour, with 9 abstentions and 7 against. See Tinker, *The Union of Burma*, p.344; and F.N. Trager, *Burma: From Kingdom to Independence: A Historical and Political Analysis* (Pall Mall Press, London, 1966), p.114.

10 Liang Chi-shad, 'Burma's Relations with the People's Republic of China: From Delicate Friendship to Genuine Cooperation', in Peter Carey (ed), *Burma: The Challenge of Change in a Divided Society* (Macmillan, Houndsmills, 1997), p.74. See also Crocker, *Burma's Foreign Policy and the Korean War*, p.26.

11 W.C. Johnstone, *Burma's Foreign Policy: A Study in Neutralism* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1963), pp.283-4. See also Tinker, *The Union of Burma*, p.345.

12 Johnstone, *Burma's Foreign Policy*, p.61.

13 See, for example, *Pyidawtha, The New Burma: A Report from the Government to the People of the Union of Burma on our Long-Term Programme for Economic and Social Development* (Economic and Social Board, Government of the Union of Burma, Rangoon, 1954).

14 R.H. Taylor, *The State in Burma* (C. Hurst and Co., London, 1987), p.263. See also Johnstone, *Burma's Foreign Policy*, pp.78-81.

[15] Taylor, *The State in Burma*, p.256. In order to forestall a threatened military coup, U Nu agreed to a 'caretaker' military government (which operated from November 1958 to February 1960), while a general election was arranged.

[16] Speech delivered on 27 September 1957, cited in Crocker, *Burma's Foreign Policy and the Korean War*, pp.50-1.

[17] This step seems to have been prompted by the communist victory in Vietnam that April, after which Burma extended diplomatic recognition to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Provisional Government of South Vietnam. See Liang Chi-shad, *Burma's Foreign Relations: Neutralism in Theory and Practice* (Praeger, New York, 1990), p.156.

[18] R.N. Clough, *Embattled Korea: The Rivalry for International Support* (Westview Press, Boulder, 1987), p.274.

[19] At the same time, full-page advertisements on Kim Il-sung and his alleged achievements appeared in the state-controlled Burmese press. David Rees, *North Korea's Growth as a Subversive Centre*, Conflict Studies No.28 (Institute for the Study of Conflict, London, 1972), p.17.

[20] Discussions with Burmese officials from January 1974 to August 1976, during which period the author was assigned to the Australian Embassy, Rangoon.

[21] Liang, *Burma's Foreign Relations*, pp.156-7. Also, personal observations in Burma between January 1974 and August 1976.

[22] Major General Park Chung-hee seized power in a military coup in 1961 but, in 'a conscious effort not to repeat the experience of Burma', he retired from the army in 1963 to govern the country as a civilian. H.C. Hinton, *Korea Under New Leadership: The Fifth Republic* (Praeger, New York, 1983), pp.32-3.

[23] B.K. Gills, *Korea Versus Korea: A case of contested legitimacy* (Routledge, London, 1996), p.101.

[24] Liang, *Burma's Foreign Relations*, p.158. See also C.B. Smith, *The Burmese Communist Party in the 1980s* (Regional Studies Programme, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1984), p.8.

[25] Shim Jae Hoon, 'Patience rewarded', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 17 November 1983, p.19. In fact, a number of these plants were left unfinished, or operated well below expectations. The tin smelting plant had to be rescued by South Korean technical experts.

[26] J.S. Bermudez, *Terrorism: The North Korean Connection* (Crane Russak, New York, 1990), p.139. See, however, 'N.K. arms supplied to 20 nations', *The Korea Herald*, 12 November 1983, which does not list Burma as an arms recipient. The material in this article was probably provided by the South Korean government.

[27] See, for example, Bertil Lintner, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB)* (Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, Ithaca, 1990).

[28] Bradley Hahn, 'Dilemma for the mavericks of Pyongyang', *Pacific Defence Reporter*, Vol.14, No.1, July 1987, pp.18-22.

[29] Bertil Lintner, *Land of Jade: A Journey Through Insurgent Burma* (Kiscadale, Edinburgh, 1990), p.203.

30 Bermudez, *Terrorism*, p.139. The FPF is not listed by Bertil Lintner in the comprehensive inventory of Burmese insurgent groups and alliances given in his book *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency Since 1948* (Silkworm, Chiang Mai, 1999), pp.480-95. Also, personal communication with Bertil Lintner, December 2003.

31 Given SEATO's attitude to both the CPB and North Korea during the 1960s, it might be expected that any clandestine links between them would be mentioned in such a publication. See *Burma's Insurgent Communists* (SEATO, Bangkok, 1969).

32 Smith, *The Burmese Communist Party in the 1980s*, pp.27-9 and pp.38-46. Even the moribund Australian Marxist-Leninist Communist Party was named, but not the KWP.

33 See, for example, the sections on Burma in the *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs* published annually from the 1970s to the early 1990s by the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

34 Personal communication with Bertil Lintner, December 2003. See also Lintner, *Land of Jade*, p.203; Smith, *The Burmese Communist Party in the 1980s*, p.8; and 'Burma's rebels at last in retreat', *The Economist*, 28 February 1987, p.54.

35 There were regular contacts at the time between one of Ne Win's close advisors, who had been trained by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the US intelligence community. Personal communication with Bertil Lintner, December 2003.

36 See, for example, Bertil Lintner, 'The CIA's First Secret War', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 16 September 1993, pp.56-7.

37 Adrian Buzo, *The Guerilla Dynasty: Politics and Leadership in North Korea* (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1999), pp.233-48. See also Nack An and Rose An, 'North Korean Military Assistance' in J.F. Copper and D.S. Papp (eds), *Communist Nations' Military Assistance* (Westview Press, Boulder, 1983), pp.169-77.

38 Gills, *Korea Versus Korea*, p.131.

39 'N.K. exports "revolution" in quest to communize all', *The Korea Herald*, 12 October 1983. See also Hahn, 'Dilemma for the mavericks of Pyongyang', pp.18-22; and Clough, *Embattled Korea*, pp.389-91.

40 Liang, *Burma's Foreign Relations*, p.157. For the background to Chun's rise to South Korea's highest office, see Hinton, *Korea Under New Leadership*, pp.45-65. See also note 73 below. For details of the political turmoil in South Korea during 1980 see, for example, D.N. Clark (ed), *The Kwangju Uprising: Shadows Over the Regime in South Korea* (Westview, Boulder, 1988). The author was assigned to the Australian Embassy in Seoul from September 1977 to April 1981, and personally observed developments in South Korea during this period.

41 Interview, Seoul, April 2001. See also Bermudez, *Terrorism*, pp.141-2.

42 In the event, the North Korean vessel did not land the second team, as the South Korean ambassador in Colombo managed to persuade the Sri Lankan authorities to order it to leave before it could do so.

[43] A plot against Chun's life was uncovered in Canada in 1982. Although unknown by the South Koreans at the time, another attempt to kill Chun during a state visit to Africa that year was cancelled, for fear of upsetting North Korea's rapidly growing relations with the African countries. The same consideration was clearly not given to relations with Burma. See Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (Little Brown and Co, London, 1998), p.142.

[44] Interview, Seoul, April 2001. See also Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, p.142.

[45] One of the bombs was an incendiary device. The other two contained high explosive and steel pellets. Only one of the latter bombs, however, is believed to have detonated successfully. Interview, Seoul, April 2001. The Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) was renamed the Agency for National Security Planning (ANSP) in 1980. Since 1997 it has been known as the National Intelligence Service (NIS).

[46] This was common practice on such occasions. A North Korean delegation visiting Burma had paid an official visit to the mausoleum only two months before. See, for example, John McBeth, 'A dress rehearsal?', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 27 October 1983, pp.15-16; and 'South Korea', *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, Vol.12, December 1983, p.32566A.

[47] Late on the night of 8 October it was agreed that, to avoid a clash with his wife's official program, the President would leave the State Guest House for the Martyr's Mausoleum five minutes later than scheduled. This slight amendment to the agreed timings was not felt important enough to affect the other arrangements already put in place. The South Korean ambassador left for the shrine at the appointed time, to forewarn the officials already waiting there that the president would be slightly delayed. Interviews, Canberra, 1985 and 2000.

[48] See, for example, *The Bomb Attack at the Martyr's Mausoleum in Rangoon: Report on the Findings by the Enquiry Committee and the Measures taken by the Burmese Government* (unofficial translation of the original Burmese report, held by the author); and *Massacre in Rangoon: North Korean Terrorism* (Korean Overseas Information Service, Seoul, 1983).

[49] *A Lingering Nightmare: The Rangoon Bombing* (Korean Overseas Information Service, Seoul, 1984), pp.28-9.

[50] Ne Win formally passed the position of president to San Yu in 1981 but, as Chairman of the BSPP, he still effectively controlled Burma's executive, legislative, judicial and foreign policy functions. See, for example, D.I. Steinberg, 'Burma in 1983: The Dilemmas of Neutralism and Succession', *Asian Survey*, Vol.24, No.2, February 1984, pp.195-200.

[51] Liang, *Burma's Foreign Relations*, p.157.

[52] 'A Statement by President Chun Doo Hwan Upon Returning Home', 10 October 1983. Included in 'Materials on Massacre of Korean Officials in Rangoon', *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol.7, No.4, 1983, p.736.

[53] The shrine was inspected by South Korean and Burmese security officials the day before the incident, and a guard was assigned to watch over it that night. It appears, however, that the Burmese did not inspect the roof cavity properly, and

refused to let the South Koreans do so themselves. Interview, Seoul, April 2001. See also McBeth, 'A dress rehearsal?', p.15.

54 Interview, Seoul, April 2001.

55 This paragraph has been drawn from the official Burmese and Korean accounts of the incident. See, for example, *The Bomb Attack at the Martyr's Mausoleum in Rangoon*; and *Massacre in Rangoon*. Also, interview, Seoul, April 2001.

56 Shim Jae Hoon and John McBeth, 'Mausoleum massacre', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 20 October 1983, pp.16-17.

57 See, for example, Steinberg, 'Burma in 1983', pp.195-200.

58 No key Burmese figures were scheduled to be at the mausoleum that day and, due to Chun's late arrival, none of the three Burmese Ministers attending the ceremony were near the bombs when they exploded. The Foreign Minister was travelling with Chun, and the two others were waiting for him outside the shrine.

59 Interview, Seoul, April 2001.

60 *The Bomb Attack at the Martyr's Mausoleum in Rangoon*. See also *Rangoon Justice: North Korean Terrorists on Trial* (Korean Overseas Information Service, Seoul, 1984). The North Korean diplomats had eight dependents, all of whom left with them on a North Korean aircraft flown to Rangoon for the purpose.

61 John McBeth, 'The verdict is guilty', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 17 November 1983, pp.18-19. See also John McBeth, 'Confession of terror', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 December 1983, pp.25-6.

62 McBeth, 'Confession of terror', pp.25-6. See also M.C. Tun, 'Inevitable ending', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 22 December 1983, p.23.

63 Interviews, Rangoon, November 1999; and Seoul, October 2003.

64 See, for example, *The Truth of Rangoon Bomb Blast Incident* (The Korean Peace Committee in Japan, Tokyo, 1983), pp.1-11; and Bermudez, *Terrorism*, p.141. One Australian academic gave some credence to Pyongyang's claim that dissident South Koreans were responsible for the attack. See, for example, transcript of the current affairs television program 'Nationwide', Australian Broadcasting Commission, 11 October 1983.

65 See, for example, 'Rodong Sinmun Concludes Chon Du Hwan To Be Mastermind Of Rangoon Bombing', *The People's Korea*, 29 October 1983.

66 See, for example, 'Self-Contradictory Accounts and Flimsy Forged Evidence: Who Engineered Rangoon Bombing?', *The People's Korea*, 26 November 1983.

67 *International Renegades: North Korean Diplomacy Through Terror* (Korean Overseas Information Service, Seoul, 1983), p.40. See also W.A. Kirkbride, *North Korea's Undeclared War; 1953-* (Hollym, Elizabeth, 1994), pp.67-9.

68 See, for example, *International Renegades*, p.40; 'The Prince of Terror', *Asiaweek*, 26 February 1988, p.43; and Mark Magnier, 'Cracks in Kim's shell shed a bit of light on dictator', *Los Angeles Times*, 19 January 2003.

69 The same reasoning lay behind the choice of Sri Lanka as the alternative site for the attack. Bermudez, *Terrorism*, p.139.

[70] The South Korean Defence Minister recommended bombing North Korea in retaliation for the attack, and some South Korean military commanders were also keen for a punitive response. They were overruled by Chun, at Washington's request. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, p.143. See also 'South Korea', p.32567A.

[71] Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, p.142.

[72] *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan*, (USGPO, Washington, 1985), 1983, vol.2, July 2-December 31, pp.1596-7.

[73] Following Park's sudden death, Premier Choi Kyu-hah was appointed President as required by the constitution. On 12 December 1979 a coup was staged by Major General Chun Doo-hwan, then commander of South Korea's powerful Defence Security Command. Chun engineered Choi's peaceful departure from office and replaced him in August 1980. Hinton, *Korea Under New Leadership*, pp.47-55. See also Frank Downs, 'A Hermit Still Emerging: The Republic of Korea', *Quadrant*, November 1983, pp.43-7.

[74] Buzo, *The Guerilla Dynasty*, pp.125-6.

[75] Kim Yong-ho, 'North Korea's Use of Terror and Coercive Diplomacy: Looking for their Circumstantial Variants', *The Korean Journal of Defence Analysis*, Vol.14, No.1, Spring 2002, pp.54-5.

[76] 'Consideration of Effective Measures to Enhance the Protection, Security and Safety of Diplomatic and Consular Missions and Representatives; Report of the Secretary General', Addendum, Agenda item 128, General Assembly, UN Reference A/39/456/Add.1, 27 September 1984. See also Clough, *Embattled Korea*, p.281 and p.285; and *An International Terrorist Clique: North Korea* (Korean Overseas Information Service, Seoul, 1984), pp.28-9.

[77] Liang, *Burma's Foreign Relations*, p.159.

[78] Two-way trade before 1977 was negligible but, notwithstanding the lack of formal ties since 1983, both imports from North Korea and Burmese exports to that country grew steadily until the mid-1980s, when severe economic problems in both countries began to have a greater impact on commercial activity. Liang, *Burma's Foreign Relations*, p.159.

[79] The operation has been described in detail by the surviving North Korean terrorist. See Kim Hyun Hee, *The Tears of My Soul* (William Morrow and Co, New York, 1993); and 'The human face of war', *The Economist*, 23 January 1988, pp.18-19.

[80] *Investigation Findings: Explosion of Korean Air Flight 858* (Korean Overseas Information Service, Seoul, 1988), p.10.

[81] *Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1987* (US Department of State, Washington, 1988), p.39 and p.70.

[82] In 2003, there was a bizarre suggestion that the entire incident was fabricated by the ANSP to assist in the election of President Roh Tae-woo that year. See 'Agents file suit against author of novel on Korean Air bombing', *Yonhap News* (in English), 22 November 2003.

[83] Gills, *Korea Versus Korea*, pp.220-1. See also Rodney Tasker, 'Strained neutrality', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 5 January 1984, pp.20-1.

[84] 'Myanmar Pursues Active Exchanges With Seoul', *Diplomacy*, Vol.15, No.12, December 1989, pp.21-2; and Kwon Byong-hyon, 'Yangon, Seoul Enhance Bilateral Relations', *Diplomacy*, Vol.15, No.12, December 1989, p.23.

[85] Than Nyun and Dalchoong Kim (eds), *Myanmar-Korea Economic Cooperation*, East and West Studies Series 22 (Institute of East and West Studies, Yonsei University, Seoul, 1992), p.190.

[86] Than Nyun and Kim, *Myanmar-Korea Economic Cooperation*, pp.190-2.

[87] Than Nyun and Kim, *Myanmar-Korea Economic Cooperation*, pp.190-2.

[88] Mya Maung, *Totalitarianism in Burma: Prospects for Economic Development* (Paragon House, New York, 1992), pp.228-9.

[89] D.I. Steinberg, *Burma: The State of Myanmar*, (Georgetown University Press, Washington, 2001), pp.136-7, and p.244. Also, personal communication with David Steinberg, May 2003.

[90] Andrew Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces: Power Without Glory* (EastBridge, Norwalk, 2002), p.138 and p.169.

[91] M.B. Pedersen, 'International Policy on Burma: Coercion, Persuasion, or Cooperation?: Assessing the Claims', in M.B. Pedersen, Emily Rudland and R.J. May (eds), *Burma/Myanmar: Strong Regime, Weak State?* (Crawford House, Adelaide, 2000), p.261.

[92] In a surprisingly free and fair general election held in May 1990, the opposition parties won by a landslide. However, the military regime has consistently refused to acknowledge the result. The CRPP is a 10-member committee formed by the NLD to represent the parliament that was elected. See, for example, *Burma Special Report: The Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP)*, (Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma, Bangkok, 1999).

[93] Pedersen, 'International Policy on Burma', pp.200-1.

[94] This relationship is described in detail in Than Nyun and Kim, *Myanmar-Korea Economic Cooperation*.

[95] Under successive military regimes, the growth of Korea's industrial sector was given a higher priority than labour, environmental or other such considerations. See, for example, 'Korean companies move overseas for better business protection', *Asia Pulse*, 1 July 2003.

[96] See, for example, 'Big Players Fare Well in Textiles', *The Myanmar Times*, 2 April 2001.

[97] Personal communication with David Steinberg, May 2003.

[98] 'Sanctions shut Burmese factories', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 16 October 2003, p.14.

[99] 'Memorial Service for Officials Killed in Myanmar', *Chosun Ilbo* (in Korean), 9 October 2000. See also 'Lee, Albright discuss NK terrorism issue', *Korea Times*, 14 March 2000.

[100] See, for example, 'Lee calls for President Kim Dae-jung to explain need for public funds', Yonhap News (in English), 16 October 2000. Also, 'Demand for apology for past terrors to be conveyed to North Korea', Yonhap News (in English), 12 October 2000.

[101] 'ROK Minister to convey public demand for apology for terrorist acts to DPRK', *The Korea Herald*, 14 October 2000. Kim Dae-jung made a state visit to Pyongyang in June 2000, the first ever by a South Korean leader. Kim Jong-il has yet to make his promised return visit to Seoul.

[102] 'Incomprehensible behaviour of South Korea', KCNA (in Korean), 19 October 2000.

[103] Interview, Seoul, October 2003.

[104] This included Kim Hyun-hee, one of those responsible for the bombing of KAL Flight 858. She married one of her ANSP guards and is now living in suburban Seoul.

[105] See, for example, Andrew Selth, *Burma's Muslims: Terrorists or Terrorised?*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No.150 (Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 2003), pp.24-9.

[106] *Defence Economic Trends in the Asia-Pacific, 2002* (Defence Intelligence Organisation, Canberra, 2003), p.21. See also 'Armed Forces', *North Korea Special Report*, Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment (Jane's Information Systems, Coulsdon, 2003), p.39.

[107] *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1998* (US Department of State, Bureau of Verification and Compliance, Washington, 2000), p.3.

[108] For details of this expansion and modernisation program, see Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces*.

[109] Steinberg, *Burma: The State of Myanmar*, p.66, note 27. North Korea supported Burma's entry to ASEAN in 1997, and joined with ASEAN members in opposing US sanctions against Rangoon. See, for example, 'North Korea sides with ASEAN over US Burma sanctions', *Agence France Presse*, 9 May 1997.

[110] The lax security measures put in place for Chun's visit were in large part the result of a purge of the MIS by Ne Win only months before. See Robert Trumbull, 'A Political Purge May Have Led to Burma Security Lapses in Blast', *New York Times*, 14 October 1983; and Andrew Selth, *Burma's Intelligence Apparatus*, Working Paper No.308 (Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 1997), p.12 and pp.19-20.

[111] Bertil Lintner, 'Myanmar's Military Intelligence', *International Defense Review*, Vol.24, No.1, 1991, p.39.

[112] The DPA disintegrated after the 1989 Communist Party of Burma mutiny that effectively ended the CPB as a political and insurgent force. See Bermudez, *Terrorism*, p.139; Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, p.480; and *Burma Communist Party's Conspiracy to take over State Power* (News and Periodicals Enterprise, Yangon, 1989), pp.38ff.

[113] 'Burma Buys AK-47 Rounds', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 2 February 1991, p.139.

[114] Interview, Canberra, October 1995; and Martin Smith, 'The Burmese Way to Rack and Ruin', in Article 19, *Index on Censorship*, No.10, 1991, p.45.

[115] Bruce Hawke, 'Rice buys artillery for Myanmar', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 5 August 1998, p.8. See also 'Burma-North Korea Arms', Voice of America, 4 August 1998; and interviews, Chiang Mai and Rangoon, November 1999.

[116] 'North Koreans Return to Burma', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 10 July 2003, p.8. See also Lintner and Crispin, 'Dangerous Bedfellows', pp.22-4.

[117] Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces*, p.193.

[118] William Ashton, 'Myanmar Navy boosts sea power with corvettes', *Jane's Navy International*, Vol.105, No.8, October 2000, p.39. See also Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces*, pp.192-3.

[119] *Jane's Fighting Ships 1999-2000* (Jane's Information Systems, Coulsdon, 2000), p.80. See also Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces*, p.194; and Downs, 'Myanmar and North Korea', p.38.

[120] Voice of America, 'Burma-North Korea Arms'.

[121] 'Overseas Trips by NK Officials Brisk', *Korea Times*, 10 July 2001.

[122] See, for example, Hawke, 'Rice buys artillery for Myanmar', p.8.

[123] See, for example, David Lague, 'Felling Asia's Forests', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 December 2003-1 January 2004, pp.26-9.

[124] See, for example, Jeffrey Robertson, 'The Socialist roots of the Korea crisis', *Asia Times*, 3 September 2003.

[125] Interview, Rangoon, November 1999.

[126] Andrew Selth, *Burma's Secret Military Partners*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No.136 (Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 2000), p.65. See also Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces*, p.195.

[127] Robert Karniol, 'Myanmar ditches submarine deal', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 11 June 2003, p.12.

[128] J.S. Bermudez, *Shield of The Great Leader: The Armed Forces of North Korea* (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2001), pp.186-8.

[129] Karniol, 'Myanmar ditches submarine deal', p.12.

[130] Downs, 'Myanmar and North Korea', p.40.

[131] Interviews, Rangoon, November 1999.

[132] See, for example, 'Neighbours' Envy', *News Insight.net*, 27 December 2003, found on the internet at http://www.indiareacts.com/fulldebate2.asp?recno=742; and 'N.Korea ballistic missiles for Burma likely', *News Insight.net*, 14 October 2003.

[133] Bermudez, *Shield of The Great Leader*, pp.276-7. See also 'Armed Forces', *North Korea Special Report*.

[134] 'Armed Forces', *North Korea Special Report*. See also Bertil Lintner and Steve Stecklow, 'Paper Trail Exposes Missile Merchants', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 February 2003, p.13.

[135] See, for example, Julien Moe, 'US Findings on Burma: An Overview', *The Irrawaddy*, 7 November 2003; and 'Burma rejects magazine report of missile, nuclear links with DPRK', *Agence France Presse*, 17 November 2003.

[136] Bertil Lintner, 'North Korea's Missile Trade Helps Fund Its Nuclear Program', *YaleGlobal Online*, found on the internet at <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=1546>

[137] The Spanish Marines who boarded the Cambodian-registered North Korean vessel in December 2002 found 15 Scud missiles and 15 conventional warheads, as well as rocket propellant. See Lintner, 'North Korea's Missile Trade Helps Fund Its Nuclear Program'.

[138] Jay Solomon and Jason Dean, 'Heroin busts point to source of funds for North Koreans', *Wall Street Journal*, 23 April 2003.

[139] Solomon and Dean, 'Heroin busts point to source of funds for North Koreans'. See also R.C. Paddock and Barbara Demick, 'North Korea's Growing Drug Trade Seen in Botched Heroin Delivery', *Los Angeles Times*, 21 May 2003.

[140] Nick Hordern, 'North Korean heroin shipment seized', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol. 15, Number 6, June 2003, pp.4-5. See also Paddock and Demick, 'North Korea's Growing Drug Trade Seen in Botched Heroin Delivery'. Predictably, Pyongyang claimed that the *Pong Su* was a civilian vessel and that the North Korean government had no knowledge of the heroin it was carrying.

[141] Lintner and Crispin, 'Dangerous Bedfellows', p.24.

[142] See, for example, Desmond Ball, *Burma and Drugs: The Regime's Complicity in the Global Drug Trade*, Working Paper No.336 (Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 1999).

[143] Cited in Barry Wain, 'Myanmar Defends Efforts to Combat Drug Trade', *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 24 December 1998.

[144] Bertil Lintner, 'Safe at Home', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 14 August 1997, p.19. See also Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces*, p.139.

[145] Lintner and Crispin, 'Dangerous Bedfellows', p.24.

[146] Michael Paterniti, 'The Flight of the Fluttering Swallows', *New York Times Magazine*, 27 April 2003, pp.46ff.

[147] The number of people attempting to escape from North Korea is increasing and, according to some reports, this is now easier to achieve than a decade ago. See, for example, Kang Chol-hwan and Pierre Rigoulot, *The Acquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in a North Korean Gulag* (Basic Books, New York, 2001), pp.195-7.

[148] Aidan Foster-Carter, 'North Korea: Making Up Lost Ground, Pyongyang Reaches Out', Pacific Forum CSIS, *Comparative Connections*, found at <http://www.csis.org/pacfor/cc/994Qnkorea.html>

[149] See, for example, Andrew Chang, 'Access to Evil? Burma: A Potential, But Unlikely, Partner for Iran, Iraq and North Korea', *abcNews.com*, 22 October 2002, found on the internet at <http://abcnews.go.com/sections/world/DailyNews/burma021022.html>; and Joshua Kurlantzick, 'Ran-goons: Why isn't Burma on Bush's "Axis of Evil"', *Washington Monthly Online*, April 2002, found at http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2001/0204.kurlantzick.html. See also 'Burma and its place in the New World Order', *The Independent*, 7 June 2003; and 'A moral foreign policy', *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 13 June 2003.

[150] According to one news report, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair actually stated that he 'would love to destroy the loathsome regime in Rangoon'. Geoffrey Wheatcroft, 'Saddam was a despot: True. This justifies the war: False', *The Guardian*, 22 April 2003.

[151] This theme is explored in Andrew Selth, 'Burma in a changing world: Through a glass darkly', *AQ, Journal of Contemporary Analysis*, Vol.75, Issue 4, July-August 2003, pp.15-21.

[152] See William Ashton, 'Myanmar's new MiG-29s: A threat to regional stability?', *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, Vol.28, No.2, February 2002, pp.20-3.

[153] For Burma's discontinued chemical weapons program, see Andrew Selth, *Burma and Weapons of Mass Destruction*, Working Paper No.334 (Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 1999), pp.1-9.

[154] Ironically, this scenario was used as the basis for war games and command post exercises in a number of Western military training institutions during the mid-1990s. It was chosen partly for its perceived improbability.

[155] Veronika Voskoboinikova, 'Myanmar shows interest in Russian research reactor', *Tass*, 22 December 2000.

[156] 'IAEA Will Ignore Burmese Request for Research Reactor Assistance', *Nucleonics Week*, 25 October 2001, p.14.

[157] 'IAEA Will Ignore Burmese Request for Research Reactor Assistance', p.14. See also 'Launch of research reactor project', *Nuclear Engineering International*, February 2002, p.6.

[158] 'IAEA Will Ignore Burmese Request for Research Reactor Assistance', p.14.

[159] During the late 1980s and 1990s Burma's higher education institutions were closed 10 times, often for lengthy periods, in an attempt to quell civil unrest. Also, since the armed forces took back direct control of the national budget in 1988, the allocation for the civilian education sector has been dramatically reduced.

[160] 'IAEA Will Ignore Burmese Request for Research Reactor Assistance', p.14. See also 'International Labour Conference adopts Resolution targeting forced labour in Myanmar (Burma)', International Labour Organisation, Press Release ILO/00/27, 14 June 2000.

[161] See, for example, Thomas Crampton, 'Burma Seeks Nuclear Research Plant', *International Herald Tribune*, 14 July 2001; and Moe, 'US Findings on Burma'. The total cost of the nuclear reactor project is likely to be well in excess of this figure.

[162] Crampton, 'Burma Seeks Nuclear Research Plant'.

[163] 'Myanmar Reactor', *Moscow Times*, 17 May 2002.

[164] Bertil Lintner, 'Burma joins the nuclear club', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 27 December 2001-3 January 2002, p.26.

[165] 'IAEA Will Ignore Burmese Request for Research Reactor Assistance', p.14.

[166] Lintner, 'Burma joins the nuclear club', p.26. See also Bertil Lintner, 'Myanmar Gets a Russian Nuclear Reactor', *Wall Street Journal*, 3 January 2002; and 'Launch of research reactor project', p.6.

[167] A.C. LoBaido, 'Nuclear politics in Burma', *WorldNet Daily*, 8 February 2002, found at http://worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=26375.

[168] Larry Jagan, 'Yangon's Nuclear Ambitions Alarm Asia and Europe', *The Straits Times*, 18 January 2002.

[169] LoBaido, 'Nuclear politics in Burma'. See also Larry Jagan, 'Burma announces nuclear plans', BBC News, 11 January 2002.

[170] See, for example, 'Burma receives $120 million loan from China to build hydroelectric plant', Radio Myanmar (in Burmese), 15 September 2000; and 'Burma-China sign MOU for construction of two small moveable LNG refineries', Radio Myanmar (in Burmese), 6 October 2000.

[171] 'Burma to build nuclear reactor', BBC, 21 January 2002; and Lintner, 'Burma joins the nuclear club', p.26.

[172] Interview, Bangkok, October 2001. See also Jagan, 'Yangon's Nuclear Ambitions Alarm Asia and Europe'.

[173] 'Burma's Nuclear Plans Worry IAEA', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 21 February 2002, p.11; and 'Launch of research reactor project'.

[174] Phil Thornton, 'Burma the next Chernobyl', *Reportage*, September 2002, found at http://www.reportage.uts.edu.au/stories/2002/international/burma3.html. The NCUB should not be confused with the exiled National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB).

[175] Michael Roston, 'Nuclear Archipelagoes? Secure Nuclear Materials in Southeast Asia', *CSIS Pacific Forum*, 21 June 2002, found on the internet at http://www.csis.org/pacfor/pac0225.htm.

[176] LoBaido, 'Nuclear politics in Burma'.

[177] 'Freighters carrying "nuclear reactor" equipment arrive at naval base', Democratic Voice of Burma (in Burmese), 3 April 2003. Zadetkyi Kyun (or Big Zadet Island) was once known as St Matthew's Island. Kalagok is also known as Kalakok or Kalegauk Island.

[178] 'Russians arrive for survey of Kalagok Island in Ye Township', Democratic Voice of Burma (in Burmese), 29 March 2003.

[179] 'Mon Council says SPDC building nuclear reactor on Kalagok Island', Democratic Voice of Burma (in Burmese), 25 March 2003.

[180] 'Atomic Reactors Scientific Research Institute Develops Cooperation With Republic of Korea, China', *Moscow Nuclear* (in Russian), 9 December 2002. See also 'Burma Goes Nuclear', *Burma News Update*, No.148, 21 February 2002.

[181] 'Junta officers secretly depart for Pyongyang to study advanced technology', Democratic Voice of Burma (in Burmese), 25 November 2003.

[182] Moe, 'US Findings on Burma'.

[183] Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces*, pp.215-6.

[184] 'Neighbours' Envy'.

[185] See, for example, Selth, *Burma's Secret Military Partners*, pp.61-70.

[186] 'Official: Pakistan ready to export peaceful nuclear capability', *Khabrain* (in Hindi), 15 July 2000.

[187] See 'Reactor For Burma Unlikely, Says Army', *Bangkok Post*, 18 January 2002; and W.J. Broad, David Rohde and D.E. Sanger, 'Inquiry suggests Pakistanis sold nuclear secrets', *New York Times*, 22 December 2003.

[188] Rahul Bedi, 'Nuclear scientists in Myanmar', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol.14, No.3, March 2002, p.2; and Linter, 'Myanmar Gets a Russian Nuclear Reactor'.

[189] Douglas Frantz, James Risen and David Sanger, 'Nuclear experts in Pakistan may have links to Al Qaeda', *New York Times*, 9 December 2001.

[190] Bedi, 'Nuclear scientists in Myanmar', p.2.

[191] Arnaud de Borchgrave, 'Al Qaeda's Nuclear Agenda Verified', *The Washington Times*, 10 December 2001. See also Lintner, 'Burma joins the nuclear club', p.26.

[192] 'Nuclear Burma', *Washington Post*, 6 January 2002; and 'Nuclear Burma', *Washington Post*, 16 January 2002. See also 'Burma to build nuclear reactor', BBC, 21 January 2002.

[193] 'Neighbours' Envy'.

[194] Moe, 'US Findings on Burma'.

[195] See, for example, Max Singer and Aaron Wildarsky, *The Real World Order: Zones of Peace/Zones of Turmoil* (Chatham House, London, 1993), p.67.

[196] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 1996: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996), pp.773ff.

[197] *1995 United Nations Disarmament Yearbook* (Centre for Disarmament Affairs, New York, 1996), p.254. See also 'Asia-Pacific, Southeast Asia becomes a nuclear free zone', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 9 April 1997, p.12.

[198] 'Statement by U Ohn Gyaw, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the Delegation of Myanmar in the General Debate of the Fifty-First Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 27 September 1996', Embassy of the Union of Myanmar, Canberra, *Newsletter* 12/96, 18 October 1996.

[199] 'Statement by U Ohn Gyaw', New York, 27 September 1996. See also *UN Disarmament Yearbook 2002*, (Department of Disarmament Affairs, New York, 2003), pp.129-30.

[200] *1995 United Nations Disarmament Yearbook*, p.98. In recent years the Conference on Disarmament has been considering an item entitled 'Process of nuclear disarmament in the framework of international peace and security, with the objective of the elimination of nuclear weapons'.

[201] Lintner and Crispin, 'Dangerous Bedfellows', pp.22-4.

[202] Lintner and Crispin, 'Dangerous Bedfellows', p.22. Natmauk is about 50 kilometres northeast of the town of Magwe, in central Burma's Magwe Division, and about 15 kilometres north of Myothit.

[203] Natmauk is close to two major military air bases, at Shante and Meiktila.

[204] Lintner and Crispin, 'Dangerous Bedfellows', pp.22-4.

[205] Lintner and Crispin, 'Dangerous Bedfellows', p.24.

[206] 'Junta officers secretly depart for Pyongyang to study advanced technology'.

[207] See, for example, William Ashton, 'Myanmar: Invasion fears prompt search for air defences', *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, Vol.27, No.2, March 2001, pp.32-4.

[208] 'Burma rejects magazine report of missile, nuclear links with DPRK'.

[209] 'Myanmar rejects report of military, nuclear ties with North Korea', Associated Press, 14 November 2003, reproduced in *BurmaNet News*,14 November 2003.

[210] 'Myanmar rejects report of military, nuclear ties with North Korea'.

[211] See also 'No Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) for Myanmar, Only the Weapons of Mass Development (WMD) for Myanmar', Myanmar Information Committee, Information Sheet No.C-2839 (I/L), 17 November 2003.

[212] It can be assumed, however, that the carefully worded statements on this issue made by senior US officials, such as Senator Richard Lugar, reflect a greater awareness of developments than it is possible to gain simply from open sources. See R.G. Lugar, 'Seeds of Trouble From Burma', Statement issued on 28 September 2003.

[213] Jagan, 'Yangon's Nuclear Ambitions Alarm Asia and Europe'.

[214] Interview, Bangkok, November 1999.

[215] Lintner and Crispin, 'Dangerous Bedfellows', p.24. See, however, Ashton, 'Myanmar's new MiG-29s', p.23.

[216] See, for example, Chart Navavichit, 'Thailand's Maritime Strategy in the Twenty First Century', in Jurgen Shwarz, W.A. Herrman and H-F. Seller (eds), *Maritime Strategies in Asia* (White Lotus, Bangkok, 2002), p.420; Andrew Selth, 'Burma's Maritime Strategy', in Shwarz, Herrman and Seller (eds), *Maritime Strategies in Asia*, p.309; and 'Submarines, Training Ship for Navy', *Asian Defence Journal*, December 2003, p.40.

[217] Andrew Selth, 'Burma and Superpower Rivalries in the Asia-Pacific', *Naval War College Review*, Vol.55, No.2, Spring 2002, pp.42-60.

[218] Burma's role in the strategic competition between China and India has been the subject of considerable debate. See, for example, Andrew Selth, *Burma's China Connection and the Indian Ocean Region*, Working Paper No.377 (Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 2003); J.M. Malik, 'Myanmar's Role in Regional Security: Pawn or Pivot?', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol.19, No.1, June 1997, pp.52-73; and J.W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2001), chapters 9 and 10.

[219] 'Neighbours' Envy'.

[220] 'Neighbours' Envy'.

[221] See, for example, Justin Bernier, 'China's Strategic Proxies', *Orbis*, Vol.47, No.4, Fall 2003, pp.629-43.

[222] See, for example, Kay Merrill, 'Myanmar's China Connection: A Cause for Alarm?', *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, 1998 Annual Reference Edition, Vol.24, No.1, January 1998, pp.20-1; and Selth, *Burma's China Connection and the Indian Ocean Region*.

[223] Garver, *Protracted Contest*, pp.271-4.

[224] Lintner, 'Burma joins the nuclear club', p.26. See also 'Nuclear Burma', 6 January 2002.

[225] Moe, 'US Findings on Burma'.

[226] This is not to overlook, however, the fact that in key areas like human rights and narcotics trafficking the US currently takes a harder policy line towards Burma than perhaps any other country. See David Steinberg, 'Burma/Myanmar and the Dilemmas of US Foreign Policy', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 21, no.2, August 1999, pp.283-311; and D.I. Steinberg, 'What to do about Myanmar', *Asia Times*, 7 January 2003.

[227] See, for example, Andrew Selth, *Burma: A Strategic Perspective*, Working Paper No.13 (Asia Foundation, San Francisco, 2001).

[228] 'Concern over Burma-North Korea Ties', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 16 October 2003, p.14.

[229] LoBaido, 'Nuclear politics in Burma'; 'Burma: Russian Nuclear Reactor', Office of the Spokesman, US Department of State, Washington DC, 23 January 2002; and 'Concern Over Burma-North Korea Ties', p.14.

[230] 'US Senate approves sale of AMRAAM missiles to Thailand', *The Nation*, 17 July 2001.

[231] Lugar, 'Seeds of Trouble From Burma'.

[232] Lintner and Crispin, 'Dangerous Bedfellows', p.24.

[233] 'Congress seeking report on DPRK sales to Burma', Yonhap News (in English), 6 December 2003.

[234] Nick Hordern, 'Stopping the flow of WMD', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, August 2003. See also 'Concern Over Burma-North Korea Ties', p.14.

[235] 'DPRK party organ says US sanctions, blockade "directly bring" war', KCNA (in Korean), 14 January 2003.

[236] See, for example, J.O. Goldsborough, 'Does the President know where to stop?', *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 7 February 2002.

[237] Selth, 'Burma in a changing world', pp.15-21.

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Burma and North Korea have in recent years quietly been developing closer ties. The main impetus for this reconciliation seems to be their shared pariah status, their common perception of an external threat, and the coincidence of their respective needs. Burma wants arms, while North Korea wants food and funds. Reports that the military government in Rangoon has sought to acquire strategic weapons from Pyongyang have aroused concern in regional capitals and elsewhere. It is still too early to make any definitive judgements but, depending on how it develops, this relationship could extend well beyond mutual support to have strategic implications for the entire Asia-Pacific region.

Andrew Selth