

# Maneuvering between Baghdad and Tehran

North Korea's Relations with Iraq  
and Iran during the Cold War

❖ Balázs Szalontai and Yoo Jinil

## Introduction

The hitherto published academic literature on North Korea's policy toward the Middle East can be grouped into two main categories. Some scholars have examined Pyongyang's bilateral relations with individual Middle Eastern states (mainly Iran, Syria, and Egypt) and armed political organizations (above all, the various Palestinian groups and Lebanon's Hezbollah), seeking to identify the factors that induced and enabled North Korea to forge partnerships with these entities.<sup>1</sup> Other scholars have sought to provide an overview of DPRK activities in the entire region or a specific subregion (like the Persian/Arabian Gulf) or described North Korea's policy toward the Middle

---

1. See, among others, Shirzad Azad, "Iran and the Two Koreas: A Peculiar Pattern of Foreign Policy," *Journal of East Asian Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Fall/Winter 2012), pp. 163–192; Lyong Choi, Jong-dae Shin, and Han-hyung Lee, "The Dilemma of the 'Axis of Evil': The Rise and Fall of Iran-DPRK Relations," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (December 2019), pp. 595–611; Mark Fitzpatrick, "Iran and North Korea: The Proliferation Nexus," *Survival*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (2006), pp. 61–80; Alon Levkowitz, "Iran and North Korea Military Cooperation: A Partnership within the 'Axis of Evil,'" *Iran-Pulse*, No. 10 (2007), pp. 1–3; Christina Y. Lin, "The King from the East: DPRK-Syria-Iran Nuclear Nexus and Strategic Implications for Israel and the ROK," *Korea Economic Institute Academic Paper Series*, Vol. 3, No. 7 (2008), pp. 1–13; Bruce E. Bechtol, "North Korea and Syria: Partners in Destruction and Violence," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (September 2015), pp. 277–292; Yitzhak Shichor, "Evil from the North: The DPRK-Syria Axis and its Strategic Dimensions," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2007), pp. 71–92; Satoru Miyamoto, "DPRK Troop Dispatches and Military Support in the Middle East: Change from Military Support to Arms Trade in the 1970s," *East Asia*, No. 27 (2010), pp. 345–359; Balázs Szalontai, "Courting the 'Traitor to the Arab Cause': Egyptian–North Korean Relations in the Sadat Era, 1970–1981," *S/N Korean Humanities*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (March 2019), pp. 103–136; and Carl Anthony Wege, "The Hizballah–North Korean Nexus," *Small Wars Journal* (23 January 2011), pp. 1–8.

*Journal of Cold War Studies*

Vol. 25, No. 2, Spring 2023, pp. 179–247, [https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws\\_a\\_01119](https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws_a_01119)

© 2023 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

East as one segment of Pyongyang's overall strategy toward the Third World.<sup>2</sup> The aforesaid themes were usually placed into the broader context of inter-Korean competition or North Korean arms trade, with a focus on the security threats and diplomatic challenges that the DPRK's presence in the Middle East posed to the Republic of Korea (ROK), Israel, and the United States. A few authors (Shirzad Azad, Christina Y. Lin, Yitzhak Shichor, and the trio of Lyong Choi, Jong-dae Shin, and Han-hyung Lee) have created models of triangular or quadrangular relations (Iran-DPRK-ROK, Iran-DPRK-United States, Iran-Syria-DPRK, Syria-DPRK-Israel-ROK) to assess the extent of cooperation between Pyongyang and its Middle Eastern partners against Washington and Seoul or to call for joint action against the allied "rogue states."

This article on North Korea's triangular relationship with Iraq and Iran approaches Pyongyang's policy in the region from a partly different angle, seeking to fill gaps in the literature. Earlier studies, focused as they are on the DPRK's cooperation with Iran, Syria, and Egypt, pay far less attention to the history of Iraqi-North Korean interactions. A few scholars (Azad, Barry Gills, and Chung-in Moon) have briefly noted that "traditionally, the DPRK had enjoyed a close and amicable relationship with Iraq" (which they contrast with Baghdad's long reluctance to engage Seoul), but they cover the Iraqi-North Korean partnership only in a couple of paragraphs or sentences, and their observations even contain factual inaccuracies.<sup>3</sup> So far, no article or chapter has been devoted specifically to the history of Iraqi-DPRK relations—an omission presumably influenced by the fact that military assistance played a less prominent role in Pyongyang's cooperation with Baghdad than in its partnerships with Cairo, Damascus, and Tehran.

Second, the earlier triangular models of North Korea's strategy in the Middle East analyze either Pyongyang's cooperation with a regional state

2. Shirzad Azad, *Koreans in the Persian Gulf: Policies and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2015); Bruce E. Bechtol, "Creating Instability in Dangerous Global Regions: North Korean Proliferation and Support to Terrorism in the Middle East and South Asia," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2009), pp. 99–115; Joseph S. Bermudez, *Proliferation for Profit: North Korea in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1994); Joseph S. Bermudez, *Terrorism: The North Korean Connection* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1990); Kenneth Katzman and Rinn-Sup Shinn, *North Korea: Military Relations with the Middle East*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 1994); Chung-in Moon, "Between Ideology and Interest: North Korea in the Middle East," in Park Jae Kyu, Byung Chul Koh, and Tae-Hwan Kwak, eds., *The Foreign Relations of North Korea* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 379–410; Barry K. Gills, *Korea versus Korea: A Case of Contested Legitimacy* (London: Routledge, 1996); and Benjamin R. Young, *Guns, Guerrillas, and the Great Leader: North Korea and the Third World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021).

3. Moon, "Between Ideology and Interest," p. 396. See also Azad, *Koreans in the Persian Gulf*, pp. 21, 29, 76–78; and Gills, *Korea versus Korea*, pp. 67, 103–104, 118–119, 132–133.

against other powers that DPRK leaders regarded as inherently hostile (South Korea, the United States, and Israel) or its trilateral alliance with two regional states that were on good terms with each other (Iran and Syria). In contrast, this article explores (1) how North Korean leaders tried to maneuver between two Middle Eastern states that were on hostile terms with each other but were regarded by the DPRK as potentially attractive partners; (2) which external and internal conditions enhanced or reduced the DPRK's chances to gain a foothold in Baghdad or Tehran; (3) which benefits the DPRK could draw from the Iraq–Iran rivalry and which obstacles it placed in the way of their diplomatic efforts; and (4) how North Korea reacted to the various shifts in Iraqi and Iranian domestic and foreign policies. In parallel with this analysis, the article also investigates how Iranian and Iraqi policymakers viewed the Korean question.

Iran and Iraq were selected for analysis because of the significant role they played not only in Middle Eastern power politics in general but in North Korea's strategy toward the Middle East in particular. Both countries had sufficient population, oil reserves, and military power to aspire to regional hegemony in the Persian Gulf and exert a substantial influence in the eastern part of the Arab world (the Mashriq). By pressuring or propping up the so-called front-line states (Egypt, Syria, and Jordan), they could have a stronger impact on the dynamics of the Arab-Israeli conflict than, say, Algeria and South Yemen could—countries that had adopted an intransigent stance toward Israel and maintained friendly relations with the DPRK but whose geographical remoteness prevented them from playing a major role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The regional ambitions of Iran and Iraq eventually reached such a height that they ended up on a collision course not only with each other (as occurred in 1980, leading to the longest and most destructive interstate war in post-1945 Middle Eastern history) but also with the United States.

Their conflicts with each other, and with Israel and the United States, in turn created opportunities for North Korean diplomacy to gain footholds in Baghdad and Tehran. The initial stage of North Korea's strategy toward the Middle East (1957–1966) focused on outcompeting Seoul in the diplomatic sphere, that is, to set up embassies, or at least trade offices and consulates-general, in the various Middle Eastern countries, sign cultural and trade agreements with the host authorities, and dissuade the latter from establishing contacts with the South Korean “puppet regime.” In the aftermath of the Six-Day War (1967), the DPRK started to provide military and economic assistance to various Arab states and guerrilla organizations. In the 1970s and 1980s, the global oil shocks and North Korea's debt crisis induced DPRK

leaders to seek to obtain crude oil and convertible currency from oil-rich Iraq and Iran. Because of the deficiencies of the North Korean economy, arms sales became the most effective means to achieve these aims. Starting in 1980, the Islamic Republic of Iran was usually first among the countries purchasing military equipment from the DPRK, its purchases gradually evolving from tanks, artillery, and fighter planes to medium-range ballistic missiles.

The analysis here relies on a combination of primary sources: the reports of Soviet-bloc diplomats, now accessible in the Hungarian National Archives (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár) and the Digital Archives of the Woodrow Wilson Center; U.S. and British diplomatic files, available in the U.S. National Archives and the UK National Archives; and North Korean media sources. Whereas earlier authors (Azad, Gills, Moon, and Benjamin R. Young) cite *Rodong sinmun* (the daily newspaper of the Korean Workers' Party, KWP) and other North Korean press organs mainly to illustrate specific episodes of North Korean foreign policy and to show the tone of North Korean propaganda, this article also analyzes the fluctuating trends in North Korean media coverage of developments in Iraq and Iran, comparing *Rodong sinmun's* comments on these events with the positions of other Communist states. Instead of placing Pyongyang's interactions with Baghdad and Tehran solely in the context of inter-Korean rivalry, the article also examines the similarities and differences between North Korean and Soviet/Chinese/East German attitudes toward Iran and Iraq.

In comparing *Rodong sinmun's* standpoint with that of other Communist regimes, the article pays particular attention to *Neues Deutschland*, East Germany's party newspaper, on the following grounds: East Germany, like the DPRK, was a divided country, and thus its diplomatic activities in the Middle East were as strongly motivated by its perennial competition with West Germany as Pyongyang's policies were driven by its rivalry with Seoul. At the same time, East German leaders consistently sought to achieve their aims within the confines of Soviet policy toward the Middle East, adapting to the latter's priorities, sympathies, and antipathies to a far greater extent than post-1960 North Korean diplomacy. By using the *Neues Deutschland* articles as a control group, the article can better illustrate the distinctive elements of *Rodong sinmun's* position than if the DPRK newspaper had been examined in isolation. Fortunately, the full set of *Neues Deutschland* issues (1946–1990) is available in a searchable format.<sup>4</sup>

---

4. All cited articles from *Neues Deutschland* are available online at <https://www.nd-archiv.de/>.

## Through a Glass Darkly: North Korea Faces Iran and Iraq, 1950–1957

North Korea established diplomatic relations with the Republic of Iraq in 1968 and the Imperial State of Iran in 1973. At first sight, this relatively small chronological difference might create the impression that Iraqi-DPRK and Iranian-DPRK relations developed largely in parallel. In reality, the degree of North Korean interest in these two Middle Eastern countries, and the scope of Pyongyang's contacts with them, showed strong divergence and fluctuation during the Cold War. From 1946 to the mid-1950s, *Rodong sinmun* paid much greater attention to Iran than to Iraq. Following the republican takeover in Baghdad (14 July 1958), Iraq suddenly eclipsed Iran on North Korea's priority list, but more than eight years of persistent North Korean efforts were needed to upgrade Iraqi-DPRK cooperation from the first economic and cultural agreements to ambassadorial relations. In contrast, Iran established full diplomatic contacts with the DPRK after hardly any preliminary steps, quickly switching from a hostile relationship to a cordial one. From 1973 to 1979, Pyongyang sought to stay on good terms with both Middle Eastern powers, but in 1980 the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War created a permanent imbalance in this triangle. The collapse of the already weakening Iraqi-DPRK partnership was offset by the emergence of a strong Iranian–North Korean alliance.

In the formative stage of the North Korean regime and during the Korean War, the North Koreans lacked any direct contact with either Iran or Iraq (or with any other Middle Eastern state, for that matter). Seen from this perspective, *Rodong sinmun's* strikingly uneven coverage of the two countries may appear peculiar. For instance, during the first nine months of 1950 the newspaper carried thirteen articles on Iran but only a single one about Iraq. In 1951, the number of articles on Iran increased to 64, whereas those about Iraq reached only six. *Rodong sinmun's* strong interest in Iran manifested itself as early as the spring of 1946 (during the dispute at the United Nations over the prolonged presence of Soviet troops in northern Iran), when it published nine articles about Iranian events from 5 February to 17 April.<sup>5</sup> At that time, Iran lay just as far beyond the reach of North Korean diplomacy as Iraq, and thus the conspicuous attention it received from *Rodong sinmun* can hardly be attributed to practical political considerations.

5. See, among others, "Ajebejan munjenün Iran'gwa Ssoryön chikhchöm kyosöp-anjön pojang-wiwönhoenün shirhoe chungji," *Rodong sinmun* (Pyongyang), 5 February 1946, p. 1; and "Iranjudun Ssoryön'gun ilbuch'ölt'oerül kaeshi," *Rodong sinmun*, 6 March 1946, p. 1.

If, however, one compares the patterns of North Korean media coverage with the number of articles published by the Soviet party newspaper *Pravda* on Iran and Iraq, the reason *Rodong sinmun* covered the former country far more extensively than the latter becomes clearer. *Pravda* also devoted much greater attention to Iran than to Iraq. For example, in 1947 it carried as many as 109 articles on Iran but only 15 on Iraq, whereas in 1948 and 1949 the proportion of articles was 126 to 18 and 60 to 10, respectively. These differences seem to have reflected Soviet geopolitical priorities. In Soviet foreign policy under Joseph Stalin, Iran—a country that shared a 1,690-kilometer land border with the USSR and that was partly occupied by Soviet troops from 1941 to 1946—occupied a far more prominent place than Iraq, a non-neighboring state then firmly belonging to Britain's sphere of interest. The impact these Soviet priorities made on North Korean propaganda may be detected not only in the number of articles but also in their content. The start of *Rodong sinmun's* interest in Iran may be traced to United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 2 (30 January 1946), which called on the Soviet Union and Iran to resolve their conflict. The newspaper's first article on Iran (5 February 1946) covered the UN dispute over the crisis, and in the following three months the majority of Iran-related articles were focused on the various episodes of Soviet-Iranian relations (such as the gradual withdrawal of Soviet troops and the visit of Iranian Prime Minister Ahmad Qavam to Moscow). One of the *Rodong sinmun* articles lavishly praised Soviet policies toward Tehran as a major contribution to world peace.<sup>6</sup> Similar tendencies may be observed in *Rodong sinmun's* coverage of Iraq. One of its early articles, dated 24 June 1949 and describing the deterioration of Iraqi-Syrian relations, seems to have been inspired by a Soviet *Pravda* article of 17 June 1949.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, *Rodong sinmun's* unusually strong initial interest in Iran and its relative indifference toward Iraq was more a reflection of Soviet geopolitical preferences than an attitude based on North Korea's own diplomatic priorities. During these early years, North Korean perceptions of the Middle East were heavily dependent on Soviet narratives, not only because of Pyongyang's political alignment with Moscow but also because of the KWP leaders' overall unfamiliarity with this faraway and culturally alien region.

These characteristics of North Korea's initial approach toward the two Middle Eastern states (i.e., its adherence to the standpoint of its superpower

6. "Ssoryön-Iran ch'insönün segyep'yonghwa kiyō," *Rodong sinmun*, 17 April 1946, p. 4.

7. "Obostrenie otnoshenii mezhdū Siriei i Irakom," *Pravda* (Moscow), 17 June 1949, p. 4; and "Irak'ū Ssiriaūi kwan'gyenūn nalloak'wa," *Rodong sinmun*, 24 June 1949, p. 4.

patron, combined with a lack of direct involvement) were partly mirrored in the attitudes that Iraq and Iran adopted toward the Korean question in 1947–1949. During the first UN General Assembly vote on Korea (23 September 1947), Iran sided with the United States, whereas Iraq abstained.<sup>8</sup> On 12 December 1948, when the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 195 to recognize the South Korean administration as a freely elected and lawful government, both countries followed Washington's lead. This position reflected their largely pro-Western orientation, but otherwise they were considerably less active at the UN sessions on Korea than during the debates over issues that were of direct concern to them (such as Palestine, Indonesia, and Libya).<sup>9</sup>

Iranian and Iraqi reactions to the outbreak of the Korean War were of a similarly ambivalent nature. When the UN Security Council passed Resolution 80 (27 June 1950) to authorize military assistance to South Korea, Iran strongly supported it, whereas Iraq expressed support for the action “within the framework of the Charter.”<sup>10</sup> The Iranian leaders' standpoint was evidently influenced by their fears of Soviet designs on Iran. According to a telegram sent on 2 July, Iranian Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi told U.S. Ambassador Henry F. Grady that Iran felt “heartened by evidence US prepared [to] support small nations when confronted by armed Communist aggression.” Grady noted that the Shah “obviously had idea in mind that time might come when he would need such assistance.”<sup>11</sup> Striking a more reserved tone, the Iraqi chargé d'affaires to the United States “privately” assured the Department of the State that “Iraq [was] not neutral but lined up solidly with West.”<sup>12</sup>

In practice, however, both countries (like the other Middle Eastern states) refrained from sending troops to the defense of South Korea—a decision that *Pravda* promptly depicted as a fiasco of U.S. diplomacy.<sup>13</sup> Iranian leaders, for their part, were anxious not to provoke their powerful northern neighbor, all the more so because they harbored doubts about the extent of military

8. Gills, *Korea versus Korea*, p. 43.

9. *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1948–49* (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1950), pp. 193–194, 234, 258–261, 289.

10. *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), p. 225.

11. “The Ambassador in Iran (Grady) to the Secretary of State,” Telegram, 3 July 1950, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950*, Vol. V, Doc. 257 (hereinafter referred to as *FRUS*, with appropriate year and volume numbers).

12. “The Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic Offices,” Circular Telegram, 21 July 1950, in *FRUS, 1950*, Vol. VII, Doc. 337.

13. “Arabskie strany ne khoyat uchastvovat' v agressii,” *Pravda*, 19 July 1950, p. 4; and “Otkaz Irana posylat' voiska v Koreyu,” *Pravda*, 27 July 1950, p. 4.



support they might receive from the United States against a Soviet invasion.<sup>14</sup> In a conversation with U.S. counselor Arthur Richards, the Shah

attributed great initial successes of North Koreans to the fact that ROK had not been supplied with more heavy equipment and from this he indicated that decision supply Iran with military equipment useful primarily maintain internal security would be, as in Korea, completely inadequate withstand any armed Soviet aggression.<sup>15</sup>

Lacking a common border with the USSR, Iraq had much less to fear from a direct Soviet onslaught, but the Iraqi government, like the other Arab states, nursed a grievance against the United States and the UN for the partition of Palestine, and hence it felt little inclination to provide any material support to the UN effort on behalf of the ROK.<sup>16</sup> On 21 September 1950, Iraqi UN delegate Mohammad Fadhil al-Jamali commended “the efficacy and justice of meeting aggression in Korea” but lamented “why the Security Council did not and does not act with similar promptness and efficacy in cases of aggression in Palestine.”<sup>17</sup> By the end of the year, only Israel and Lebanon among Middle Eastern states had offered to give humanitarian aid to South Korea. In the later stage of the war, Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia made some token aid contributions, but Iraq did not, whereas an Iranian offer of fuel was turned down by the UN Command on logistical grounds.<sup>18</sup>

In the summer of 1950, Soviet and North Korean leaders had good reason to welcome the Middle Eastern countries’ desire to avoid taking sides in the Korean War, but in the winter of 1950–1951, when Chinese–North Korean troops drove back the UN forces, Moscow, Beijing, and Pyongyang were far less pleased by their neutrality. On 5 December 1950, thirteen African and Asian countries (including both Iran and Iraq) appealed to the DPRK and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to “declare that it was not their intention that any forces under their control should cross to the south of the 38th parallel,” but to no avail.

14. Azad, *Koreans in the Persian Gulf*, pp. 16–17.

15. “The Ambassador in Iran (Grady) to the Secretary of State,” Telegram, 3 August 1950, in *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. V, Doc. 265.

16. “Policy Statement Prepared in the Department of State,” 9 November 1950, in *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. V, Doc. 303.

17. United Nations General Assembly, 5th Session, 280th Plenary Meeting, 21 September 1950, Official Records, A/PV.280, pp. 35–36.

18. *Yearbook of the United Nations*, 1950, pp. 225–228; *Yearbook of the United Nations*, 1951 (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1952), p. 253; and *Yearbook of the United Nations*, 1952 (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1953), p. 220.



On 14 December 1950, in response to a joint draft resolution submitted by these states, the Iranian president of the UN General Assembly, Nasrollah Entezam, set up a committee to “determine the basis on which a satisfactory cease-fire in Korea could be arranged,” whereupon the Soviet delegate charged that this proposal was merely a “camouflaged” U.S. attempt to give a “breathing spell” to the beleaguered UN troops. On 22 December, the PRC declared that “if the Asian and Arab nations wished to achieve genuine peace, they must free themselves from United States pressure . . . and give up the idea of achieving a cease-fire first and negotiations afterward.”<sup>19</sup>

Exasperated by the intransigence of the Communist powers, the Iraqi UN delegate told John C. Ross, the Deputy U.S. Representative on the UN Security Council, that “from beginning of Chinese Communist intervention in Korea he had felt it was essential to give them rope enough to hang themselves” (i.e., to expose their unwillingness to seek a peaceful settlement). Jamali rebuffed an Indian proposal to discuss China’s intervention together with the Taiwan issue on the grounds that this would be tantamount to “paying reward for aggression.”<sup>20</sup> Diverging from the neutralist position embraced by Egypt and Syria, both Iran and Iraq supported the draft resolutions that branded the PRC as an aggressor in Korea (1 February 1951) and called for an embargo against North Korea and China (18 May 1951). The Korea-related votes that the two Middle Eastern states cast in 1952 were likewise at variance with the Soviet standpoint. Iraq consistently sided with the United States, whereas Iran, then governed by the radical nationalist Premier Mohammad Mossadegh, repeatedly abstained, but this did not prevent the Soviet delegate from confronting his Iranian counterpart during the session of 24 November.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout these tumultuous events, *Rodong sinmun*’s articles on Iran and Iraq continued to reflect Soviet (rather than North Korean) priorities and interests. Although the newspaper mentioned the effort by twelve Arab-Asian countries to pursue an independent course in the UN, most of the articles were unrelated to the position that Tehran and Baghdad adopted on the Korean War.<sup>22</sup> Instead, they focused on local workers’ protests, political disputes over a British-Iraqi oil agreement (3 February 1952), the British-Iranian

19. *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1950*, pp. 245–251.

20. “The United States Representative at the United Nations (Austin) to the Secretary of State,” Telegram, 27 December 1950, in *FRUS, 1950*, Vol. VII, Doc. 1091.

21. *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1951*, pp. 224, 228, 264; and *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1952*, pp. 198–207.

22. “Arap min Asea 12kaeguk taep’yodül 7kaeguk hoeüi sojibane taehan sujöngan chech’ul,” *Rodong sinmun*, 2 February 1951, p. 4.

conflict triggered by Mossadegh's nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (1 May 1951), and the U.S. role in the military coup against Mossadegh (19 August 1953), placing these episodes into the context of the global anti-imperialist struggle.<sup>23</sup>

The way *Rodong sinmun* followed *Pravda's* lead is demonstrated by the following examples: Mossadegh's referendum on the dissolution of the parliament, held in Tehran on 3 August 1953, was covered by *Pravda* and *Rodong sinmun* on 4 and 10 August respectively.<sup>24</sup> The Soviet newspaper published a long article on the first coup attempt against Mossadegh (15 August) as early as 17 August and continued to report on the events in Tehran on a daily basis.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, *Rodong sinmun* published its first articles about the Iranian crisis as late as 24 and 28 August; that is, only after Mossadegh's downfall.<sup>26</sup>

The fall of Mossadegh and the restoration of the Shah soon made an impact on Iran's attitude toward Korea, too. Abandoning Mossadegh's neutralist stance, the new Iranian administration adopted a consistently pro-Western position on each occasion when the UN discussed the Korean question. On 3 December 1953, no other Middle Eastern country but Iran and Israel supported a draft resolution condemning North Korean and Chinese atrocities against the UN prisoners-of-war—Iraq and four other Arab states abstained.<sup>27</sup> The Iranian government took a harder stance toward the DPRK, the PRC, and East Germany than toward the USSR and the other East European countries, not least because the former group lacked diplomatic relations with the United States. Iranian officials knew that U.S. policymakers did not want to see inroads by North Korea, China, and East Germany into the Middle East.<sup>28</sup> Hence, the Iranian authorities maintained cordial relations with the

23. See, among others, "Chegukchuüi ch'imnyakül pandaehanün Iran inmindürüi t'ujaenggojo-sökyu munjee kwallyöndoenmigugüi kansöbül paegyök," *Rodong sinmun*, 27 May 1951, p. 4; and "Yöngguk hoesawaüi sökyu hyöpchöng pijunün Irak'ü chönggyee kyökpunül yagi," *Rodong sinmun*, 24 February 1952, p. 4.

24. "Referendum v Irane," *Pravda*, 4 August 1953, p. 4; and "Iran kuk'oe haesane kwanhan kungmin t'up'yorül chinhaeng," *Rodong sinmun*, 10 August 1953, p. 4 (obtained and translated by Yoo Jinil).

25. "Proval popytki sovershit' gosudarstvennyi perevorot v Irane," *Pravda*, 17 August 1953, p. 4.

26. "Iran sar'ae chaech'a ak'wa," *Rodong sinmun*, 24 August 1953, p. 4; and "Iranesö Mosadik'i chöngburül pandaehayö wangdangp'a k'uder'a kamhaeng," *Rodong sinmun*, 28 August 1953, p. 4 (both articles obtained and translated by Yoo Jinil).

27. *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1953* (1954; New York: Kraus reprint, 1980), p. 152.

28. On U.S. distinctions between East Germany, China, and the other Communist states, see "United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East," Staff Study Prepared in the Department of State, 30 October 1957, in *FRUS, 1955–1957*, Vol. XII, Doc. 270.

Czechoslovak and Polish legations even after Soviet-Iranian relations turned sour, but they did not establish any official contacts with North Korea, the PRC, or East Germany.<sup>29</sup> North Korean interactions with Iran were limited to the occasional visits of Iranian trade union delegations in Pyongyang (1957–1958), which were more likely to irritate than to please the Iranian government.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, North Korea could not draw any benefits from the cautious rapprochement that occurred in Soviet-Iranian relations in 1956–1957, though *Rodong sinmun* dutifully covered the Shah's visit to the USSR and the resulting Soviet-Iranian agreements.<sup>31</sup> The DPRK labored under even greater handicaps than East Germany, which managed to forge at least some economic ties with Iran by the late 1950s.<sup>32</sup> Under such conditions, North Korean leaders seem to have kept an eye on Iran mainly because their Soviet allies attributed great importance to the country. For example, *Rodong sinmun*'s reaction to the Iranian earthquake of 2 July 1957 stands in marked contrast with that of East Germany's party newspaper. Starting on 5 July, *Neues Deutschland* carried a series of news reports about the catastrophe, whereas *Rodong sinmun* said nothing about it until 14 July, when it announced that the USSR gave 50,000 rubles' worth of humanitarian aid to Iran.<sup>33</sup>

During this period, Iraq proved an even less hospitable environment than Iran for North Korean diplomacy. Whereas the Iranian monarchy found it advisable to interact with at least a few Communist states, the Kingdom of Iraq, having broken diplomatic relations with the USSR in January 1955, refused to establish contacts with any Communist power, not least because it was

29. On Iran's relations with China, East Germany, and the East European states, see Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Memorandum, 2 August 1965, in Hungarian National Archives (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, MNL), XIX-J-1-j Iran, 1965, 59. doboz, IV-142, 004374/1965; Hungarian Embassy to Iran, Report, 25 September 1965, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iran, 1965, 59. doboz, IV-105, 004674/1965; and British Embassy to Tehran to the Foreign Office, 4 November 1971, in The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNAUK), former Public Record Office (PRO) Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 33 001346 001.

30. "Iran min t'airodongjoham chidojadül P'yöngyange toch'ang," *Rodong sinmun*, 21 December 1957, p. 3.

31. "Iran wangi Ssoryön pangmun yejöng," *Rodong sinmun*, 23 April 1956, p. 6; and "Ssoryön'gwa Iran'gane kukkyöng munjee kwanhan hyöpchöng choin," *Rodong sinmun*, 16 May 1957, p. 4. See also Roham Alvandi, "Flirting with Neutrality: The Shah, Khrushchev, and the Failed 1959 Soviet-Iranian Negotiations," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (2014), pp. 421–422.

32. Economic and Commercial Department of the British Embassy to Tehran to the Foreign Office, 15 October 1959, in TNAUK, PRO FO 371 145528 001.

33. "Erdbeben forderte 1000 Tote," *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin), 5 July 1957, p. 5; "5000 Tote in Iran," *Neues Deutschland*, 6 July 1957, p. 5; and "Ssoryöni Iranüi chijin p'ihaejadürül wihayö 5man rubüllü chüngjöng," *Rodong sinmun*, 14 July 1957, p. 4.

unwilling to host a Communist diplomatic mission in Baghdad.<sup>34</sup> In 1954–1957, Iraq routinely supported the U.S.-sponsored draft UN resolutions on the Korean question, thus diverging from the neutrally inclined Arab states (e.g., Syria and Gamal Abdel Nasser’s Egypt).<sup>35</sup> Not surprisingly, *Rodong sinmun*’s articles on Iraq showed the same patterns as in earlier years. For example, their number (1954: two; 1955: thirteen; 1956: six; 1957: five) consistently lagged behind those on Iran (1954: fifteen; 1955: 21; 1956: ten; 1957: ten). Second, most articles were of a critical nature. Following Moscow’s lead, *Rodong sinmun* condemned the Turkish-Iraqi Pact of Mutual Cooperation, known as the Baghdad Pact, in ten articles.<sup>36</sup>

### The First Breakthrough: Gradual Expansion of Iraqi-DPRK Relations, 1958–1968

On 14 July 1958, a military coup in Iraq headed by Abd al-Karim Qasim resulted in an abrupt change in Iraq’s domestic and foreign policies, reorienting North Korea’s attention from Iran to Iraq and eventually enabling the DPRK to gain a foothold in this hitherto inaccessible country. KWP leaders reacted to the coup with unusual alacrity. On 15–17 July, *Rodong sinmun* welcomed the Iraqi “revolution” in fourteen articles, protesting against a perceived U.S. intervention plan.<sup>37</sup> North Korea’s decision to recognize the new republican regime, announced on 18 July, followed the analogous steps of the Soviet and Chinese governments (16 July) far more closely than a few months before, when the DPRK recognized the newly proclaimed United Arab Republic (UAR; a union of Egypt and Syria) more than a week later than the USSR and China did.<sup>38</sup> The North Koreans’ optimistic expectations proved at least partly justified. As early as 19 July, *Rodong sinmun* reported that the

34. British Embassy to Baghdad (Wright) to the Foreign Office, 29 February 1956, in TNAUK, PRO FO 371 124301 001; and Tareq Y. Ismael and Andrej Kreutz, “Russian-Iraqi Relations: A Historical and Political Analysis,” *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Fall 2001), pp. 88–89.

35. See, among others, *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1956* (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1957), pp. 128–130; and *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1957* (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information, 1958), p. 90.

36. See, among others, “Ŭoigŭi-Irak’ŭ choyang ch’egyöre kwanhan Mossük’ŭba ch’ulp’anmultürüi ronp’yöng,” *Rodong sinmun*, 3 March 1955, p. 4.

37. See, among others, “Irak’ŭ inmindŭl hyöngmyöng chöngburŭryölyörhi hwanyöng,” *Rodong sinmun*, 16 July 1958, p. 4.

38. “Kim Ilsöng susang Irak’ŭ Konghwaguk ch’anggöne chehayö Irak’ŭ Konghwaguk susang Apüdel K’arim K’aseмеge chönmun,” *Rodong sinmun*, 18 July 1958, p. 1.

Qasim regime had restored diplomatic relations with the USSR, and later it announced a Chinese-Iraqi agreement to exchange ambassadors.<sup>39</sup>

Still, Iraq's post-coup rapprochement with the Soviet bloc did not automatically lead to a breakthrough between Iraq and North Korea. Paradoxically, the distinctions that Qasim made between the various Communist states had certain similarities with the position of the Iranian government (with which he was on mostly bad terms). "The government of the Iraqi Republic passed a resolution to establish diplomatic relations with the countries of the socialist camp," Ho Söksin, a deputy departmental head of the North Korean Foreign Ministry, told the Communist ambassadors, "but for the time being it does not speak about either the Mongolian People's Republic or the German Democratic Republic or the Democratic Republic of Vietnam or the DPRK."<sup>40</sup> By November 1958, the USSR, China, and several East European countries had set up embassies in Baghdad, but the East Germans had to content themselves with opening a trade office, and the Iraqi authorities were not yet ready to conclude any agreement with North Korea or North Vietnam.<sup>41</sup> In December 1958, an Iraqi "people's delegation" touring the Communist countries visited the DPRK, where even Kim Il-Sung was ready to meet them, but this non-governmental visit was greatly overshadowed by East German Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl's January 1959 trip to Baghdad.<sup>42</sup> The fact that North Korea faced greater obstacles than China, East Germany, and the other East European countries did in Qasim's Iraq contradicts the narratives of Barry Gills (who strongly emphasizes the DPRK's ability to exploit Iraq's "reversal from a conservative to a radical regime") and Moon Chung-in (who claims that, in the 1950s, the "radical Arab countries . . . became staunch supporters of, as well as spokesmen for North Korea in international councils").<sup>43</sup>

39. "Irak'ü konghwaguk Ssoryön'gwa oegyo kwan'gye hoebokk'iro kyölc'höng," *Rodong sinmun*, 19 July 1958, p. 6; and "Chunggukkwa Irak'üga taesarül kyohwanhagiroyölc'höng," *Rodong sinmun*, 28 August 1958, p. 4.

40. Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Report, 25 August 1958, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1945–1964, 5. doboz, 5/f, 005458/1958.

41. On Iraqi relations with East Germany, Hungary, and North Vietnam, see "Handelsvertretung in Bagdad eröffnet," *Neues Deutschland*, 21 November 1958, p. 5; Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 23 October 1958, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1945–1964, 3. doboz, 5/c, 005947/1958; and Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 30 May 1960, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1945–1964, 3. doboz, 5/bf, 004529/1960.

42. "Kim Il-söng susang Irak'ü inmin taep'yodanül chöpk'yön," *Rodong sinmun*, 13 December 1958, p. 1; "Erfolgreiche Verhandlungen DDR-Irak," *Neues Deutschland*, 12 January 1959, p. 2; and Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 13 January 1959, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1945–1964, 3. doboz, 5/bc, 00857/1959.

43. Gills, *Korea versus Korea*, p. 67; and Moon, "Between Ideology and Interest," p. 380.

Implying that the Iraqi government and the Communist camp had common enemies, *Rodong sinmun* devoted several articles to the tension that Qasim's coup had created in Iraq's relations with the United States, Britain, Turkey, and Jordan.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, the newspaper seems to have paid little attention to the growing friction between Iraq and Iran, though Iran's hostile attitude toward the new Iraqi government was noticed by Soviet-bloc diplomats as early as September 1958. By November, Qasim had become convinced that Iran and the United States were hatching a conspiracy against his regime.<sup>45</sup> Ironically, the factor that finally enabled North Korean diplomacy to gain Qasim's trust was not Iraq's quarrel with the pro-American Iranian government but the conflict that erupted between Qasim and another "progressive" Arab regime with which the DPRK had just established commercial relations: Nasser's UAR.<sup>46</sup>

Qasim's cooperation with the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) aroused Nasser's ire, inducing him to provide covert support to a failed coup attempt against Qasim in the city of Mosul (7–11 March 1959). Nasser's involvement in the plot triggered a fierce public row between Baghdad and Cairo, one in which the Communist powers were also caught up. Because Nasser accused Qasim of collaborating with the "Communist agents of a foreign power" against the UAR, the USSR and China felt compelled to weigh in on Qasim's side.<sup>47</sup> In the escalating dispute, North Korean leaders followed the line taken by their Communist allies, even though this meant confronting the same UAR government they had eagerly engaged in 1957–1958. Having covered the Iraqi crisis since 11 March, *Rodong sinmun* had reached the point by 17–18 March of quoting the critical remarks that Nikita Khrushchev and the ICP's newspaper made about Nasser, and on 20–22 March it expressly condemned Nasser's anti-Communist campaign against Iraq.<sup>48</sup>

44. See, among others, "Irak'ũ ch'imgongũl chunbihago innũn T'oigie kyõnggo (Ssoryõn chõngbuga T'oigi chõngbuebimangnong chõndal)," *Rodong sinmun*, 27 July 1958, p. 4.

45. Hungarian Embassy to Iran, Report, 24 September 1958, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1945–1964, 3. doboz, 5/c, 005442/1958; and "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iraq," 4 December 1958, in *FRUS*, 1958–1960, Vol. XII, Doc. 145.

46. On the establishment of a North Korean trade office in Cairo in July 1958, see Hungarian Foreign Ministry to the Hungarian Embassy in the UAR, 9 July 1958, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Egypt, 1945–1964, 1. doboz, 1/a, 004488/1958.

47. Anthony Nutting, *Nasser* (London: Constable, 1972), pp. 256–259; Johan Franzén, *Red Star over Iraq: Iraqi Communism before Saddam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 102; and Yitzhak Shichor, *The Middle East in China's Foreign Policy, 1949–1977* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 87.

48. See, among others, "Irak'ũ chõngbugun pallan todangũl chinap," *Rodong sinmun*, 11 March 1959, p. 6; "Irak'ũ sahoe yõron irak'ũe taehan nasserũi pibangũl kyut'an," *Rodong sinmun*, 17 March 1959,

After the 1959 coup attempt, Qasim, who had previously tried to allay Nasser's suspicions by keeping his contacts with the Communist powers within limits, took the opposite tack. Seeking to overcome Iraq's diplomatic isolation, Qasim's government hastily signed agreements of cultural cooperation with the USSR, China, East Germany, and five other East European countries in April–May 1959 through a spectacular exchange of delegations.<sup>49</sup> The DPRK also took advantage of this opportunity. The Iraqi government invited delegations from numerous countries to celebrate the first anniversary of the “July 14 Revolution,” and on 4 July *Rodong sinmun* announced that a North Korean government delegation would also attend the celebrations.<sup>50</sup> The delegation, headed by Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Nam Il, urged Qasim to establish diplomatic relations. Because the Iraqi government was not yet ready for this step, the North Koreans had to content themselves with signing a trade and payments agreement and a cultural cooperation agreement and with obtaining Qasim's consent to the opening of a DPRK trade office in Baghdad.<sup>51</sup> Judging from *Rodong sinmun's* earlier articles, the North Koreans were keenly aware of Iraq's trade and cultural agreements with East Germany and other Communist states, and they probably cited them as precedents, asking for equal status under the principle of non-discrimination.<sup>52</sup> But initially the legal framework of cooperation did not put the DPRK on a par with East Germany, which was able to open a trade office in Iraq a month after concluding a trade agreement. By contrast, a Hungarian report dated November 1960 noted that North Korea had not yet opened its own trade office.<sup>53</sup>

p. 6; and “Arap Yönhap Konghwaguküi panirak'ü kkampaniyanün chegukchüüjadürege toumül chulppunida,” *Rodong sinmun*, 22 March 1959, p. 6 (translated by Peter Ward).

49. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 13 January 1959 (see note 42 *supra*); Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 15 April 1959, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1945–1964, 3. doboz, 5/bc, 003098/1959; and Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 13 May 1959, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1945–1964, 3. doboz, 5/bc, 003098/1/1959.

50. “Irak'ü Konghwaguk kukkyöngjöl kinyöm haengsae ch'amgahal Chosön Minjujuüi Inmin Konghwaguk chöngbu taep'yodan P'yöngyangül ch'ulbal,” *Rodong sinmun*, 4 July 1959, p. 1.

51. Record of Conversation between Nam Il and M. Zimyanin, Head of the Far Eastern Department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, “K besede s Nam Irom (spravka),” 30 June 1959 (in Russian), in Tongil munhwa yönkuso, *Pyöngyang soryön taesakwan pimil söch'ol* (Seoul: K'oria k'ont'en'ch'u raep, 2002), File KM012101, pp. 6–7; “Uri narawa Irak'ü Konghwaguk kane munhwa hyöpchoe kwanhan hyöpchöng choin,” *Rodong sinmun*, 26 July 1959, p. 1; and Gills, *Korea versus Korea*, p. 67.

52. “Minju Togilgwa Irak'ügame r'ongsang hyöpchöng ch'egyöl,” *Rodong sinmun*, 30 October 1958, p. 6; and “P'aran gwa Irak'ügame munhwayhyöpchoe kwanhan hyöpchöng choin,” *Rodong sinmun*, 5 April 1959, p. 6.

53. Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Report, 21 November 1960, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1945–1964, 5. doboz, 5/bc, 008454/1960.



North Korea's rapprochement with Iraq encountered other stumbling blocks within less than a year. In February 1960, Qasim sought to reduce his dependence on the ICP and the Soviet bloc by licensing an ICP faction headed by Daud al-Sayegh, rather than the majority group, as the country's single legal Communist party.<sup>54</sup> This maneuver earned the veiled disapproval of the Communist powers, all the more so because Qasim attempted to improve his relations with Iran and took repressive measures against the main ICP group.<sup>55</sup> North Korea reacted to the controversy in a belated and low-key manner but in line with the position of its Communist allies. In contrast to *Neues Deutschland* (which reported the ICP's split and its conflict with Qasim as early as January–February 1960), *Rodong sinmun* did not mention this sensitive topic until 23 March, and, when it did so, it extensively quoted the complaints that Zaki Khayri (a leader of the ICP's majority group) voiced about Qasim's preference for Daud al-Sayegh's faction but added no comment of its own.<sup>56</sup> Notably, the article cited China's Xinhua News Agency as its source.<sup>57</sup> In February 1961, *Rodong sinmun* quoted the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee's protest against the persecution of the ICP, then published a similar statement issued by Pyongyang's analogous committee.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, KWP leaders had grievances of their own against Qasim. In 1960, the Iraqi authorities invited not only a DPRK delegation to the anniversary of the "July 14 Revolution" but also a South Korean delegation. Although the Iraqi government did not conclude any agreement with the South Koreans, the latter's presence greatly annoyed the North Korean delegates, who did their best to convince their hosts not to deal with the ROK.<sup>59</sup>

54. Franzén, *Red Star over Iraq*, pp. 112–116.

55. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 13 March 1960, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1945–1964, 3. doboz, 5/bc, 002979/1960; Hungarian Embassy to the USSR, Report, 20 July 1960, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1945–1964, 3. doboz, 5/ca, 005522/1960; and U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), "The Iraq Communist Party and the Question of Legalization," Report, 8 March 1961, in CIA Electronic Reading Room (CERR), CIA-RDP78-00915R001300180001-7. This and all subsequently cited CERR documents are available at <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/home>.

56. "Vor der Gründung geplatzt," *Neues Deutschland*, 31 January 1960, p. 7; and "Volkseinheitspartei Iraks nicht zugelassen," *Neues Deutschland*, 25 February 1960, p. 7.

57. "Irak'ü kongsandangüi chojige taehan shinch'önggwa kwallyönhan Chak'i K'airiüi söngmyöng," *Rodong sinmun*, 23 March 1960, p. 4 (translated by Peter Ward).

58. "Soryönüi sahoe tanch'edüri Irak'üaegukhadüre taehan pak'aerül chungjishik'il kösül Irak'ü susangesö yogu," *Rodong sinmun*, 14 February 1961, p. 6; and "Uri nara sahoe tanch'edüresö Irak'ü Konghwaguk susangege chönmun," *Rodong sinmun*, 16 February 1961, p. 3 (both articles translated by Peter Ward).

59. Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Report, 21 November 1960, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1945–1964, 5. doboz, 5/bc, 008454/1960.

These disputes seem to have at least partially found reflection in *Rodong sinmun*, which after publishing as many as 52 articles on Iraq in 1958 and 66 in 1959, made only a single brief reference to the country in April–May 1960 and carried no articles about it at all from August to December. Fortunately for the DPRK, neither Qasim nor the Kremlin wanted to escalate the ICP controversy to such an extent that it would have seriously damaged Soviet-Iraqi cooperation.<sup>60</sup> Thanks to the efforts of Soviet diplomacy, at the UN meetings held on 12 April 1961 and 13 December 1961, the Iraqi delegation—unlike the other Arab states—voted in favor of inviting both the DPRK and the ROK to the discussion of the Korean question.<sup>61</sup>

The process of Iraqi-DPRK rapprochement, less than smooth as it was, inevitably overshadowed Iran in North Korean press coverage, all the more so because Iran remained inaccessible to North Korean diplomats. Reversing the pre-1958 trend, *Rodong sinmun* consistently carried fewer articles on Iran (1958: six; 1959: nine; 1960: two; 1961: five; 1962: one; 1963: one) than on Iraq (1958: 52; 1959: 66; 1960: eleven; 1961: twelve; 1962: 23; 1963: 22). Starting in 1960, the number of Iran-related articles underwent a particularly conspicuous decline, which had much in common with China's temporary loss of interest in Middle Eastern affairs (1960–1963) but stood in a glaring contrast to the keen attention *Neues Deutschland* continued to pay to Iranian politics.<sup>62</sup> For instance, the East German newspaper covered both the student protests of January–February 1962 and the uprising of June 1963, whereas *Rodong sinmun* ignored both events.<sup>63</sup> Judging from these patterns, North Korea's flagging interest in Iran was a symptom of its growing independence from the USSR (to which East Germany remained firmly loyal). In 1958–1959, *Rodong sinmun*'s Iran-related articles had explicitly reflected the Kremlin's concerns about U.S.-Iranian military cooperation, but in 1960 North Korean officials seem to have concluded that they no longer had to

60. Hungarian Embassy to the USSR, Report, 20 July 1960, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1945–1964, 3. doboz, 5/ca, 005522/1960; and Oles M. Smolansky and Bettie M. Smolansky, *The USSR and Iraq: The Soviet Quest for Influence* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 16.

61. "Journal of Soviet Ambassador in the DPRK A.M. Puzanov for 7 December 1960," Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (AVP RF), Fond 0102, Opis' 16, Delo 7, Llisty 172–200, trans. by Gary Goldberg, in Woodrow Wilson Center Digital Archive, Doc. No. 116143; *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1960* (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information, 1961), p. 168; and *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1961* (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information, 1963), p. 137.

62. Shichor, *The Middle East in China's Foreign Policy*, p. 97.

63. Davoud Norouzi, "Teheraner Studenten stürmen gegen den Pfauenthron," *Neues Deutschland*, 6 February 1962, p. 5; and "100 Tote bei Unruhen," *Neues Deutschland*, 15 June 1963, p. 5.

devote a large number of articles to this faraway and inaccessible country regardless of whether it had attracted *Pravda's* attention.

Nor did KWP leaders make any notable effort to exploit the deterioration of Iran-Iraq relations. Since May 1959, the Qasim regime and the Iranian government had been increasingly at odds over such matters as Iranian navigation rights on the Shatt al-Arab (a river constituting the southern section of the Iran-Iraq boundary) and other territorial issues. By December 1959, the escalating conflict provided an opportunity for the USSR to make further inroads in Iraq, as it readily supplied Baghdad with torpedo boats to patrol the disputed waters.<sup>64</sup> Still, *Rodong sinmun* did not devote any articles to the Iraqi-Iranian conflict, either in 1959 or in 1961–1962 (when Baghdad clashed with Tehran over Qasim's territorial claim to Kuwait and Iran's covert support to the Kurdish insurgency in Iraq).<sup>65</sup>

North Korean leaders seem to have taken this stance on the grounds that a rift between Iraq and another Middle Eastern state was of less importance and ideologically less useful than a conflict between Baghdad and the Western powers. For instance, *Rodong sinmun* made no comment on Qasim's irredentist claim against Kuwait (25 June 1961)—which encountered strong opposition not only from Kuwait and Iran but also from Nasser—until 6 July, and then it directed its criticism against Britain's military "interference" in the Iraqi-Kuwaiti dispute, instead of siding with either Qasim or Nasser.<sup>66</sup> Pyongyang's position was effectively patterned on the similarly evasive attitude that the USSR and China adopted toward the crisis.<sup>67</sup> Notably, *Rodong sinmun's* 6 July article was published two days after *Renmin ribao* made an authoritative statement on the dispute: "On the question of the sovereignty of Kuwait, there exist different views among the Arab countries," but "any

64. CIA, "Central Intelligence Bulletin: Daily Brief," 18 December 1959, in CERR, C03007362; and CIA, "The Dispute over the Shatt al-Arab," Intelligence Report, 22 January 1960, in CERR, CIA-RDP08C01297R000600010049-4.

65. On Iranian-Iraqi friction over Kuwait and the Kurds, see Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 1 July 1961, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1945–1964, 3. doboz, 5/bf, 005692/1961; Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 25 September 1961, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1945–1964, 3. doboz, 5/ca, 006687/1/1961; and Edgar O'Ballance, *The Kurdish Struggle 1920–94* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), p. 52.

66. "K'uweit'üüi sat'ae taehan muryök kansöbül chungjihara," *Rodong sinmun*, 6 July 1961, p. 4 (translated by Peter Ward). On Nasser's opposition to Qasim's territorial claim, see Nutting, *Nasser*, pp. 283–285.

67. On Soviet criticism of Britain and the United States over Kuwait, see "Konflikt um Kuwait spitzt sich zu," *Neues Deutschland*, 2 July 1961, p. 7.

conflict among the Arab countries can only be to the advantage of imperialist intervention and aggression.”<sup>68</sup>

This evasive and opportunistic attitude toward Middle Eastern political altercations may have prevented KWP leaders from exploiting Qasim’s conflict with Iran but ultimately enabled them to retain a foothold in Iraq even after Qasim’s downfall, when the violent takeover of the Ba’ath Party (8–10 February 1963) triggered an increasingly acrimonious dispute between Baghdad and Moscow. The Communist powers were initially willing to come to terms with the regime change in Iraq, recognizing the new administration one by one (USSR: 11 February; China: 12 February; North Korea: 13 February).<sup>69</sup> *Rodong sinmun* even published a critical assessment of Qasim’s post-1960 policies, pointing out that his campaign against the ICP had undermined the stability of his regime. At the same time, the article, unlike the Soviet-bloc diplomats in Baghdad, held the Kurds, rather than Qasim, responsible for the outbreak of the First Iraqi-Kurdish War (1961–1970)—a view foreshadowing North Korea’s reluctance to criticize the anti-Kurdish policies of the successive Ba’athist regimes (1963, 1968–2003).<sup>70</sup>

Still, the Ba’ath Party’s brutal retaliation for the ICP’s pro-Qasim actions during the coup was bound to displease the Communist powers. As early as 16 February, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) issued a protest against the persecution of the ICP.<sup>71</sup> By mid-1963, Soviet-Iraqi relations had become so hostile that the Soviet Peace Committee appealed to the UN Security Council against the Ba’athists’ “genocidal” war against the Kurds.<sup>72</sup> In contrast, Chinese protests, which started only on 22 February, remained confined to the sphere of mass organizations and effectively ceased by mid-March.<sup>73</sup> In July, China’s acquiescence in

68. “Stop British Armed Intervention against Kuwait! Says *Jen-min Jih-pao*,” *New China News Agency* (Beijing), 4 July 1961, quoted in *Survey of China Mainland Press* (U.S. Consulate General in Hong Kong), No. 2534 (11 July 1961), p. 31.

69. “UdSSR erkennt an,” *Neues Deutschland*, 12 February 1963, p. 5; Mohamed Bin Huwaidin, *China’s Relations with Arabia and the Gulf, 1949–1999* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 139; and “Pak Söngch’öl oemusang Irak’ü Konghwaguk oesangege chönmun (urinarajöngbuga Irak’ü Konghwaguk shinjöngburül sünginhagiroy kyölchöngghan kötkwa kwallyönhayö),” *Rodong sinmun*, 14 February 1963, p. 1.

70. “Kunsa chöngbyöni irönan Irak’ü,” *Rodong sinmun*, 12 February 1963, p. 3 (translated by Peter Ward). On Soviet-bloc views about Qasim’s responsibility for the Kurdish insurgency, see Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 1 November 1961, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1945–1964, 3. doboz, 5/ca, 006687/2/1961.

71. “ZK der KPdSU brandmarkt Terror in Irak,” *Neues Deutschland*, 17 February 1963, p. 7.

72. “Wieder irakische Patrioten ermordet,” *Neues Deutschland*, 25 June 1963, p. 7.

73. See, among others, “ACFTU Condemns Iraqi Persecution of Communists,” *New China News Agency*, 22 February 1963, quoted in *Survey of China Mainland Press*, No. 2927 (U.S. Consulate

Ba'athist rule was clearly expressed by the attendance of high-ranking Chinese leaders at the Iraqi ambassador's reception, an event the Soviet-bloc diplomats demonstratively boycotted. China was evidently more interested in exploiting the Soviet-Iraqi conflict than in championing the cause of the pro-Soviet ICP.<sup>74</sup>

North Korea's attitude toward the Ba'ath regime was far closer to the PRC's than to Moscow's. From 23 February to 20 March, *Rodong sinmun* carried six articles about the persecution of Iraqi Communists, but these protests were issued by North Korean social organizations rather than the party or state leadership.<sup>75</sup> In April–August 1963, the newspaper pointedly ignored Iraq, then abruptly changed tack and devoted as many as five articles (including an illustrated one) to the Iraqi ambassador to Beijing, who visited North Korea to attend the celebrations of the DPRK's fifteenth anniversary and was received with evident hospitality by KWP leaders (including Kim Il-Sung).<sup>76</sup> Anxious to retain a foothold in Iraq, the North Koreans decided to make their peace with the Ba'ath regime instead of confronting it in the same way the Soviet-bloc states had and thus exposing themselves to the same kind of retaliatory measures the latter encountered. In July 1963, Iraqi authorities broke diplomatic relations with Mongolia and expelled six East European diplomats.<sup>77</sup>

North Korean leaders had every reason to tread with caution. They would not have been able to offset a deterioration of their relations with Iraq by reaching out to Iran in the same way the Soviet Union did. For instance, in July 1963 the USSR undertook to assist Tehran in the construction of two dams and a hydropower station, and in November 1963 Leonid Brezhnev (then the head of the USSR Supreme Soviet) visited Iran and invited the Shah

General in Hong Kong, 27 February 1963), p. 29; and “*Jen-min Jih-pao* Commentator Protests against Atrocities in Iraq,” *New China News Agency*, 15 March 1963, quoted in *Survey of China Mainland Press*, No. 2942 (U.S. Consulate General in Hong Kong, 20 March 1963), p. 27.

74. Shichor, *The Middle East in China's Foreign Policy*, p. 104; and “Deterioration Continues in Soviet-Iraqi Relations,” in *Sino-Soviet Affairs* (Washington, DC: Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, September 1963), pp. 5–7, in TNAUK, PRO FO 371 171525 001.

75. See, among others, “Irak'ü chöngbunün Irak'ü aegukchadülghwa p'yöngghwa t'usadüre taehan piböpchögin t'anap choch'irül chükshi ch'örhoehara!,” *Rodong sinmun*, 23 February 1963, p. 3; and “Irak'ü kongsandangwöndüre taehan t'anabül chungjihara,” *Rodong sinmun*, 20 March 1963, p. 3 (both articles translated by Peter Ward).

76. See, inter alia, “Konghwaguk ch'anggön 15chunyön kyöngch'uk haengsae ch'amgahal Irak'ü Konghwaguk chöngbu ch'insön taep'yodoch'ak,” *Rodong sinmun*, 3 September 1963, p. 1 (translated by Peter Ward).

77. “Deterioration Continues in Soviet-Iraqi Relations,” p. 6.

to visit the Soviet Union.<sup>78</sup> In contrast, North Korea found itself increasingly at odds with Iran. At the UN meeting of 11 December 1962, no Middle Eastern state except Iran voted against a draft resolution on inviting both Koreas to the debate—Iraq and five other Arab states expressed support for the proposal, and two hitherto pro-ROK Arab countries switched to abstention.<sup>79</sup> The Arab states seem to have reacted to the recent establishment of Israeli–South Korean diplomatic relations (9 April 1962), but Iran, having granted recognition both to Israel (24 July 1960) and the ROK (23 October 1962), did not feel compelled to follow suit.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, on 13 December 1963 only Iran and Israel voted for a U.S.-sponsored UN resolution on the Korean question—every other Middle Eastern state preferred to abstain.<sup>81</sup>

The Iran-DPRK rift was further deepened by the fact that North Korea's partners in the Middle East were at loggerheads with Tehran's regional allies. During the North Yemen Civil War (1962–1970), Iran and South Korea cooperated with Saudi Arabia (which actively supported the royalist forces) and refused to grant recognition to the Egyptian-backed Yemeni Arab Republic (YAR). In contrast, in October 1962 KWP leaders readily recognized the YAR—a step that helped North Korea to establish full diplomatic relations with Nasser's Egypt (which had broken relations with Iran in 1960).<sup>82</sup>

The precariousness of North Korea's presence in the region was brought into sharp relief by a new Iraqi coup in November 1963 that replaced the Ba'ath regime with a military junta headed by Abdul Salam Arif and Abdul Rahman Arif. Because of this unexpected regime change, North Korea's readiness to reach a *modus vivendi* with Ba'ath leaders became a potential liability in the course of barely two months. Although Soviet leaders had every reason to regard the coup as a turn for the better (a view that *Isvestiya* expressed as early as 14 November), the North Koreans, having just reached out to the

78. "Sowjetunion unterstützt Iran," *Neues Deutschland*, 29 July 1963, p. 2; and "Breshnew: Gute Beziehungen zu Iran," *Neues Deutschland*, 19 November 1963, p. 5.

79. *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1962* (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information, 1964), p. 123.

80. Guy Podoler, "Enter the 'Far East': Korean Culture in Early South Korea-Israel Relations," *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol. 20, No. 5 (2014), p. 524; and Azad, *Koreans in the Persian Gulf*, p. 21.

81. *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1963* (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information, 1965), p. 40.

82. Hungarian Embassy to Egypt, Report, 7 January 1963, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Yemen, Top Secret Documents, 1945–1964, 1, doboz, IV-10, 00434/1963; "Yemen Arap Konghwaguk susang Abüdulla Sallal kak'a (Chosön Minjujuüi Inmin Konghwaguk naegak susang Kim Ilsöng)," *Rodong sinmun*, 15 October 1962, p. 1; Moon, "Between Ideology and Interest," p. 383; and Abdeldayem M. Mubarez, "Foreign Policy Making in the Yemen Arab Republic Civil War Period: A Study of Four Major Decisions," Ph.D. Diss, London School of Economics and Political Science, 1991, pp. 41, 230.

Ba'ath, were less eager to welcome it. *Rodong sinmun* waited until 20 November to publish a single brief article about the coup, describing it in a studiously neutral tone.<sup>83</sup> The North Koreans seem to have tried to maintain their delicate foothold in Iraq no matter who happened to be in charge in volatile Baghdad. In certain respects, this approach paid off insofar as they managed to forge ties with the Arif regime, too. They signed a cultural exchange plan (January 1964) and hosted an Iraqi cultural delegation (June 1964) and a reporters' delegation (September–October 1964).<sup>84</sup> Still, the meagerness of these interactions indicates that no major breakthrough had yet occurred in Iraqi-DPRK relations. On the contrary, at the UN General Assembly session of 9 December 1963 the Iraqi delegation abstained from voting on a draft resolution to invite both Koreas, thus temporarily reversing the supportive attitude that Qasim had adopted in 1961–1962.<sup>85</sup>

The complicated nature of the Iraqi political situation may be gauged from the fact that, in February 1965, the post-Ba'athist authorities decided to celebrate 8 February (the date of the Ba'ath's 1963 coup) as a national holiday and reprimanded the Communist diplomats (including the representative of the North Korean trade office) who refused to offer their felicitations.<sup>86</sup> Throughout 1965, the foreign policies of the successive Iraqi governments were strongly influenced by their determination to suppress the Kurdish insurgency through military force. They adopted a reserved and sometimes critical attitude toward the USSR (which suspended its arms supplies in protest against the Kurdish war), sought to cooperate with Western countries (from which they obtained modern arms), and strove to achieve a rapprochement with the Iranian government (which they tried to dissuade from assisting the Kurds).<sup>87</sup> Under such unfavorable conditions, Iraqi-DPRK cooperation remained confined to such forms as a cultural exchange plan (October 1965)

83. "Auseinandersetzen in Bagdad," *Neues Deutschland*, 15 November 1963, p. 8; and "Irak'üesö k'üt'et'a palsang," *Rodong sinmun*, 20 November 1963, p. 4 (translated by Peter Ward).

84. "Uri narawa Irak'ü kanüü 1963–1964nyöndo munhwa kyoryu kyehoeksö choin," *Rodong sinmun*, 26 January 1964, p. 4; "Irak'ü kyoyung munhwa taep'yodan toch'ak," *Rodong sinmun*, 2 June 1964, p. 3; and "Irak'ü kija taep'yodan P'yoŋgyange toch'ak," *Rodong sinmun*, 23 September 1964, p. 3.

85. *Yearbook of the United Nations*, 1963, p. 39.

86. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 17 February 1965, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1965, 59. doboz, IV-1, 002241/1965.

87. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 3 May 1965, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1965, 59. doboz, 00711/2/1965; Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 6 November 1965, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1965, 59. doboz, 0034614/14/1965; and Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 7 November 1965, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1965, 59. doboz, 00922/6/1965.



and a trade agreement (December 1965).<sup>88</sup> Still, at the UN meeting of 20 December 1965 the Iraqi delegation resumed its support for the idea of inviting both Koreas.<sup>89</sup>

In the spring of 1966, Iraqi leaders switched to a new approach. By expressing readiness to seek a negotiated solution to the Kurdish conflict, they managed to persuade the USSR to resume its arms supplies to Baghdad, whereupon Iraq's relations with the Soviet bloc underwent a marked improvement. This favorable atmosphere may have facilitated the efforts of a North Korean delegation headed by Kang Ryang'uk (the vice chair of the Supreme People's Assembly's Presidium) that visited Iraq in July 1966. The host authorities agreed to upgrade the North Korean trade office in Baghdad to a consulate general (a status that East Germany had achieved as early as June 1962).<sup>90</sup>

At the UN meetings held in September and December 1966, Iraq inched closer to the DPRK by supporting the Soviet position on key questions (invitation of both Koreas, withdrawal of all foreign forces from the ROK, and dissolution of the UN Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea, the UNCURK), but, unlike Syria and Algeria, it continued to abstain on two other issues (placing the Korean question on the agenda and UNCURK's report). In contrast, Iran consistently supported the U.S. position on all four questions, with one minor and partial exception: on the issue of invitations, the Iranian delegation voted for the U.S. draft resolution, but instead of voting against the Soviet-supported proposal to invite both Koreas (as Israel did) it preferred to abstain.<sup>91</sup> This symbolic gesture indicated that the gradual improvement of relations between Iran and the Soviet bloc—such as the Shah's visits in the USSR (June–July 1965) and a few East European countries (September 1966)—induced the Iranian government to soften its stance vis-à-vis Moscow over the Korean question. Notably, in April 1967 a North Korean delegation headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Hō Sōktae asked the Hungarian Foreign Ministry to provide active support to the DPRK's diplomatic initiatives, whereupon their hosts promised that they would try to sway Iran to adopt a more favorable attitude toward North Korea. At the same

88. "Uri narawa Irak'ū kane 1965–1966nyōndo munhwa kyoryu kyehoeksō choin," *Rodong simmun*, 7 October 1965, p. 4; and Azad, *Koreans in the Persian Gulf*, p. 76.

89. *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1965* (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information, 1967), p. 184.

90. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 6 February 1967, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1967, 47. doboz, 001377/1967; and "DDR-Generalkonsulat in Irak," *Neues Deutschland*, 18 June 1962, p. 2.

91. *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1966* (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information, 1968), p. 143–145.

time, the meagerness of Iran's gesture also revealed how limited the benefits were that North Korea could draw from the Soviet-Iranian rapprochement.<sup>92</sup> Under such conditions, *Rodong sinmun* continued to ignore Iran.

In the wake of the disastrous Six-Day War (5–10 June 1967), Iraq's public attitude toward the Korean question underwent a drastic change. At the UN meetings held in October–November 1967, the Iraqi delegation actively supported the Soviet position on every Korea-related dispute, including questions on which it had abstained in earlier years. Because Iraq, unlike front-line Egypt and Syria, had not received economic or military aid from North Korea in the aftermath of the 1967 war, this sudden policy shift cannot be easily explained within the framework of bilateral relations. North Korea's vocal solidarity with the Arab side and South Korea's perceived pro-Israel stance must have been an important factor (as suggested by Gills). In the fall of 1967, when the DPRK's deputy consul general asked Iraqi Foreign Minister Ismail Khairallah whether the Iraqi authorities intended to receive a South Korean goodwill delegation touring the Middle East, Khairallah responded with an emphatic “no” on the grounds that “during the Israeli aggression, the South Korean government showed an unfriendly attitude toward the collective Arab struggle.” Still, the pro-Western Arab states (Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, and the Kingdom of Libya) continued to abstain during UN votes on Korea, and Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Kuwait were willing to receive the same South Korean delegation to which Iraq denied entry.<sup>93</sup>

In all probability, Iraqi leaders modified their UN position to please the USSR, whose material assistance they greatly needed to recover from the unexpected defeat. As early as 7 June, the Iraqi government asked for immediate Soviet military aid, and by July the state-controlled Iraqi media were effusively praising the support provided by the Communist states.<sup>94</sup> The Six-Day War built new bridges between the militant Arab states and the Soviet bloc. The hardline Arab states severed diplomatic relations with the United States, and the Soviet-bloc countries other than Romania broke relations with Israel. Not

92. Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Memorandum, 24 April 1967, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Files unrelated to individual countries, 1967, 103. doboz, V-40, 001509/2/1967; and Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Memorandum, 27 February 1968, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iran, 1968, 44. doboz, 63, 001478/1968.

93. Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Memorandum, 12 October 1967, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j South Korea, 1967, 61. doboz, 81, 003977/1967; Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 29 November 1967, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j South Korea, 1967, 61. doboz, 81, 003977/1/1967; *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1967* (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information, 1969), pp. 148–150; and Gills, *Korea versus Korea*, pp. 114, 164.

94. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 22 June 1967, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1967, 47. doboz, 62–42, 003395/1967; and Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 13 July 1967, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1967, 47. doboz, 62–221, 001374/7/1967.

only Iraq but also Egypt, Syria, and Algeria adopted a consistently pro-Soviet stand on the Korean question, and they also offered facilities to the Soviet navy. In contrast, no Middle Eastern states other than Iran and Israel gave consistent support to the U.S. position on Korea.<sup>95</sup>

The post-Six-Day War shift in Iraq's foreign policy also enabled North Korea to establish ambassadorial relations with Iraq. The official date of this act (30 January 1968) reveals that it was carried out by the relatively non-ideological administration of Abdul Rahman Arif (16 April 1966–17 July 1968), rather than by the radical Ba'ath leaders who deposed him half a year later (as Shirzad Azad erroneously claims).<sup>96</sup> Once again, the broader diplomatic context of the event needs to be taken into consideration. Iraq, having broken diplomatic relations with Mongolia in 1963, restored ties at the ambassadorial level in November 1967, shortly before establishing an analogous relationship with the DPRK. In March 1968, the Hungarian embassy in Baghdad reported that in recent months the Iraqi government had dispatched ambassadors to nearly every Soviet-bloc country and opened a consulate general in East Berlin. Ambassadorial relations with North Vietnam were established a few days before the Ba'athist coup of 17 July 1968.<sup>97</sup> Thus, the act that crowned the decade-long process of Iraqi-DPRK rapprochement cannot be attributed solely to North Korea's own efforts but must also be credited to Iraq's desire to broaden its institutional contacts with as many Communist countries as possible.

### **Benefiting from the Iraq-Iran Conflict: The DPRK and the Ba'ath Regime, 1968–1972**

The Ba'athist takeover in Baghdad gave an additional impetus to Iraqi–North Korean collaboration. Unlike the 1963 Ba'ath regime, the new leaders opted for a course of enhanced cooperation with the Soviet bloc as early as August 1968 (when they approved of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia), not least because both the pro-American Iranian monarchy and numerous

95. Saïd K. Aburish, *Nasser: The Last Arab* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), p. 292; and *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1967*, pp. 148–150.

96. Moon, "Between Ideology and Interest," p. 383; and Azad, *Koreans in the Persian Gulf*, p. 76.

97. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 30 November 1967, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k Iraq, 1967, 20. doboz, 2623/5/1967; Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 13 March 1968, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 45. doboz, 62-2, 001006/1/1968; Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Memorandum, 20 July 1968, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1968, 45. doboz, 62-2, 002947/1/1968; and "Minister Sölle empfing irakischen Generalkonsul," *Neues Deutschland*, 21 December 1967, p. 2.

Arab states—Egypt, Syria, and Algeria—adopted a reserved and distrustful attitude toward Iraq.<sup>98</sup> The process of Iran-Iraq rapprochement initiated by Arif in 1966 abruptly ground to a halt, and numerous armed border incidents took place. Seeking to disrupt Iran’s support to the Kurds, the Ba’ath regime in January–February 1969 held show trials whose Jewish and “reactionary” defendants were convicted (and publicly executed) on spurious charges of espionage for the United States, Israel, and Iran, whereupon in April the Iranian government abrogated the 1937 Iraq-Iran treaty over the Shatt al-Arab.<sup>99</sup> In response, Ba’ath leaders further broadened their contacts with the Soviet bloc. On 10 May 1969, they established ambassadorial relations with East Germany, coaxing the latter into making a public statement that condemned Iran’s hostile acts against Iraq (for which the Iranian government promptly retaliated by halting all trade relations with East Germany).<sup>100</sup>

North Korean leaders must have found these developments advantageous to their interests. In the first five months of 1969, *Rodong sinmun* carried as many as six articles about the Ba’ath Party’s repressive measures against the alleged U.S. and Israeli spies (8 January, 30–31 January, 2 February, 22 April, 24 May), taking a laudatory tone that stood in sharp contrast to the single laconic article that *Neues Deutschland* published about the spy hunt and the critical comments that various Arab newspapers (e.g., Egypt’s semi-official *Al-Ahram*) made on the public hangings.<sup>101</sup> In an interview given to Iraq’s state-run news agency, Kim Il-Sung described the hangings as a “perfectly correct action,” declaring: “You must have no mercy on imperialist spies who menace your

98. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 26 September 1968, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1968, 45. doboz, 62, 002947/9/1968; and Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 18 November 1968, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1968, 45. doboz, 62-1, 001008/1/1968.

99. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 27 January 1969, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1969, 46. doboz, 62-1, 001281/1/1969; Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 27 January 1969, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1969, 46. doboz, 62-2, 001280/1/1969; and Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 2 April 1969, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1969, 46. doboz, 62-1, 001280/3/1969.

100. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 14 May 1969, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1969, 46. doboz, 62-1, 001282/2/1969; “Kommuniqué DDR-Irak,” *Neues Deutschland*, 11 May 1969, p. 2; and British Embassy to Tehran to the Foreign Office, 4 November 1971, in TNAUK, FCO 33 001346 001.

101. See, among others, “Irak’üesö p’agoehwaltongül kamhaengharyödön Mijeüi apchabi Isürael kanch’ömnömdürül chaep’an,” *Rodong sinmun*, 8 January 1969, p. 5; “Irak’üesö Mijeüi kanch’öptürül tanhohi ch’ödan,” *Rodong sinmun*, 30 January 1969, p. 4; “Mijungangjögöngbogugüi kanch’öbaktangdüre taehan Irak’üjögngbuüi chunömhän chingböl,” *Rodong sinmun*, 31 January 1969, p. 4 (all three articles translated by Hanna Kim); “Spione in Irak zum Tode verurteilt,” *Neues Deutschland*, 21 February 1969, p. 7; and “Moscow Says Executions Were ‘Justified’ While Arab World Takes Dim View of Spectacle,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin*, Vol. 36, No. 23 (3 February 1969), p. 2.

country's sovereignty and security."<sup>102</sup> By North Korean standards, public executions were perfectly *comme il faut* as long as they expressed Iraq's readiness to confront "American imperialism."

The DPRK benefited from Iraq's worsening relations with Iran and the Western powers and Iraq's rapprochement with the Soviet bloc. In August 1969, Iraq joined the Arab states that cosponsored a Soviet-backed draft resolution calling for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea (a gesture that only Algeria and Syria had made in 1966–1968). On 3 October 1969, an Iraqi UN delegate mentioned Korea in his opening speech for the first time, discussing it together with the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Iran-Iraq dispute, the Vietnam War, and East Germany.<sup>103</sup> In previous years, Iraqi opening speeches, focused as they were on Israel and other Middle East problems, consistently ignored Korea. As late as October 1968 (i.e., after the Ba'ath takeover), the Iraqi delegation linked the problem of Palestine only with Vietnam and Africa, making no reference to Korea, Iran, or Germany.<sup>104</sup>

Despite the significant (and, from North Korea's perspective, advantageous) role that the Iran-Iraq conflict played in Baghdad's post-1968 policy shift, *Rodong sinmun* paid peculiarly little, if any, attention to it. Of the six articles about the alleged espionage against Iraq, only two mentioned Iran's involvement, and even these brief references targeted the U.S. consulate in Abadan (30 January) and the U.S. military forces stationed in Iran (2 February), rather than the Iranian government.<sup>105</sup> Although the first Iraqi trials did single out Israel and the United States as the prime culprits, *Rodong sinmun*'s exclusive focus on the United States and Israel persisted as late as 24 May; that is, after the Iraqi authorities had staged new spy trials explicitly directed against Iran. For instance, five people were sentenced to death on 12 May 1969 for spying for Iranian and Israeli intelligence.<sup>106</sup> Nor did *Rodong sinmun* cover the Iran-Iraq dispute over Tehran's unilateral abrogation of the 1937 treaty or publish any articles specifically about Iran throughout 1969.

102. Kim Il-Sung, "Answers to Questions Raised by Taha al-Basri, Assistant Director General of the Iraqi News Agency," 1 July 1969, in Kim-Il Sung, *Works*, Vol. 24 (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1986), pp. 80–81.

103. United Nations General Assembly, 24th Session, 1777th Plenary Meeting, 3 October 1969, Official Records, A/PV.1777, pp. 8–11.

104. United Nations General Assembly, 23rd Session, 1691st Plenary Meeting, 11 October 1968, Official Records, A/PV.1691, p. 3.

105. "Irak'üesö Mijeüi kanch'öptürül," p. 4; and "Irak'üesö Mijeüi kanch'öptüre taehan saeroun chaep'anül kaeshi," *Rodong sinmun*, 2 February 1969, p. 4 (both articles translated by Hanna Kim).

106. "Spies' Given Death Penalty," *Canberra Times*, 14 May 1969, p. 5; and "Irak'üesö chegukchuuüijadürüi chojonghae kanch'öp'aengwirül kamaengan panhyöngmyöngbunjadürül ch'ödan," *Rodong sinmun*, 24 May 1969, p. 5 (translated by Hanna Kim).

Because North Korea lacked any contacts with Iran and the latter's voting record in the UN was consistently at odds with the DPRK's interests, North Korea's conspicuous silence cannot be attributed to the sort of considerations that motivated Soviet neutrality on the Shatt al-Arab dispute. Soviet leaders had a stake in remaining on good terms with both Baghdad and Tehran, whereas North Korea had little to lose by confronting Iran.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, the North Koreans must have been dismayed by Iran's decision to sign a treaty of friendship with South Korea on 5 May 1969.<sup>108</sup> Even so, the North Koreans refrained from openly taking sides in the Iran-Iraq conflict, probably on the grounds that a recurrent territorial dispute between Iraq and another Middle Eastern country, like the Iraqi-Kuwaiti dispute of 1961, was ideologically less useful and of lower strategic importance than a conflict between Baghdad and the "main enemy": the United States. The diversity of Arab reactions to the Shatt al-Arab dispute also militated in favor of a cautious approach, as Syria's pro-Iraq stance stood in marked contrast to Egypt's impartial attitude.<sup>109</sup>

North Korea's determination to avoid taking sides in the Iran-Iraq dispute manifested itself in an especially clear form in the aftermath of a failed Iraqi coup attempt in which the Iranian government was deeply involved (20–21 January 1970). Ba'ath leaders did their best to expose Iran's role in the plot, expelling the Iranian ambassador and four other diplomats and closing the Iranian consulates in Baghdad, Karbala, and Basra.<sup>110</sup> In contrast, the two articles *Rodong sinmun* published about the crushed plot (23–24 January 1970) expressed support for the Iraqi government's punitive measures but made no reference to Iran; instead, they singled out the United States, Israel, and West Germany as the powers conspiring against the "anti-imperialist" Iraqi regime.<sup>111</sup> *Rodong sinmun's* silence on Iran's role appears particularly conspicuous if compared with *Neues Deutschland's* attitude. On 22–30 January 1970, the East German newspaper devoted as many as eight articles to the plot.

107. On Soviet attitudes toward the Shatt al-Arab dispute, see Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Memorandum, 23 May 1969, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1969, 46. doboz, 62-1, 001281/3/1969.

108. "S. Korea, Iran Sign Treaty," *Canberra Times*, 6 May 1969, p. 7.

109. Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran: A Developing State in a Zone of Great-Power Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 166.

110. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 19 February 1970, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1970, 43. doboz, 62, 00947/2/1970; and Bryan R. Gibson, *Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds, and the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 122–123.

111. "Irak'ü inminün pandongnomdürüi majimaksogulkkaji ch'ö'chö'hi sot'anghamürossö modün panhyöngmyöngjökümmorül chonggukchöküro punswaehagoya mal," *Rodong sinmun*, 23 January 1970, p. 5; and "Irak'ü t'ükyölgunsajaep'ansoga chegukchuhüijadürüi sach'ongmit'e panjöngbuümmorül kkuminbanhyöngmyöngbunjadürül ch'öhyöng," *Rodong sinmun*, 24 January 1970, p. 5 (both articles translated by Hanna Kim).

Although the East German newspaper focused its attacks on West Germany's alleged involvement, it also enumerated many specific details about Iran's role in the conspiracy and later criticized Iran's military threats against Iraq.<sup>112</sup> Iranian diplomats promptly complained that the Soviet bloc's press reports on the incident were based exclusively on the Iraqi narrative.<sup>113</sup>

But if North Korea's attitude toward the Iran-Iraq conflict was less close to Baghdad's position than that of the Soviet-bloc states, the reverse was true as far as Israel was concerned. Fixated as the radical Ba'ath leaders were on the armed liberation of Palestine, they deplored Moscow's willingness to seek a negotiated solution to the Middle East crisis and showed a palpable preference for the Communist regimes that took an uncompromising stance vis-à-vis Israel. The Iraqis also sought to avoid entanglement in the Sino-Soviet conflict. These considerations made them especially favorably disposed toward North Korea and North Vietnam, which had a long record of armed struggle against the United States, lacked any contacts with Israel, and sought to guard their independence from both Communist giants. As such, they could be expected to provide open or tacit political support to Iraq's militant position and thus alleviate the isolation that the extremist Ba'ath leaders faced within the Arab world.<sup>114</sup> Unlike the USSR and China, the DPRK did not recognize Israel's right to exist. In July 1970, when Nasser and the Soviet Union expressed their readiness to accept a ceasefire plan proposed by U.S. Secretary of State William P. Rogers, the North Korean media did not condemn these diplomatic initiatives as explicitly as China did but pointedly ignored them. Instead, the North Koreans praised the armed struggle of the Palestinian guerrillas, both against Israel and against King Hussein during the Jordanian Civil War (16–27 September 1970).<sup>115</sup> These views were in accordance with the standpoint of the radical Ba'ath leaders, who had deplored the Rogers Plan and encouraged the Palestinian guerrillas to topple Hussein.<sup>116</sup>

112. See, among others, "Putschisten verurteilt," *Neues Deutschland*, 23 January 1970, p. 7; and "Iran auf dem Schachbrett der USA-Globalstrategen," *Neues Deutschland*, 11 February 1970, p. 7.

113. Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Memorandum, 4 February 1970, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iran, 1970, 43. doboz, 63-146, 001065/1/1970.

114. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Annual Report, 17 June 1970, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1970, 43. doboz, 62-142, 002264/1/1970.

115. Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Report, January 20, 1971, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1971, 68. doboz, 82, 001209/1971; and Moon, "Between Ideology and Interest," p. 403. On China's position, see Shichor, *The Middle East in China's Foreign Policy*, pp. 149, 176.

116. Bruce Riedel, "Fifty Years after 'Black September' in Jordan," *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (2020), p. 37.



In turn, the North Koreans evidently welcomed Iraq's decision to recognize Norodom Sihanouk's Beijing-based government-in-exile (which the DPRK recognized as early as 7 May 1970 but which the USSR declined to recognize until 1973) as the sole legal government of Cambodia. For instance, in June–July 1970 *Rodong sinmun* carried three articles on Sihanouk's meetings with the Iraqi ambassador to Pyongyang and a delegation of Iraqi journalists.<sup>117</sup> The far-reaching (but not complete) consensus between Iraqi and North Korean views was summed up in Iraqi Foreign Minister Abdul Karim al-Shaikhly's speech at the UN on 30 September 1970, which castigated “Zionist aggression,” rejected the Rogers Plan, held the United States responsible for the Jordanian Civil War, expressed unconditional support to Sihanouk and the “just struggle of the Vietnamese people,” and condemned the U.S. occupation of South Korea, but also devoted five whole paragraphs to the Iran-Iraq dispute—a theme *Rodong sinmun* continued to ignore.<sup>118</sup>

In the spring of 1971, Iraqi–North Korean cooperation reached its zenith in several respects. First, the bilateral partnership was extended to the sphere of interparty relations. In April, Iraqi leaders sent a combined delegation from the Ba'ath Party and the government to the DPRK, and on 24–31 May a KWP-government delegation headed by Vice Premier Pak Söngch'öl visited Iraq.<sup>119</sup> These mutual visits constituted a new phenomenon. From 1959 to 1968, North Korean leaders had sent only government delegations to participate in the annual celebrations of Iraq's “July 14 Revolution,” but from 1969 on they also dispatched combined party and government delegations, thus indicating their readiness to establish interparty relations with the Ba'ath.<sup>120</sup> Ba'ath leaders were similarly interested in forging such ties, though for reasons of their own. Seeking to isolate and suppress the domestic Communist movement, they forcefully insisted on establishing interparty relations with

117. See, among others, “K'ambojyagukka wönsuimyö K'ambojya minjok t'ongilchönsön wiwönjangin Norodom Shihanuk'üch'inwangi uri narae wainnün Irak'ü Konghwaguk taesarül manatta,” *Rodong sinmun*, 20 June 1970, p. 2. On North Korea's support to Sihanouk's exile government, see Balázs Szalontai, “In the Shadow of Vietnam: A New Look at North Korea's Militant Strategy, 1962–1970,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (2012), p. 162.

118. United Nations General Assembly, 25th Session, 1854th Plenary Meeting, 30 September 1970, Official Records, A/PV.1854, pp. 13–16.

119. “Chosön Rodongdang chungangwiwönhoewa Chosön Minjujuüi Inmin Konghwaguk naegesö Arap Sahoebühüngdang mit Irak'ü Konghwaguk chöngbudaep'yodanüi urinara pangmunül hwanyönghayö yönhoerül ch'aryötta,” *Rodong sinmun*, 22 April 1971, p. 1; and Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 21 June 1971, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1971, 66. doboz, 81-10, 002560/1971.

120. “Urinara tang mit chöngbudaep'yodani Irak'ü Konghwaguk taet'ongnyöngül pangmun,” *Rodong sinmun*, 23 July 1969, p. 1.

the friendly Communist regimes to dissuade the latter from maintaining contacts with the ICP.<sup>121</sup>

As far as the Soviet bloc was concerned, Iraq's efforts were only partly successful because the USSR and its satellites opted for dual-track diplomacy. For instance, the Soviet hosts of an international Communist meeting held in April 1970 invited both an ICP delegation and a Ba'ath delegation and later criticized the Iraqi regime's repressive measures against Communists.<sup>122</sup> In contrast, Chinese leaders rebuffed the Ba'ath's request to establish inter-party relations, but they also scorned the pro-Soviet ICP, from which only a small radical faction broke away to follow the Chinese line.<sup>123</sup>

Under such conditions, Ba'ath leaders probably appreciated that North Korea was closer than either the Soviet Union or China to Iraq's position on various matters. The North Koreans sought to expand their influence in Iraq by pursuing interparty cooperation with the Ba'ath Party but adopted a neglectful attitude toward the ICP (whose pro-Soviet line had little in common with their own). In 1964–1972, *Rodong sinmun* largely ignored the ICP. For instance, it did not cover the party's Second Congress (September 1970) in the same way *Pravda* and *Neues Deutschland* did.<sup>124</sup> When the KWP held its own Fifth Congress (2–13 November 1970), the North Korean press mentioned the congratulations of the ICP, but the Iraqi newspapers whose favorable comments on the congress were quoted in *Rodong sinmun* lacked any affiliation with the ICP. On the contrary, *al-Thawra* and *al-Jumhuriyya* were mouthpieces of the Ba'ath Party and the Iraqi government respectively.<sup>125</sup> These newspapers' willingness to publish North Korean propaganda materials implied a close relationship between Pyongyang and Baghdad. Ordinarily, Soviet-bloc embassies had difficulty publishing their own articles in these two North Korean dailies. Still, *Rodong sinmun*'s claims about how effusively the Iraqi press hailed Kim Il-Sung must be read with caution. The intensity of this propaganda reveals more about the vast amounts of money Pyongyang

121. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Annual Report, 17 June 1970, in MNL.

122. "Liste der Delegationen," *Neues Deutschland*, 23 April 1970, p. 3; and Francis Fukuyama, *The Soviet Union and Iraq since 1968*, RAND Note N-1524-AF (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1980), pp. 28–29.

123. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 6 February 1972, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1972, 45. doboz, 62-10, 001577/1972; and Hafizullah Emadi, "China and Iraq: Patterns of Interaction, 1960–1992," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 29, No. 53 (1994), p. 3316.

124. "Parteitag der irakischen Kommunisten," *Neues Deutschland*, 27 September 1970, p. 7.

125. *Chosŏn chungang nyŏn'gam 4 (1970–1979), K'ŏmp'yut'ŏjaryo* (Pyongyang: Chosŏn ch'ulp'anmulsuch'uripsa, 2004) (obtained and translated by Peter Ward); and "Chosŏn Rodongdang chungangwiwŏnhoe chuwiŏ chŏnch'edangwŏndŭlgwa kŭllojadŭrŭn kutke tan'gyŏltoeyŏtta," *Rodong sinmun*, 14 November 1970, p. 11 (translated by Hanna Kim).

invested in such activities than about the ideological affinities of the Iraqi newspapers. In 1970, the North Korean press secretary readily paid the *Baghdad Observer* 250–300 Iraqi dinars for the publication of a single Kim Il-Sung speech, whereas the Polish embassy could not afford to pay more than ten to fifteen dinars per article.<sup>126</sup>

Second, the mutual visits of April–May 1971 brought a sea change in North Korea's hitherto evasive and indifferent attitude toward the territorial conflict between Iraq and Iran. In the joint communiqué published on 2 June 1971, the DPRK delegation expressed its “full support” for Iraq's standpoint not only with regard to the Palestinian resistance movement and the Oman-based Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf (PFLOAG) but also with regard to the Shatt al-Arab dispute—a statement that the Hungarian embassy in Baghdad correctly interpreted as an “indirect thrust against Iran.” Actually, the two governments proved more able to reach a full consensus over the Shatt al-Arab question than over certain other issues. At a mass meeting held in Baghdad's Khuld Hall, the DPRK delegates readily joined their hosts in denouncing the Rogers Plan, but the resulting communiqué sidestepped this thorny issue, presumably because the North Koreans wanted to avoid offending the Egyptian government (which, unlike Iraq, had accepted the Rogers Plan). Because the DRPK maintained full diplomatic relations with Egypt but lacked any contacts with Iran, North Korean leaders seem to have concluded that confronting Iran carried less risk than challenging Egypt. Their extensive but still partial adaptation to Iraq's priorities was mirrored by the attitude of the Ba'ath leaders, who readily condemned “American imperialism” and the “Park Chung Hee clique” in the joint communiqué but refused to denounce Japan (as the North Korean delegation would have preferred).<sup>127</sup>

From the perspective of the Ba'ath leaders, North Korea's public endorsement of their territorial claims against Iran must have been a much-welcomed gesture, all the more so because they could not expect the Soviet-bloc countries to act likewise. During the subsequent visit of Soviet Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Novikov (16–24 June 1971), Iraqi leaders made a similar effort to persuade the Soviet delegation to condemn Iran in the joint communiqué, but Novikov rebuffed their request on the grounds that “the good relationship between the USSR and Iran was ultimately advantageous to

---

126. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 17 February 1970, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1970, 43. doboz, 62-81, 001319/1970.

127. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 21 June 1971.

Iraq's interests, too."<sup>128</sup> Thus, the support Iraq received from North Korea at Iran's expense helped the DPRK to forge a "special relationship" with the Ba'ath regime. Iraqi leaders' public statements about North Korea's economic and social achievements explicitly attributed these successes to Kim Il-Sung's *chuch'e* idea, a doctrine the Kremlin was as reluctant to praise as it was to endorse Iraq's territorial claims. Their welcoming ceremony for the DPRK delegation headed by Vice Premier and KWP Politburo member Pak Sŏngch'ŏl met the standards of a full state visit, whereas Novikov was greeted with perceptibly less pomp and ceremony.<sup>129</sup>

On 30 November 1971, the forcible Iranian seizure of the islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs (which then belonged to the newly formed United Arab Emirates, although Iran claimed them on the basis of earlier Persian ownership) brought the growing tension between Iraq and Iran to the breaking point. The Ba'ath leaders, imbued with a radical pan-Arab nationalist outlook, refused to accept any sort of foreign (British or Iranian) control over what they called the Arabian Gulf. As early as July 1971, they sought to use the issue of Iran's ambitions in the Gulf as a rallying point for inter-Arab cooperation (and thus overcome the isolation they continued to face within the Arab world).<sup>130</sup> Now, in response to the Iranian occupation of the islands, they promptly broke diplomatic relations with Tehran, and on 3 December 1971 they joined forces with Algeria, South Yemen, and Muammar al-Qadhafi's Libya to place the issue on the agenda of the UN Security Council.<sup>131</sup>

At first sight, North Korea's reaction to Iraq's new conflict with Iran seemed fully in accordance with the joint communiqué of 2 June 1971. On 28 December, *Rodong sinmun* published an article whose very title ("Egypt, Iraq, and other Arab and African countries condemned the criminal act of Iran, which occupied three islands in the Persian Gulf") expressed evident sympathy with Iraq's position.<sup>132</sup> As such, it stood in marked contrast to the

128. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 17 July 1971, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1971, 52. doboz, 62-10, 001791/4/1971.

129. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 21 June 1971; and Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 17 July 1971.

130. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 15 August 1971, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Arab states, 1971, 108. doboz, 202-10, 001253/10/1971.

131. For an overview of the crisis, see Kourosh Ahmadi, *Islands and International Politics in the Persian Gulf: Abu Musa and the Tunbs in Strategic Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 101–109.

132. "Aegeupgwa Irakeureul birotan yeoreo Arapnaradeulgwa Apeurikanaradeureseo Pereusyamanui 3gae seomeul gangjeomhan Iranui beomjoehaengwireul gyutan," *Rodong sinmun*, 28 December 1971, p. 6.

noncommittal stance that both the USSR and China adopted toward the dispute. Even though Soviet officials viewed Iran's forceful seizure of the islands as incompatible with international law, they also believed that Iran's territorial claims had merit and that Iraq's standpoint (i.e., confronting Iran over an area that had not been a part of Iraq's territory) was "of a peculiar nature."<sup>133</sup> Still, *Rodong sinmun's* article was published nearly a month after the outbreak of the crisis, whereas *Neues Deutschland* devoted two brief factual articles to the dispute as early as the first days of December.<sup>134</sup> The North Korean outlet's conspicuous delay implies that KWP leaders initially tried to dodge this thorny issue and that, when they finally took a stand against Iran, they did so under pressure from Iraq and the other radical Arab states.<sup>135</sup>

Because North Korean leaders had explicitly sided with Iraq against Iran in the joint communiqué of 2 June 1971, their conspicuous slowness in adopting a similar position only six months later may appear strange. One factor that probably influenced their attitude was that on 17 August 1971 (between the two events described above), Iran established diplomatic relations with China—a decision promptly reported by *Rodong sinmun*.<sup>136</sup> During this period, Sino-North Korean relations were perceptibly closer than Soviet-North Korean relations, and thus leaders in Pyongyang were presumably reluctant to confront a country with which their chief ally had just reached a rapprochement.<sup>137</sup> The North Koreans may have also taken into consideration that the various Arab states were by no means of one mind about how to respond to Iran's action. For instance, Egypt—a country specifically mentioned in *Rodong sinmun's* 28 December article—argued that the issue should be handled by the Arab League rather than the UN Security Council (the venue chosen by Iraq).<sup>138</sup> Having refrained from challenging Egypt in the June 1971

133. Hungarian Embassy to the USSR, Report, 16 December 1971, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Arab states, 1971, 108. doboz, 202-10, 001253/31/1971; and Mohamed Mousa Mohamed Ali Binhuwaidin, "China's Foreign Policy towards the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Region, 1949–1999," Ph.D. Diss., University of Durham, 2001, p. 350.

134. "Iran besetzte drei Golfinseln," *Neues Deutschland*, 1 December 1971, p. 7; and "Irak brach Beziehungen ab," *Neues Deutschland*, 2 December 1971, p. 7.

135. A parallel may be drawn with *Rodong sinmun's* similarly much-belated reaction to Anwar al-Sadat's 1977 visit to Israel, an attitude that reflected North Korea's delicate maneuvering between Egypt (which expected Pyongyang to welcome Sadat's initiative) and the radical Arab states (which condemned Sadat's action). See Szalontai, "Courting the 'Traitor to the Arab Cause,'" pp. 119–120.

136. "Chunggukwa Irani oegyogwan'gyerül surip," *Rodong sinmun*, 20 August 1971, p. 6.

137. Shen Zhihua and Xia Yafeng, *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong, Kim Il-sung, and Sino-North Korean Relations, 1949–1976* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), pp. 211, 223.

138. Hungarian Embassy to the USSR, Telegram, 3 December 1971, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Arab states, 1971, 108. doboz, 202-10, 001253/30/1971.

communiqué, the North Koreans probably sought to formulate a position sufficiently compatible with both Iraqi and Egyptian views.

Despite the initial procrastination, North Korea's condemnation of Iran's action seems to have reinforced Iraqi-DPRK cooperation against Iran. During Vice Premier Chŏng Chunt'aek's visit to Iraq in late February 1972, both sides showed readiness to take each other's priorities into consideration. Iraqi leaders demanded that all U.S. troops be withdrawn from South Korea, that UNCURK be dissolved, and that peaceful national unification be accomplished in the spirit of Kim Il-Sung's latest proposals. In turn, Chŏng expressed support for the Iraqi position that the Palestinian problem could not be solved by any means other than armed struggle and condemned Iran's seizure of the three Gulf islands, its unilateral abrogation of the 1937 border treaty, and its armed provocations against Iraq.<sup>139</sup>

North Korea's need for Iraq's solidarity vis-à-vis the United States and South Korea seems to have enabled the Ba'ath leaders to coax the DPRK into adopting an explicitly critical stance vis-à-vis Iran—a step that neither the USSR nor China was willing to take. During Vice President Saddam Hussein's visit to the USSR in mid-February 1972, Soviet leaders reiterated that they did not intend to develop their relations with Iraq at the expense of their cordial relationship with Iran (which Hussein depicted as an “advance base of American imperialism”), and the Chinese government went so far as to show preference for Iran over Iraq. In September 1972, the Iraqi ambassador to Beijing complained to a Hungarian colleague that China had granted a bigger loan to Iran than to Iraq.<sup>140</sup> The Ba'ath leaders' dissatisfaction with the attitude of the Communist great powers probably reinforced their determination to secure North Korea's public support against Iran.

Iraqi-DPRK cooperation against Iran may not have been confined to the sphere of propaganda. In February–May 1972, the Iranian authorities brought to trial the leaders of an armed revolutionary group known as the People's Mujahedin Organization of Iran (Mujahedin-e-Khalq, MKO), who were said to have received financial support from Iraq and guerrilla training in North Korea. The extent of direct North Korean assistance to the MKO is difficult to ascertain, but we know for sure that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which first provided guerrilla training for the Mujahedin in 1970,

139. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, April 2, 1972, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1972, 58. doboz, 10, 002160/1972.

140. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 29 March 1972, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1972, 45. doboz, 62-10, 001625/4/1972; and Hungarian Embassy to the PRC, Telegram, 7 September 1972, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1972, 45. doboz, 62-10, 001577/1/1972.

benefited from both Iraqi and North Korean support.<sup>141</sup> What is also known for certain is that in May–June 1972 a delegation of the Tudeh Party (Iran’s Communist party) visited the DPRK, where it was welcomed by Kim Il-Sung and its activities were extensively covered by *Rodong sinmun*.<sup>142</sup> In light of the illegal status of the Tudeh Party, this visit was hardly conducive to the improvement of Iranian–North Korean relations.

## A Balancing Act: North Korea between Iraq and Iran, 1972–1978

Paradoxically, North Korea’s cooperation with Iraq against South Korea and Iran hit a snag soon after it reached its zenith. When the DPRK reversed its confrontational stance toward the South Korean government and the two Koreas issued a joint declaration calling for “a great national unity . . . transcending differences in ideas, ideologies, and systems” (4 July 1972), Iraqi leaders were caught off guard. A high-ranking official of the Iraqi Foreign Ministry told a Hungarian diplomat that the declaration was potentially harmful to the Arab cause because “Western Europe might use [this precedent] to call for direct negotiations between the Arabs and Israel”—an idea patently unacceptable to the Ba’ath leaders, who did not recognize Israel’s right to exist and stressed that armed struggle was the sole appropriate method to solve the Palestinian problem.<sup>143</sup>

Worse still, North Korea’s attitude toward Iran also underwent an unexpected shift from criticism to rapprochement, thus abruptly reversing the recent trend of Iraqi–DPRK cooperation against Tehran. Once again, Pyongyang’s diplomacy seems to have taken inspiration from China’s actions. On 23 September 1972, *Rodong sinmun* reported that Iran’s Queen Farah, accompanied by Premier Amir-Abbas Hoveyda, visited the PRC, and on 26–29 September it carried three articles about the visit of an Iranian table tennis team to the DPRK.<sup>144</sup> That visit had much in common with the

141. Bermudez, *Terrorism*, p. 72; and Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1989), pp. 127–135.

142. See, among others, “Kyōnggaehanūn suryōng Kim Il-sōng dongjikkesō Iranin mindang-daep’yodanūl mannashiyōtta,” *Rodong sinmun*, 1 June 1972, p. 1.

143. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Telegram, July 1972, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1972, 59. doboz, 81-107, 00958/29/1972.

144. “Iran wanhuga Chunggukūl pangmunhagi wihae peijinge toch’ak,” *Rodong sinmun*, 23 September 1972, p. 4; and “Ch’insōnūi t’akkugyōnggi (urinara P’yōngyangshinamnyōsōnsudani Iran-amnyōsōnsudanūl kakkagirwōtta),” *Rodong sinmun*, 26 September 1972, p. 6.



Sino-American “ping-pong diplomacy” (April 1971), all the more so because this initial contact in the “neutral” sphere of sports paved the way for the establishment of political relations. Notably, the Iranian players were cordially received by Vice Premier Pak Söngch’öl—the very same leader who had visited Iraq in May 1971.<sup>145</sup>

Following the visit of the Iranian players from October 1972 to February 1973, *Rodong sinmun* published five articles about Iran’s foreign and economic policies, far fewer than the number that discussed Iraq (October 1972: ten; February 1973: twenty) and also lagging behind *Neues Deutschland*’s thirteen Iran-related articles. However, the tone of the five articles was unmistakably cordial rather than hostile. By presenting Iran as a country that maintained friendly relations with Communist states (the USSR and Romania) and sought to protect its national interests vis-à-vis the Western oil companies, the articles implied that the DPRK regarded Iran as a potentially acceptable partner rather than an “advance base of U.S. imperialism.”<sup>146</sup> Although *Rodong sinmun*’s continued preference for Iraq suggested that the North Koreans intended to broaden their relations with Iran without weakening their partnership with Iraq, the Iraqi government had little reason to welcome the DPRK’s warmer stance toward Iran at a time when Iraqi-Iranian relations remained as tense as ever. On 5 October 1972, Iraq’s UN delegate once again denounced Iran’s hostile actions—the seizure of the Gulf islands and the abrogation of the 1937 treaty—at length, only to receive a dismissive Iranian response.<sup>147</sup>

In contrast to the long and gradual process of Iraqi–North Korean rapprochement (1959–1968), Iranian–DPRK relations progressed from the first tentative contacts to the establishment of full diplomatic relations without further preliminaries. By reaching out to the Iranian ambassador in Beijing, the North Koreans took the initiative, but Iran proved just as ready to fulfill their request. On 13 April 1973, a North Korean delegation headed by Minister of Finance Kim Kyöngryon arrived in Tehran under the guise of economic discussions, and by 19 April the Iranian government had announced its decision to recognize the DPRK. The alacrity with which Iranian leaders responded to

145. “Naegang chepusang Pak Söngch’öl tongjiga Iran’akkusönsudanül mannatta,” *Rodong sinmun*, 29 September 1972, p. 2.

146. “Iran kukwangi Ssoryönül pangmunhagi wihae Mosük’übae toch’ak,” *Rodong sinmun*, 13 October 1972, p. 6; and “Iran’kukwangi chagi naraüi minjokchöngniikül suhohagi wihayö chegukchüüisökyudokchömyönhapch’ewaüi hyöpchönggihanül yön’gihaji anül üihyangül p’yoshi,” *Rodong sinmun*, 30 January 1973, p. 5.

147. United Nations General Assembly, 27th Session, 2055th Plenary Meeting, 5 October 1972, Official Records, A/PV.2055, p. 3.

North Korea's initiative is all the more remarkable insofar as they took this step in defiance of strong opposition from Seoul and Washington.<sup>148</sup> On 18 April, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Ahmad Mirfendereski gave the following response to the U.S. ambassador's objections:

In Iran's view, the situation of Korea was somewhat similar to that of Germany, the eastern part of which Iran had recently recognized. Keeping the North Koreans isolated would not serve a useful purpose; on the contrary, bringing them more fully into the diplomatic world would make them behave more responsibly.<sup>149</sup>

Iranian recognition of the DPRK seems to have been an integral part of a new Iranian policy toward countries that were divided into two parts—one Communist and the other non-Communist. In earlier decades Iran had avoided the Communist parts, but in the early 1970s Iran established diplomatic relations not only with North Korea but also with East Germany (7 December 1972) and North Vietnam (4 August 1973).<sup>150</sup> Thus, the sudden political breakthrough between North Korea and Iran—just like the establishment of Iraqi–North Korean diplomatic relations in January 1968—is only marginally attributable to the DPRK's own diplomatic efforts. Still, North Korea's short-lived rapprochement with South Korea seems to have influenced Iran's decision. The visit of the Iranian table tennis players took place a few months after the July 1972 North-South declaration, and in January 1973 Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Ali Khalatbari pointedly remarked that the establishment of contacts between the two Koreas opened the way for Iran to forge ties with North Korea.<sup>151</sup> Thus, the July 1972 declaration that had generated

---

148. U.S. Embassy in Seoul to the Secretary of State, "Iranian recognition of North Korea," Telegram, 17 April 1973, in U.S. National Archives (NARA), Central Foreign Policy Files 1973–1979, RG 59, Electronic Telegrams, 1973, Doc. No. 1973SEOUL02368; and U.S. Secretary of State to U.S. Embassy in Kathmandu, Telegram, "Arrival in Tehran of North Korean delegation and possible establishment of Iranian–North Korean diplomatic relations," 18 April 1973, in U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Central Foreign Policy Files 1973–1979, Record Group (RG) 59, Electronic Telegrams, 1973, Doc. No. 1973STATE072356. (All NARA documents cited in this article were viewed on the Access to Archival Databases website, <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/index.jsp>.) The establishment of Iranian–DPRK diplomatic relations was officially dated 15 April 1973.

149. U.S. Embassy in Tehran to the Secretary of State, "Imminent Iranian recognition of North Korea," Telegram, 18 April 1973, in NARA, Central Foreign Policy Files 1973–1979, RG 59, Electronic Telegrams, 1973, Doc. No. 1973TEHRAN02588.

150. "Iran, Österreich, Burundi und Schweden stellen diplomatische Beziehungen zur DDR her," *Neues Deutschland*, 8 December 1972, p. 1; and "Beziehungen DRV-Iran," *Neues Deutschland*, 6 August 1973, p. 7.

151. Azad, *Koreans in the Persian Gulf*, p. 73.

friction between Iraq and North Korea probably facilitated the normalization of Iranian-DPRK relations.

From North Korea's perspective, the Shah's willingness to develop cordial relations with both Koreas had advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it enabled the DPRK to gain a foothold in a hitherto inaccessible country. As early as June 1973, North Korea opened its embassy in Tehran.<sup>152</sup> On the other hand, the Iranian government's even-handedness was hardly compatible with Pyongyang's determination to isolate Seoul. For instance, Iranian leaders maintained that both Koreas should be admitted to the UN—an idea far more palatable to Park Chung Hee than to Kim Il-Sung. In sharp contrast to Iraq (which continued to sponsor pro-DPRK resolutions in the UN), Iran opposed the dissolution of UNCURK.<sup>153</sup>

North Korea therefore had good reason to stay on amicable terms with Iraq, too. Even as Kim Kyōngryon visited Tehran to establish diplomatic relations with the Iranian monarchy, North Korean leaders sent a KWP delegation headed by candidate Politburo member Yang Hyōngsōp to Syria (18–25 April) and Iraq (26 April–5 May) to conduct interparty talks with Ba'ath leaders. The North Koreans seem to have been favorably impressed by the strength and discipline of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party, the Iraqi leaders' efforts to find a political solution to the Kurdish problem, Baghdad's close cooperation with the Soviet bloc, and the recent improvement of Egyptian-Iraqi relations, though they noted that Iraqi and Syrian leaders, driven by a passionate hatred for Israel and the United States, often showed indecisiveness and uncertainty in taking concrete actions.<sup>154</sup>

Despite seeking to maintain a solid partnership with Iraq, the North Koreans evidently did not intend to adapt to Iraq's priorities in every respect. They reached out to Iran at a time when Iraqi-Iranian relations were still tense. Not until October 1973 (during the Yom Kippur War) did Iraq and Iran restore their diplomatic relations—a step facilitated by Iran's declarations of solidarity with the Arab states' struggle against Israel. The temporary improvement of Iran-Iraq relations enabled the Iraqi government to send troops to the Syrian front, but when the ceasefire of 25 October (which Baghdad

152. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

153. U.S. Embassy in Tehran to the Secretary of State, "Korea at 28th United Nations General Assembly," Telegram, 29 August 1973, in NARA, Central Foreign Policy Files 1973–1979, RG 59, Electronic Telegrams, 1973, Doc. No. 1973TEHRAN06143; and *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1973* (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information, 1976), p. 158.

154. Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Report, 10 August 1973, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k Korea, 1973, 31. Dobox, 3701, 6613-1/1973.

fiercely opposed) put an end to the war, hostilities between Iraq and Iran soon resumed and escalated.<sup>155</sup>

As early as 12 February 1974, Iraq called for an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council to consider the armed clashes that had occurred along the Iran-Iraq border since 24 January.<sup>156</sup> Following a ceasefire agreement reached on 7 March, the two states made efforts to normalize their relations, but the resurgence of Kurdish guerrilla activities in Iraq (with the active support of the Iranian government) led to new border clashes in August–September 1974 and the winter of 1974–1975.<sup>157</sup> On 26 August and then on 20 December, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry appealed for support from Communist diplomats (including the North Korean ambassador) in denouncing Iran’s hostile actions.<sup>158</sup> The Soviet Union did repeatedly urge the Shah to refrain from confrontational steps, but Iraqi leaders believed that the Soviet government, anxious to stay on good terms with Tehran, did not strive hard enough to restrain Iran.<sup>159</sup> *Neues Deutschland* carried only a few brief and factual news reports on the border clashes, which showed a subtle preference for the Iraqi narrative but stopped short of criticizing Iran.<sup>160</sup>

If the Soviet-bloc states were reluctant to get involved in the Iraq-Iran conflict, this was doubly true for North Korea. During the entire period of hostilities (January 1974–February 1975), *Rodong sinmun* failed to publish a single article on the dispute, though it did quote an Iraqi news bulletin on the Kurdish insurgency.<sup>161</sup> North Korea’s attitude was clearly expressed in an article that strongly emphasized North Korea’s solidarity with Iraq vis-à-vis

155. Hungarian Embassy to Iran, Report, 30 November 1973, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Middle East, 1973, 122. Dobož, 213-1, 00970/336/1973; and Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 5 December 1973, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Middle East, 1973, 122. Dobož, 213-1, 00970/343/1973.

156. *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1974* (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information, 1977), p. 252.

157. Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Memorandum, 29 October 1974, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1974, 52. Dobož, 62-10, 001722/13/1974; and Hungarian Embassy to Iran, Telegram, 18 December 1974, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1974, 52. Dobož, 62-10, 004984/1/1974.

158. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Telegram, 26 August 1974, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1974, 52. Dobož, 62-10, 001722/12/1974; and Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Telegram, 20 December 1974, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1974, 52. Dobož, 62-10, 004984/4/1974.

159. Hungarian Embassy to Iran, Telegram, 11 March 1974, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1974, 52. Dobož, 62-10, 001722/8/1974; and Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Telegram, 22 October 1974, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1974, 52. Dobož, 62-10, 005357/1974.

160. See, among others, “Bewaffneter Zusammenstoß an irakisch-iranischer Grenze,” *Neues Deutschland*, 12 February 1974, p. 7; and “Zwischenfall Iran-Irak,” *Neues Deutschland*, 19 December 1974, p. 7.

161. “Irak’üesö Parajanidodangüi mujangballanül chinap’an’götkwa kwallyönhan chöngbugongboga palp’yodoe’yötta,” *Rodong sinmun*, 22 May 1974, p. 5.

Israel and the United States but made no mention of Iran.<sup>162</sup> During this period, *Rodong sinmun* carried 136 articles concerning Iraq, and the number of articles about Iran stood at 66. Despite this 2-to-1 proportion, a closer examination reveals that many of the Iraq-related news reports merely summarized the pro-DPRK articles the Iraqi press had published at the instigation of the North Korean embassy—a propaganda opportunity denied to North Korean diplomats in Tehran. Factual news reports frequently praised Iraq’s economic development and periodically mentioned Iran’s interactions with various developing countries but carefully dodged any controversial themes (e.g., Iraq’s disputes with Egypt and Syria and Iran’s cooperation with the United States).<sup>163</sup>

The two events to which *Rodong sinmun* paid the closest attention offer insight into the differing nature of North Korea’s relations with the two Middle Eastern countries. In January–February 1975, the newspaper carried eleven articles about a pro-DPRK international solidarity conference held in Baghdad (thus presenting Iraq as an anti-imperialist ideological ally), whereas in November–December 1974 it devoted nine articles to the spectacular visit of Abdul Reza Pahlavi, the Shah’s half-brother, to North Korea (thus emphasizing the DPRK’s cordial state-to-state relations with the Iranian monarchy).<sup>164</sup> The combination of these articles reflected North Korea’s uneasy balancing act between Iraq and Iran.

The precarious nature of North Korea’s situation was further accentuated by the fact that its commitment to Iraq was limited not only by its cooperation with Iran (and vice versa) but also by its collaboration with other Middle Eastern states with which either Iraq or Iran was on unfriendly terms. For instance, Iraqi leaders, who pointedly told Soviet-bloc diplomats that they would be gravely disappointed if Brezhnev visited Egypt or Syria before Iraq, were probably displeased when North Korean Vice Premier Kim Yŏngju, Kim Il-Sung’s special envoy to the Middle East in April–May 1974, took a

162. “Irak’ünminüi chŏngüüüi wiöbül chökkük chijihanda,” *Rodong sinmun*, 30 October 1974, p. 6 (translated by Peter Ward).

163. See, among others, “Irak’ü nongch’onesö ch’ujindoegoinnün chön’gihwawa sudogönsöl,” *Rodong sinmu* (Pyongyang), 4 June 1974, p. 6; and “Rebanonch’ongniga Iranül pangmun,” *Rodong sinmun*, 22 June 1974, p. 6.

164. See, among others, “Chosönün öttöhan oeseüi kansöpto öpshi Chosöninminjashine üihayö t’ongiltoeyöyahanda (Irak’üesö chinhaengdoen Chosöninmin’gwaüi kukchejöngnyöndaesönghoeü-iesö ch’aet’aektoen ch’ongsönön),” *Rodong sinmun*, 25 January 1975, p. 1; and “Kyöngaeahanün suryöng Kim Ilsöng dongjikkeseö Iranjekuk hwangjedongaengül chöpköyönhashiyötta,” *Rodong sinmun*, 24 November 1974, p. 1.

Cairo-Damascus-Baghdad route.<sup>165</sup> The Iraqis believed that the regional itineraries of high-ranking “fraternal” visitors reflected the latter’s diplomatic priority-setting, and the DPRK evidently attributed greater strategic importance to front-line Egypt and Syria (which received North Korean military aid and training before and during the Yom Kippur War) than to Iraq (which relied on Soviet and East European, rather than North Korean, military assistance).<sup>166</sup> In a similar vein, Pahlavi’s trip to the DPRK was closely preceded by a visit of South Yemeni president Salim Rubai Ali, who managed to persuade the North Koreans to give military aid to the same PFLOAG guerrillas in Oman against whom the Shah had dispatched Iranian combat troops.<sup>167</sup>

North Korean leaders thus had good reason to avoid any sort of entanglement in the Iraqi-Iranian dispute, but their neutral position was implicitly more advantageous to the Iranian side (which presumably appreciated that the North Koreans had tacitly abandoned the hostile attitude they had adopted in 1971–1972) than to Iraqi leaders (who, judging from their appeals to the solidarity of the Communist ambassadors, would have preferred if North Korea had stuck to its earlier standpoint). Thus, the gradual but perceptible cooling of Iraqi–North Korean relations in the second half of the 1970s may be traced back to the events of 1974–1975.

Caught between the two quarreling Middle Eastern states, North Korean leaders seem to have been elated when the Shah and Saddam Hussein signed the Algiers Agreement (6 March 1975) to settle their disputes.<sup>168</sup> On 13 March, *Rodong sinmun* described the terms of the agreement (in essence, an Iraqi territorial concession in the Shatt al-Arab dispute in exchange for the discontinuation of Iranian support to the Kurdish insurgency) in great detail

165. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 16 September 1974, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1974, 52. Dobož, 62-10, 004983/1974; “Chosŏn Minjujuŭi Inmin Konghwaguk kukkajusŏng Kim Ilŏng dongjiŭi t’ŭksaro aegŭbŭl pangmunhanŭn Kim Yŏngju puch’ongniga Kkahirae toch’ak,” *Rodong sinmun*, 24 April 1974, p. 1; “Chosŏn Minjujuŭi Inmin Konghwaguk kukkajusŏng Kim Ilŏng dongjiŭi t’ŭksaŭi Suria ch’eryu,” *Rodong sinmun*, 3 May 1974, p. 1; and “Chosŏn Minjujuŭi Inmin Konghwaguk kukkajusŏng Kim Ilŏng dongjiŭi t’ŭksaro Irak’ŭrŭl pangmunha,” *Rodong sinmun*, 5 May 1974, p. 1.

166. Miyamoto, “DPRK Troop Dispatches and Military Support in the Middle East,” pp. 349–351; CIA, “Intelligence Memorandum: Recent Trends in Communist Economic and Military Aid to Iraq,” March 1972, in CERR, CIA-RDP85T00875R001700030031-3; and Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Telegram, 10 August 1972, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Files unrelated to individual countries, 1972, V-590, 00630/12/1972.

167. Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Report, 27 November 1974, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j South Yemen, 1974, 56. Dobož, 70-10, 006054/1974. On Iranian counterinsurgency operations in Oman, see Abdel Razaq Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans, and Empires in Oman, 1965–1976* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 293–295.

168. Hussein Sirriyeh, “Development of the Iraqi-Iranian Dispute, 1847–1975,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1985), pp. 489–490.

and with evident approval. By presenting the agreement as the “restoration of the traditional friendship between Iran and Iraq,” the article constructed a narrative that was greatly at variance with the historical facts but clearly reflected Pyongyang’s yearning for an Iraqi-Iranian reconciliation that would enable North Korea to engage both Middle Eastern countries without incurring the risk of alienating either.<sup>169</sup> In a similar vein, *Rodong sinmun* duly reported the protocol signed by the Iraqi and Iranian foreign ministers (17 March 1975) and the Iran-Iraq Treaty on International Borders and Good Neighborly Relations (13 June 1975).<sup>170</sup> These articles confirm that *Rodong sinmun*’s earlier silence about the Iraq-Iran conflict had not resulted from a lack of interest but from North Korean leaders’ unwillingness to get involved in a dispute in which they did not want to take sides and which would not have fit into North Korea’s dominant propaganda narrative, directed mainly against the United States, Israel, and South Korea.

Potentially hampered by the earlier friction between Iraq and Iran, North Korean leaders were not necessarily able to draw concrete benefits from the Iraq-Iran reconciliation. On the contrary, the DPRK’s relations with both Middle Eastern countries hit a snag as early as 1976, though for different reasons. For Iraqi leaders, the Algiers Agreement provided an opportunity to lessen their dependence on the Soviet bloc and broaden their contacts with the Western powers, but they did not cut their ties with the USSR as drastically as Egypt’s Anwar al-Sadat did.

This new situation probably reduced North Korea’s importance in the eyes of the Ba’ath leaders and limited the range of fields in which the two states could cooperate. In 1971–1972, the Iraqi authorities had appreciated North Korea’s solidarity vis-à-vis Iran (which distinguished North Korea from China and the USSR) and its support to the PFLOAG, but now, as the Algiers Agreement obligated the Iraqis to discontinue their assistance to the Omani guerrillas, they decided to engage Saudi Arabia and the Omani monarchy instead.<sup>171</sup> At the same time, they vehemently rejected the Egyptian-Israeli Sinai Interim Agreement (4 September 1975)—an agreement the Soviet bloc

169. “Iran’gwa Irak’ünün söllin’gwa üüüi chönt’ongjöngnyön’gyerül hoebok’algöshida (Iran-jeguk’wangjewa Irak’ühyöngmyöngjido risahoe puwiwönjangi kongdongk’ommyunik’ee choin),” *Rodong sinmun*, 13 March 1975, p. 6 (translated by Peter Ward).

170. “Iran’gwa Irak’üsaie punjaenghaegyöre kwanhan üijöngsö choin,” *Rodong sinmun*, 20 March 1975, p. 6; and “Irak’üwa Irani kukkyöng min söllinjoyakül maejötta,” *Rodong sinmun*, 26 June 1975, p. 6.

171. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 30 March 1976, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1976, 65. Dobož, 62-10, 002146/2/1976.



likewise opposed but which North Korea tacitly welcomed.<sup>172</sup> Iraqi leaders also opposed the proclamation of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), and hence they were probably less than pleased when the DPRK, unlike China and the Soviet bloc, recognized the SADR as a sovereign state (16 March 1976).<sup>173</sup>

Iraq's enduring commitment to the Palestinian movement provided the best opportunity for Iraqi-DPRK cooperation, and North Korean leaders eagerly played the "Palestinian card" to buttress their partnership with Iraq. In March 1976, the North Korean government sent 12,000 tons of military equipment (mostly submachine guns and other light arms) to the PLO, formally in exchange for a shipload of figs. To underline the importance of the event, Foreign Minister Hő Tam personally presented badges engraved with Kim Il-Sung's portrait to the crew of the Iraqi ship that transported the weapons to the Middle East.<sup>174</sup>

Nevertheless, the North Koreans could not prevent the eruption of a serious conflict of interest between Iraq and the DPRK at the Fifth Summit Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Colombo in mid-August 1976. Both countries strove to assume a prominent role in the NAM, and their competing ambitions, which were compounded by the contrast between North Korea's militant anti-American attitude and the moderate stance Iraq adopted at the summit, pitted them against each other. Because both Iraq and the DPRK had applied for membership in the NAM's Coordinating Bureau (where eight seats were allocated to Asian countries), they came to perceive each other as rivals, all the more so because Iraq favored Vietnam's candidacy over North Korea's. In the end, both Iraq and Vietnam were admitted to the bureau, but North Korea was not.<sup>175</sup> The extent to which this rivalry

172. Hungarian Embassy to Canada, Telegram, 11 September 1975, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j United Arab Republic, 1975, 54. Dobož, 36-121, 004794/20/1975; Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Telegram, 6 October 1975, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j United Arab Republic, 1975, 55. Dobož, 36-121, 004794/45/1975; and "Ein problematisches Teilabkommen," *Neues Deutschland*, 3 September 1975, p. 7.

173. Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Memorandum, 5 February 1976, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1976, 65. Dobož, 62-146, 00576/1/1976; and Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Memorandum, 27 April 1976, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1976, 81. Dobož, 1, 002965/1976.

174. Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Memorandum, 27 April 1976, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1976, 82. Dobož, 4, 002964/1976.

175. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Annual Report, 1 July 1976, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iraq, 1976, 65. Dobož, 62-142, 004219/1976; Hungarian Embassy to Mongolia, Report, 15 December 1976, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Non-aligned countries, 1976, 148. Dobož, 209-1, 004500/56/1976; and U.S. Interests Section in Baghdad to the Secretary of State, "Iraq and Colombo non-aligned summit," Telegram, 14 August 1976, in NARA, RG (RG) 59. Central Foreign Policy Files 1973-1979, Electronic Telegrams, 1976, Doc. No. 1976BAGHDA01129.

alienated Iraq from its erstwhile partners may be gauged from what Ismet Kettaneh, director-general of the Iraqi Foreign Ministry, told U.S. diplomats in Baghdad about North Korea's performance at the Colombo conference of the NAM:

According [to] Kettaneh, North Koreans made pests of [them]selves with Iraqis and other delegations, with incessant jawboning and arm-grabbing in the corridors. Although Iraq, he said, neither spoke for nor sponsored North Korea's position, Iraq did vote for North Korean language. . . . Kim Il Sung's absence at least prevented [Korean] question from assuming major importance. . . . By giving "unanimous" approval of Vietnamese candidacy over North Korea's, conferees were rewarding polished Vietnamese behavior at conference and rebuking presumptuous, self-important North Koreans.<sup>176</sup>

The Imperial State of Iran, which had joined the Baghdad Pact in November 1955, was not a member of the NAM (despite what Azad erroneously claims).<sup>177</sup> On the contrary, the Iranian government promptly took offense when South Yemen and Libya used the Colombo summit as a forum to castigate Iran's military intervention in Oman, and the Shah was deeply irritated about the pro-DPRK resolution adopted by the conference.<sup>178</sup> Thus, North Korea's newly forged contacts with the Iranian monarchy were not a spur for Kim Il-Sung's policy toward the NAM, nor did Iranian recognition of the DPRK bring about a major shift in Iran's position on the Korean question. At the UN sessions of October–November 1975, Iran supported the pro-ROK draft resolution as usual, though it preferred to abstain during the vote on the pro-DPRK resolution, instead of opposing it (as Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Oman did).<sup>179</sup>

Despite these limitations, both North Korea and Iran considered it possible to work together in other fields. For instance, in April 1974 Iran's ambassador to the DPRK told a Hungarian diplomat that the two countries' economic profiles were sufficiently compatible to create opportunities for cooperation. North Korea was a cement exporter but lacked oil reserves,

176. U.S. Interests Section in Baghdad to the Secretary of State, "Iraqi perceptions of Colombo summit," Telegram, 31 August 1976, in NARA, RG 59. Central Foreign Policy Files 1973–1979, Electronic Telegrams, 1976, Doc. No. 1976BAGHDA01263.

177. Azad, *Koreans in the Persian Gulf*, p. 73.

178. Hungarian Embassy to Iran, Report, 25 October 1976, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Non-aligned countries, 1976, 148. Dobož, 209-1, 004500/48/1976; and U.S. Embassy in Tehran to the Secretary of State, "Soviet demarche to Shah," Telegram, 22 August 1976, in NARA, RG 59. Central Foreign Policy Files 1973–1979, Electronic Telegrams, 1976, Doc. No. 1976TEHRAN08487.

179. *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1975* (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information, 1978), pp. 203–204.

whereas oil-rich Iran had to import cement to meet the growing demand created by its ambitious construction projects.<sup>180</sup> This view was shared by North Korean leaders. In August 1974, Kim Il-Sung told Bulgarian Vice Premier Pencho Kubadinski that the DPRK was keenly interested in broadening its trade with Iran and other Middle Eastern countries.<sup>181</sup> In the end, however, economic relations became a source of friction between North Korea and Iran because their shared interest in cooperation could not overcome the obstacles posed by North Korea's economic deficiencies and U.S. disapproval.

On 16 March 1975, Vice-Premier Pak Sŏngch'ŏl and Iranian Minister of Commerce Fereydoun Mahdavi signed a letter of understanding on the exchange of goods worth \$700 million during the next five years. North Korea undertook to supply steel, cement, chemical fertilizers, corn, and other agricultural products, for which Iran was to pay \$200 million in advance.<sup>182</sup> Although a South Korean attempt to block the deal ended in a fiasco, the credit agreement remained unimplemented.<sup>183</sup> Adopting an evasive attitude in the face of North Korea's insistent prodding, the Iranian authorities kept deferring the credit disbursements, partly because they were "uncomfortable with both the sorts of goods which the North Koreans would export to Iran as well as the ability of the DPRK to repay," and partly because the U.S. embassy did its best to dissuade them.<sup>184</sup> In early 1976, the Iranians reluctantly agreed to provide the DPRK with \$60 million, but only on condition that Pakistan's Zulfikar Ali Bhutto—who had persuaded Iran to fulfill Pyongyang's request—personally guaranteed that the DPRK would deliver the contracted cement and rice. Despite Bhutto's assurances, North Korea failed to fulfill its export obligations. In 1977, North Korea asked Iran for up to 400,000 tons of crude oil and \$350 million, but Iranian leaders refused to supply oil unless the

---

180. Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Telegram, 25 April 1974, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Korea, 1974, 65. Dobož, 81-10, 003091/1974.

181. Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Telegram, 15 August 1974, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Korea, 1974, 66. Dobož, 81-50, 004564/1974.

182. U.S. Embassy in Tehran to the Secretary of State, "Iran/North Korea trade relations," Telegram, 17 March 1975, in NARA, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files 1973–1979, Electronic Telegrams, 1975, Doc. No. 1975TEHRAN02481.

183. U.S. Secretary of State to CINCPAC, "ROK attempting to thwart Iranian–North Korean deal," Telegram, 28 June 1975, in NARA, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files 1973–1979, Electronic Telegrams, 1975, Doc. No. 1975STATE153446.

184. U.S. Embassy in Tehran to the Secretary of State, "Iran/North Korea trade credit agreement," Telegram, 21 September 1976, in NARA, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files 1973–1979, Electronic Telegrams, 1976, Doc. No. 1976TEHRAN09522.

DPRK paid in cash. The Iranians vowed they would pay only upon delivery of the promised North Korean goods.<sup>185</sup>

Unable to obtain credit from Iran, cash-starved North Korea approached Iraq instead. On 18 July 1978, the Iraqi government undertook to provide the DPRK with an interest-free loan worth \$50 million, to be disbursed in two equal installments in January 1979 and January 1980. North Korea was expected to repay \$10 million per annum starting in 1985. Compared to the earlier Iranian-DPRK credit agreement, this deal was to yield a smaller amount of money but under more favorable terms. North Korea evidently appealed to Iraq's revolutionary solidarity when pursuing the credit agreement, which declared that "the loan stems from friendly relations between the two countries and their joint desire to strengthen the struggle against colonialism and imperialism."<sup>186</sup>

Nevertheless, the revolutionary rhetoric could not disguise the fact that Iraqi leaders were no longer exclusively committed to economic cooperation with North Korea. In March 1977 (the same month a delegate of Iraq's Ba'ath Party attended the DPRK-sponsored World Conference for the Independent and Peaceful Reunification of Korea in Brussels), the Iraqi government awarded, for the first time, a \$30.6 million contract to South Korea's Shinwon Construction Company.<sup>187</sup> The Iraqi authorities must have been satisfied with the South Korean firm's performance because in 1978 they awarded a \$130 million infrastructure contract to Hyundai. To be sure, these Iraqi-ROK deals were dwarfed by South Korea's extensive economic cooperation with Iran. For example, in 1976 the Iranian government undertook to build a crude oil refinery in the ROK, increase its trade with Seoul to \$2 billion during the 1976–1980 period, and supply it with 60,000 barrels of crude oil per day for fifteen years. In return, South Korea promised to build a jointly owned textile factory in Iran. By the end of 1978, the number of South Korean citizens residing in Iran had risen to 12,000. Still, the entry of South Korea's highly competitive corporations into the Iraqi construction market, limited as it was

185. Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Telegram, 23 December 1977, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Korea, 1977, 79. doboz, 81-5, 006346/1977.

186. U.S. Interests Section in Baghdad to the Secretary of State, "Iraqi ratifies interest-free loan to North Korea," Telegram, 29 October 1978, in NARA, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files 1973–1979, Electronic Telegrams, 1978, Doc. No. 1978BAGHDA02238; and U.S. Interests Section in Baghdad to the Secretary of State, "Iraqi loan to North Korea," Telegram, 31 October 1978, in NARA, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files 1973–1979, Electronic Telegrams, 1978, Doc. No. 1978BAGHDA02262.

187. "Iraqi Ba'ath Party Member," Korean Central News Agency [KCNA] (Pyongyang), 9 March 1977, quoted in *Translations on North Korea* No. 517 (Arlington, VA: Joint Publications Research Service, 29 March 1977), p. 27.

for the time being, presented an economic challenge that the DPRK could not match.<sup>188</sup>

### **Pyongyang and Tehran versus Baghdad: The Emergence of the Iranian-DPRK Alliance, 1979–1988**

Thus, North Korea's relations with both Middle Eastern countries were in a less than satisfactory state when the first rumblings of the Iranian revolution sent shock waves through the region, eliciting sharply divergent reactions from the DPRK's various Arab partners. Syrian and South Yemeni leaders clearly sympathized with the escalating protest movement on the grounds that the collapse of the monarchy would greatly weaken U.S. influence in the Middle East, whereas their Iraqi counterparts monitored the Iranian political crisis with growing anxiety, as they feared that the Shah's downfall would undermine the Algiers Agreement and stimulate a resurgence of Kurdish and Shia opposition to the Ba'ath regime.<sup>189</sup>

In light of North Korea's radical reputation, *Rodong sinmun's* consistent lack of coverage of Iran's revolutionary upheaval may appear peculiar. From January 1978 (when the first protests erupted in the city of Qom) to January 1979, the newspaper did not publish a single article about the burgeoning opposition movement. On the contrary, the newspaper's reports invariably struck an optimistic and laudatory tone, with a focus on Iran's dynamic economic development, its friendly relations with the various Communist states and developing countries, and its ceremonial interactions with the DPRK.<sup>190</sup> The North Koreans' growing awareness of the Iranian crisis was expressed

188. U.S. Interests Section in Baghdad to the Secretary of State, "GOI signs contract with South Korean company," Telegram, 2 April 1977, in NARA, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files 1973–1979, Electronic Telegrams, 1977, Doc. No. 1977BAGHDA00550; U.S. Embassy in Tehran to the Secretary of State, "Iranian-South Korean economic relations," Telegram, 10 November 1976, in NARA, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files 1973–1979, Electronic Telegrams, 1976, Doc. No. 1976TEHRAN11243; and Azad, *Koreans in the Persian Gulf*, pp. 54, 68–69.

189. Hungarian Embassy to South Yemen, Telegram, 16 January 1979, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Iran, 1979, 66. doboz, 63-2, 0053/14/1979; Hungarian Embassy to Syria, Telegram, 18 January 1979, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Iran, 1979, 66. doboz, 63-2, 0053/18/1979; and Hungarian Embassy to Lebanon, Report, 29 January 1979, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Iran, 1979, 66. doboz, 63-2, 0053/36/1979.

190. See, inter alia, "Sae sahoe kōnsōrūl wihan t'ujaengūi kiresō: Iranūi minjokkongōp," *Rodong sinmun*, 19 January 1978, p. 6; "Iranūl pangmunhanūn uri nara chōngbudaep'yodani T'herane toch'ak," *Rodong sinmun*, 24 May 1978, p. 3; and "Hwa Kukpong jusōgi Iranūl kongshing ch'insōnbangmunhagi wihayō T'herane toch'ak," *Rodong sinmun*, 1 September 1978, p. 6 (all articles obtained and translated by Yoo Jinil).

only in a roundabout way. From November 1978 to January 1979 (the most turbulent phase of the revolution), *Rodong sinmun* effectively imposed a news blackout, devoting only a single ceremonial greeting to Iran. The diversity of Arab states' reactions to the upheavals warranted caution, and the North Koreans were also motivated by the consideration that any reference to the protests might incur Iran's displeasure and damage the image of a stable Iranian-DPRK partnership—an assumption that seemed reasonable, given that the Iranian ambassador to Damascus complained about the Syrian media's biased coverage of the Iranian events.<sup>191</sup> During the first eight months of 1978 (at which time East German leaders were busily preparing for an expected visit of the Shah), *Neues Deutschland* likewise refrained from covering the Iranian protests. The East German newspaper's first article on the Iranian crisis appeared on 11 September 1978 in the same issue announcing that the Shah, having declared martial law, had abruptly canceled his planned visit to East Germany.<sup>192</sup>

From September 1978 to January 1979, *Neues Deutschland* carried as many as 48 articles on the Iranian protests. In contrast, *Rodong sinmun*'s first report about the crisis, a laudatory article on the victorious struggle of the Iranian masses against an oppressive dictatorship, appeared as late as 13 February 1979, that is, after the Shah's departure and the collapse of Shahpour Bakhtiar's provisional government.<sup>193</sup> North Korean leaders evidently wanted to wait out the revolutionary storm, refraining from taking a stand as long as it was uncertain who might come out on top in Tehran. But as soon as Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini established his new administration, North Korean diplomats in Tehran made frantic efforts to get in his good graces. From the time of Khomeini's return (1 February 1979) until January 1980, the North Korean ambassador visited him as many as six times, far more frequently than any other ambassador.<sup>194</sup> His efforts seem to have paid off, since he managed to persuade Khomeini to issue a statement calling for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea.<sup>195</sup> The North Korean media, silent on Iran before

191. Hungarian Embassy to Syria, Telegram, 18 January 1979, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Iran, 1979, 66. doboz, 63-2, 0053/18/1979.

192. "Schahanschah sagt Reisen nach Rumänien und in die DDR ab," *Neues Deutschland*, 11 September 1978, p. 2; and "Iran: Parlament behandelt Kriegsrechtsbestimmungen," *Neues Deutschland*, 11 September 1978, p. 5.

193. "Iranesõ hwangjejõnggwõni munõjigo panhwangjeseryõgin inminundongseryõgi kukkagwõllyõkürinsu," *Rodong sinmun*, 13 February 1979, p. 6 (obtained and translated by Yoo Jinil).

194. Hungarian Embassy to Iran, Report, 5 February 1980, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Korea, 1980, 84. doboz, 133, 001472/1980.

195. U.S. Embassy in Tehran to the Secretary of State, "Korean squabbling in Iran," Telegram, 29 July 1979, in NARA, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files 1973–1979, Electronic Telegrams, 1979, Doc. No. 1979TEHRAN07979.

January 1979, now extensively covered the “progressive” measures taken by the revolutionary regime: its efforts to curtail U.S. influence in Iran, its severance of diplomatic relations with Israel, and its decision to nationalize private banks.<sup>196</sup>

After the takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran (4 November 1979), the DPRK was one of the few states to take Iran’s side in the dispute.<sup>197</sup> Starting on 8 November, *Rodong sinmun* carried numerous articles on the hostage crisis, highlighting the Iranian government’s determination to resist U.S. pressure and quoting Khomeini’s accusations of espionage against the U.S. diplomats.<sup>198</sup> On 23 November (after the imposition of U.S. sanctions on Iran), the newspaper published Hō Tam’s letter of support to his Iranian counterpart, and the next day it carried a long article that presented the hostage issue as a mere pretext for U.S. hostile actions against Iran. Unlike *Neues Deutschland*, which extensively covered the UN Security Council’s discussions of the crisis and quoted its call for the immediate release of the hostages, *Rodong sinmun* made no reference to the Security Council debate beyond quoting a few Iranian statements that rejected the Council’s “interference.” Iranian leaders must have appreciated these gestures, for the Iranian media promptly announced the DPRK’s statement of support.<sup>199</sup>

If North Korean leaders hoped that these expressions of solidarity would persuade the new Iranian authorities to give preferential treatment to Pyongyang over Seoul, their expectations were only partly fulfilled. From 10 to 17 January 1980, a DPRK delegation headed by Vice Premier Kong Chint’ae traveled to Tehran to sign a one-year trade agreement—the first that the

196. See, among others, “Iranesō chinbojōkchoch’idūrūl kyesong ch’wihago itta,” *Rodong sinmun*, 9 March 1979, p. 6; “Irani Migugūi naejōnggansōbūl paegyōk,” *Rodong sinmun*, 25 May 1979, p. 6; and “Iranesō kyōngjesaenghwarūl chōngsanghwahagi wihan illyōnūi pōmnyōngūl ch’ae’aek, modūn kaeinūhaengdūrūl kukyuhwa,” *Rodong sinmun*, 11 June 1979, p. 6 (all articles obtained and translated by Yoo Jinil).

197. Hungarian Embassy to Iran, Ciphared Telegram, 11 December 1979, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j Iran, 1979, 66. doboz, 63-3, 005660/28/1979.

198. See, among others, “Iranoegyobuga Iranhaksangdūrūi Miguktaesagwan chōmgōwa kwallyōnhayō sōngmyōng palp’yo,” *Rodong sinmun*, 8 November 1979, p. 6; “Iranesō subaengmanmyōngūi panmishiwi chinhaeng,” *Rodong sinmun*, 10 November 1979, p. 6; and “T’heranjujae Mi taesagwaninjiltūrūn kanch’ōptūrimyō Iran pōmnyure ttara chaep’anūlbadao tangyōnhada’ (Iranhoegyōjidoja K’omeiniga ōnmyōng),” *Rodong sinmun*, 20 November 1979, p. 6 (all articles obtained and translated by Yoo Jinil).

199. Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Report, 11 December 1979, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Iran, 1979, 66. doboz, 63-3, 005660/35/1979; “Sicherheitsrat: Resolution zu Konflikt USA-Iran,” *Neues Deutschland*, 6 December 1979, p. 5; and “Iranūn Migugin inminmunjewa kwallyōnhayō Yuenanborisahoeseō ch’ae’aektoenūn ōttōhan kyōrūido paegyōk’algōshida,” *Rodong sinmun*, 29 November 1979, p. 6 (obtained and translated by Yoo Jinil).



Islamic Republic concluded with a Communist country. The North Koreans were disappointed when Khomeini did not receive them, but they held negotiations with ten Iranian ministers and offered to assist Iran in fields in which the DPRK had ample expertise, such as mining, rice cultivation, and the construction of irrigation systems. The agreement called for the exchange of goods worth \$280 million, a volume far beyond what the notoriously unreliable North Koreans could be expected to deliver. The DPRK undertook to supply machine tools, steel ware, light industry products, and agricultural goods in exchange for manufactured products, chemical goods, and dried fruit. But when Kong Chint'ae asked for 1.5 million tons of crude oil, Iranian Minister of Petroleum Ali Akbar Moïnfar flatly refused to sell more than 500,000 tons, set a minimum price of \$28 per barrel, and demanded payment in convertible currency. In the end, Moïnfar largely managed to impose his terms on the North Korean delegation. The Hungarian ambassador surmised that North Korea intended to re-export the Iranian oil (presumably to obtain convertible currency) rather than use it for its own needs.<sup>200</sup>

In a conversation with the Hungarian ambassador, North Korea's envoy in Iran optimistically described the trade agreement as a turning point in the development of Iranian–North Korean relations. Still, the partial achievements of Kong's visit revealed that neither the Iranian revolution nor the DPRK's attempts to gain Khomeini's goodwill could bring about a complete reorientation of Iranian policy. The North Korean ambassador failed to persuade the Iranian government to close the South Korean embassy.<sup>201</sup> The North Koreans made greater efforts to please Iran than vice versa, but they could not wholly achieve their aims—an indication that Iran's bargaining position was still considerably stronger than North Korea's.

At the same time that Iranian-DPRK cooperation expanded, North Korea's relations with Iraq entered a downward spiral. To some extent, the two processes may have been interrelated. Iraq's Ba'ath leaders, whose relations with the newly established Khomeini regime went from bad to worse, had little reason to welcome North Korea's efforts to woo Iran.<sup>202</sup> For instance, the Iraqi authorities, unlike the DPRK, deplored the takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, not least because their own diplomats in Khorramshahr and

---

200. Hungarian Embassy to Iran, Report, 5 February 1980.

201. Azad, *Koreans in the Persian Gulf*, pp. 68, 84–85.

202. For an overview of Iraq-Iran relations in 1979–1980, see Stephen C. Pelletiere, *The Iran-Iraq War: Chaos in a Vacuum* (New York: Praeger, 1992), pp. 16, 29–32.

Kermanshah also encountered Iranian harassment.<sup>203</sup> Still, the issue that seems to have annoyed Iraq more than anything else was North Korea's unwillingness to break with Sadat in the wake of the Camp David Accords (17 September 1978) and the Egypt-Israel peace treaty (26 March 1979). Iraqi leaders played a particularly active role in the all-Arab campaign against Camp David, hosting first an Arab League summit (2 November 1978) and then a meeting of Arab foreign and economic ministers (31 March 1979) to pressure and ostracize Sadat.<sup>204</sup> For this reason, they strongly disapproved of North Korea's close military, political, and economic cooperation with Egypt. In turn, *Rodong sinmun* pointedly ignored the inter-Arab meetings of November 1978 and March 1979—an attitude that stood in striking contrast to that of *Neues Deutschland* (which devoted as many as ten articles to the first Baghdad summit).<sup>205</sup>

The extent to which North Korea's attitude irritated Iraqi leaders may be gauged from a conversation that the Iraqi ambassador to Pyongyang held with his Hungarian counterpart on 7 January 1980. After pointing out that the annual volume of Iraqi-DPRK trade stood at a mere \$5 million, he noted that the North Koreans were seeking to obtain crude oil from Iraq at below-market prices. They had offered to increase their cement exports from 100,000 tons to 300,000 tons, but Iraq had consistently rebuffed their requests for oil on the grounds that a country collaborating with Sadat was ineligible for such preferential treatment. Iraq, the ambassador said, did supply oil to some Asian states at pre-1973 prices, but only on condition that they condemned Sadat's policy—a condition the DPRK was unwilling to meet.

The Iraqi ambassador scorned North Korea's attempts to outcompete South Korea in the Third World by pointing out that the South Koreans were far more capable than North Korea of providing desirable goods to Third World countries. The only thing the North could supply was ideology. The ambassador effectively lumped North and South Korea together by stressing that the Iraqi government did not intend to broaden its contacts with either South Korea (which he labeled a U.S. client state) or North Korea (which he

203. U.S. Interests Section in Baghdad to the Secretary of State, "Conversation with Iraqi official," Telegram, 19 November 1979, in NARA, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files 1973–1979, Electronic Telegrams, 1979, Doc. No. 1979BAGHDA02432.

204. Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler, "The Boycott That Never Was: Egypt and the Arab System, 1979–1989," Durham Middle East Paper No. 72, Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Durham, Durham, UK, 2002, pp. 2–4.

205. For an overview of Egyptian-DPRK relations in 1978–1981, see Szalontai, "Courting the 'Traitor to the Arab Cause,'" pp. 123–127. For East Germany's coverage of the Baghdad summit, see "Arabische Gipfelkonferenz setzte ihre Beratungen fort," *Neues Deutschland*, 4 November 1978, p. 7.

described as a collaborator of another U.S. client state, Egypt).<sup>206</sup> Thus, North Korea's relations with Iraq had reached an impasse well before the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran War on 22 September 1980). Whereas Iran's revolutionary leaders showed readiness to supply at least a limited amount of oil to the DPRK, Iraq flatly turned down the North Korean requests. Seen from this perspective, North Korea's wartime tilt toward Iran was not as mysterious as Chung-in Moon presented it.<sup>207</sup>

This is not to say that North Korea publicly sided with Iran in the face of the Iraqi invasion. On the contrary, *Rodong sinmun*, unlike *Neues Deutschland*, ignored the initial conflicts between Baghdad and Teheran that occurred in the spring of 1980 and published only a single article (27 September 1980) on the outbreak of the war. That article adopted a strictly neutral position, to such an extent that it failed to mention that the war started with an Iraqi attack. It called on the two antagonists to settle their territorial dispute in a peaceful way, stressing that no one but the "imperialist forces" would benefit from their conflict.<sup>208</sup> *Rodong sinmun's* perspective was thus fairly similar to the line adopted by Soviet *Pravda* on 24 September.<sup>209</sup> Still, the Soviet-bloc media (including *Neues Deutschland*) covered the initial phase of the war almost on a daily basis, whereas *Rodong sinmun*, having stated its position, effectively ignored the topic over the entire duration of the conflict. Its article titles did not mention Iraq again until 21 July 1988, when the newspaper announced that Iran had accepted the UN Security Council's call for a ceasefire.<sup>210</sup>

*Rodong sinmun's* long news blackout on Iraq resulted not only from a reluctance to cover the Iran-Iraq War but also from the collapse of the decades-long Iraqi-DPRK partnership. On 10 October 1980, the Iraqi government broke off diplomatic relations with North Korea and promptly expelled all North Korean diplomats on the grounds that the DPRK had recently started to supply arms to Iran.<sup>211</sup> Several factors may explain why North Korean

206. Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Report, 8 January 1980, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Korea, 1980, 84. doboz, 10, 001156/1980.

207. Moon, "Between Ideology and Interest," p. 396.

208. "Arapmanjijögesöü pijöngsangjögjin sa'ae," *Rodong sinmun*, 27 September 1980, p. 6 (obtained and translated by Yoo Jinil). On the earlier Iran-Iraq conflicts, see "Yasser Arafat bietet Vermittlung zwischen Iran und Irak an," *Neues Deutschland*, 10 April 1980, p. 6.

209. "'Pravda' zum iranisch-irakischen Konflikt," *Neues Deutschland*, 25 September 1980, p. 5.

210. "Irani Iran-Irak'üsaiüi chöngghwarül hosohan Yuenanborisahoe kyörüürül kongshiksu," *Rodong sinmun*, 21 July 1988, p. 6 (obtained and translated by Yoo Jinil).

211. Irak'ü, pukkoewa tan'gyo," *Dong-A Ilbo* (Seoul), 11 October 1981, p. 1 (obtained and translated by Lee Junhee); Moon, "Between Ideology and Interest," p. 383; and Azad, *Koreans in the Persian Gulf*, p. 77.

leaders abandoned their long-standing neutrality in the Iran-Iraq conflict and why Iraq reacted to their action in such a drastic manner.

First, Iraq's decision to sever diplomatic relations with the DPRK was not an isolated action. That same day, Iraqi leaders also broke diplomatic ties with Syria and Libya, both of which were heavily involved in shipping military equipment to Iran.<sup>212</sup> The fact that these Arab states threw their weight behind Iran probably influenced North Korea's decision. By supplying arms to Iran, the North Koreans were able to reinforce their ties with Syria, too. In December 1980, the Iraqi ambassador to Hungary told his hosts that Syria was training Iranian soldiers to operate the Soviet-made light arms provided by North Korea.<sup>213</sup>

Second, the North Koreans could take advantage of Iran's international isolation to forge a special relationship with the Islamic Republic. During the first phase of the war (22 September–31 December 1980), Iraq was able to purchase ample quantities of arms (a total of \$1 billion) from a variety of West and East European suppliers. By contrast, Iran, which had been placed under a Western arms embargo after the seizure of the U.S. embassy, could obtain only a small fraction of this amount. The Iranians became heavily dependent on the few countries that were willing to come to their aid.<sup>214</sup> Third, North Korean leaders may have been concerned that the outbreak of the war would prevent the implementation of the recently signed trade agreement with Iran unless the North Koreans made additional efforts to ensure Iranian cooperation. The agreement stipulated that the Islamic Republic would supply 500,000 tons of crude oil, but Iran, whose oil production had drastically declined after the 1979 revolution, could deliver only 250,000–300,000 tons by February 1981, with the rest to be shipped later in 1981.<sup>215</sup>

Because Iraqi leaders had a stake in keeping Iran isolated, their prompt retaliation for North Korea's arms sales to Tehran seems to have been influenced by their intention to dissuade the other Communist countries from following Pyongyang's example. The Hungarian embassy in Baghdad concluded that the expulsion of the DPRK's diplomats, along with Iraq's accusations about Vietnam's alleged arms shipments to Iran, was intended as a warning to the

212. Jubin Goodarzi, *Syria and Iran: Diplomatic Alliance and Power Politics in the Middle East* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006), pp. 35–36.

213. Hungarian Foreign Ministry, Memorandum, 3 December 1980, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Iraq, 1980, 65. doboz, 62-11, 006342/3/1980.

214. CIA, "Iran-Iraq: Buying Weapons for War," Intelligence Assessment, May 1984, in CERR, CIA-RDP85T00283R000500120005-5.

215. Hungarian Trade Office in Pyongyang, Memorandum, 3 March 1981, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k Korea, 1981, 55. doboz, 81-57, 618/1981.

Soviet bloc.<sup>216</sup> At the same time, Iraqi leaders were genuinely outraged by what they regarded as North Korea's perfidy. In November 1980, Karim al-Jasim, the chairman of Iraq's Peasant Union and a member of the Iraq-DPRK Friendship Association, told the Hungarian ambassador that he was stunned by North Korea's action, all the more so because he had been on such good terms with the North Korean diplomats in Baghdad that they could visit him at any time.<sup>217</sup> In May 1983, Naim Haddad, the speaker of Iraq's National Assembly, indignantly told a Hungarian delegation that the DPRK, after receiving loans from Iraq, spent the money on arms purchases and then resold the arms to Iran.<sup>218</sup>

The collapse of the already strained Iraqi-DPRK partnership was more than offset by the dynamic expansion of North Korean cooperation with Iran. Iran's initial dependence on North Korean arms seems to have enhanced the DPRK's bargaining power. Iranian leaders had good reason to appreciate the DPRK's readiness to provide massive quantities of military equipment, train Iranian officers and pilots, and dispatch military advisers to Iran.<sup>219</sup> For instance, in 1982–1983 the Islamic Republic received T-62 tanks, MiG-19 fighter aircraft, BM-11 multiple rocket launchers, and 130-mm towed artillery from North Korea.<sup>220</sup> Most likely, this is why Iranian leaders became more willing to fulfill North Korea's economic requests. In April 1982, when Premier Ri Chong'ok visited Tehran, the Iranians undertook to supply the DPRK with 1 million tons of crude oil per annum over the next three years in exchange for arms and other equipment (1,000 rice-planting machines, 1,500 irrigation pumps, electric motors, transformers, facilities for ore enrichment, iron plates, and zinc), rather than hard currency.

Another manifestation of Iran's growing flexibility was the restraint exercised by Iranian officials, who habitually urged their trade partners to import a wide variety of Iranian goods. They no longer pressured the North Koreans to purchase non-oil products. North Korean officials would have preferred to

216. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Ciphred Telegram, 24 October 1980, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Iraq, 1980, 65. doboz, 62-10, 002090/39/1980.

217. Hungarian Embassy to Iraq, Report, 17 December 1980, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Iraq, 1980, 65. doboz, 62-10, 002090/88/1980.

218. Tibor Pethő (Press Publishing House) to Deputy Foreign Minister Róbert Garai, Report, 31 May 1983, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k, International organizations unrelated to the UN, 1983, 168. doboz, VI-18, 3582-1/1983.

219. Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Report, 18 January 1982, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Korea, 1982, 80. doboz, 40, 00991/1982; and Hungarian Embassy to Iran, Ciphred Telegram, 29 October 1982, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Korea, 1982, 80. doboz, 81-104, 003495/1/1982.

220. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Arms Transfers Database, <https://www.sipri.org/>.

receive cash payments for their arms shipments, but by re-exporting the oil they obtained from Iran they managed to earn some much-needed hard currency.<sup>221</sup> The wartime trade with Iran thus had considerable advantages for the cash-starved DPRK. The sudden increase in Iranian-DPRK trade modified North Korea's trade portfolio to such a great extent that, in 1981, the combined share of capitalist and developing countries (52 percent) surpassed the share of Communist states (48 percent) trading with North Korea. In that year, the total volume of North Korea's trade with the developing countries reached 560 million rubles (a 3.5-fold increase compared to 1980). Of that, Iranian-DPRK trade contributed nearly 250 million rubles.<sup>222</sup>

Despite the evident material benefits of Iranian-DPRK cooperation—which stood in glaring contrast to the increasing strain on Iraqi–North Korean relations—North Korean leaders did not intend to make an unequivocal commitment to Iran against Iraq. On the contrary, they soon started making behind-the-scenes efforts to patch up relations with Saddam Hussein, not least because they were acutely aware of the fact that their conflict with Iraq hindered their interactions with Jordan and Kuwait as well.<sup>223</sup> As early as January 1982, they invited an Iraqi delegation to Pyongyang to hold talks about the restoration of diplomatic relations, but the distrustful Iraqi leaders sent only an unofficial representative.<sup>224</sup> In March 1983, the head of the North Korean trade office in Kuwait visited Iraq to persuade Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz to let North Korea reopen its embassy in Baghdad. The North Korean official disingenuously argued that DPRK arms shipments to Iran were based on an earlier (presumably prewar) agreement and that, once the North Korean government fulfilled its contractual obligations, it would not supply additional arms to Iran. In response, Aziz pressed him to back up his words with a public statement about the discontinuation of arms shipments. When the North Korean diplomat demurred, the Iraqis concluded that North Korean pledges

221. Hungarian Embassy to Iran, Report, 6 June 1982, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k, Korea, 1982, 58. doboz, 81-10, 5909/1982; Hungarian Embassy to Iran, Report, 24 November 1983, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Iran, 1983, 63. doboz, 63-103, 006137/1983; Hungarian Embassy to Kuwait, Report, 21 February 1984, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Iran, 1984, 72. doboz, 63-42, 001593/1984; and U.S. Embassy in Abu Dhabi to the Secretary of State, "North Korea: arms for Iran; invite to UAE VIPs," Telegram, 17 May 1982, in Digital National Security Archive (DNSArchive), *The United States and the Two Koreas, Part I: 1969–2010*, DNSArchive Accession No. KO00420.

222. Hungarian Trade Office in Pyongyang, Memorandum, 30 April 1982, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k, Korea, 1982, 80. doboz, 81-142, 004038/1982.

223. Hungarian Embassy to Kuwait, Report, 19 January 1982, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Kuwait, 1982, 82. doboz, 85-103, 001099/1982; and CIA, "The Two Koreas and the Iran-Iraq War," Memorandum, 22 March 1984, in CERR, CIA-RDP04T00367R000201390001-8.

224. Hungarian Embassy to Kuwait, Report, 13 February 1982, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k, Korea, 1982, 58. doboz, 81-10, 2895/1982.

lacked credibility.<sup>225</sup> In the summer of 1984, Iraq made another attempt to wean North Korea from Tehran by offering to purchase large quantities of North Korean arms, but to no avail.<sup>226</sup> In August, the head of a division in the Iraqi Foreign Ministry told a U.S. diplomat that “Iraq felt it had been close to agreement with North Korea on stopping the latter’s arms shipments to Iran, but North Korea in the end had backed away from an agreement, and decided to continue to supply Iran.”<sup>227</sup>

North Korean leaders thus tried to play both ends against the middle. Instead of wholeheartedly siding with Iran against Iraq or reverting to their pre-1980 neutrality, they attempted to restore their relations with Iraq without losing the lucrative Iranian arms market. Their clumsy balancing act ended in a predictable fiasco. The Iraqi government seems to have entered talks with North Korea for the sole purpose of halting its arms shipments to Iran. Worse still, the unresolved Iraqi-DPRK conflict induced the Ba’ath leaders to broaden their contacts with South Korea—a process that ran directly counter to North Korea’s diplomatic aims. “The Iraqis—in part to punish the North Koreans—permitted the South to establish consular relations in April 1981,” the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reported.<sup>228</sup> In a similar vein, Iraq awarded several large-scale construction projects to South Korean companies and imported more than \$1.6 billion worth of South Korean goods during the war.<sup>229</sup>

From North Korea’s perspective, the expansion of Iraqi-ROK cooperation was partly offset by the restrictive measures the Iranian authorities took against South Korea. In June–July 1981, *Rodong sinmun* triumphantly announced that the Iranian government had abrogated a fishing agreement with the ROK, downgraded diplomatic relations to the level of chargé d’affaires, and instructed the South Korean embassy to reduce its staff.<sup>230</sup> The timing of these steps suggests that Iran’s hardening stance toward South Korea may

225. Hungarian Embassy to Kuwait, Report, 14 April 1983, in MNL, XIX-J-1-k, Kuwait, 1983, 85-57, 316-10/1983.

226. CIA, “Iraq: The Quest for US Arms,” Memorandum, 20 November 1984, in CERR, CIA-RDP85T00287R001302340001-0.

227. U.S. Interests Section in Baghdad to the Secretary of State, Subject: “Possible Improvement in Iraqi-South Korean relations,” Telegram, 20 August 1984, in CERR, CIA-RDP90BO137OR000801070046-6.

228. CIA, “The Two Koreas and the Iran-Iraq War.”

229. Azad, *Koreans in the Persian Gulf*, p. 70.

230. “Irani Namjosön’goeroedodangwa maejöttön susanhyöpchöngül ch’wiso,” *Rodong sinmun*, 12 June 1981, p. 5; and “Irani Namjosön’gwaüi oegyogwan’gyeüi kyökül taeridaesagübüro natch’ugiro kyölchöng (3myöngüi Namjosönt’enjoegyogwant’ent’ürül ch’ubang),” *Rodong sinmun*, 9 July 1981, p. 1 (both articles obtained and translated by Yoo Jinil).



have been influenced by the rapprochement between Iraq and South Korea. The Iranian authorities gave no reason for their move against the South Korean embassy, but their action, taken on 7 July, closely followed Seoul's public announcement of the establishment of consular relations with Iraq (1 July).<sup>231</sup> Still, Iranian leaders did not intend to cut all ties with the South Koreans. Disregarding North Korea's shrill calls for a boycott, Iran's delegates duly attended the 70th Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Seoul (2–13 October 1983), leaving it of their own accord when the meeting's draft resolution on the Iran-Iraq War did not tally with their standpoint.<sup>232</sup>

In 1983, South Korean civilian exports to Iran stood at \$650 million, making the Islamic Republic the fifth-largest trade partner for South Korea.<sup>233</sup> South Korean firms even sold various types of military equipment to Iran. By 1983, such sales had become significant enough to elicit U.S. complaints.<sup>234</sup> Iran's interests were therefore better served by simultaneous cooperation with both Koreas than by an unequivocal preference for Pyongyang over Seoul.<sup>235</sup> Neither the DPRK nor the Islamic Republic was willing to burn its bridges to the state that its partner regarded as its main opponent, but Iran's balancing act between the two Koreas proved far more successful than North Korea's post-1980 maneuvering between Iran and Iraq.

Iran's unwillingness to break with South Korea in favor of North Korea constituted but one example of the two regimes' divergent geopolitical priorities. As far as the United States and Israel were concerned, *Rodong sinmun* was ready to express support for Iran's standpoint. For instance, it condemned the failed U.S. airborne operation to rescue the hostages and insinuated that the South Korean government sympathized with the intervention.<sup>236</sup> The newspaper presented the Algiers Accords (19 January 1981) as an Iranian victory, only to point out soon afterward that the United States continued to increase its threatening naval presence along Iran's territorial waters despite the release

231. "Ajawi ch'ongyōngsa puim, Han'guk-Irak'ū yōngsagwan'gye surip," *Dong-A Ilbo* (Seoul), 2 July 1981, p. 1 (obtained and translated by Lee Junhee); and "S. Korea Told to Recall Diplomats," *Canberra Times*, 9 July 1981, p. 4.

232. Interparliamentary Union Conference, *Report of the United States Delegation to the 70th Conference of the Interparliamentary Union Held at Seoul, Korea, October 2–13, 1983* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), pp. 2–9.

233. CIA, "The Two Koreas and the Iran-Iraq War."

234. Paul Wolfowitz to the Deputy Secretary (Kenneth W. Dam), "Your trip to Korea—Overview," Briefing Memorandum, 11 October 1983, in DNSArchive, *The United States and the Two Koreas, Part I*, DNSArchive Accession No. KO00465.

235. For an overview, see Azad, "Iran and the Two Koreas," pp. 174–177.

236. "Iraninminül pandaehanün hoengp'ohan muryōkkansōp'aengwi," *Rodong sinmun*, 30 April 1980, p. 6 (obtained and translated by Yoo Jinil).

of the hostages.<sup>237</sup> By contrast, *Rodong sinmun* consistently ignored certain regional conflicts to which Iran's UN delegates paid particularly strong attention, such as the Iraq-Iran War and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. As early as October 1979, the Islamic Republic started to criticize the Afghan regime's ultra-leftist policies, which had triggered a flow of refugees into neighboring Iran. From North Korea's perspective, however, the Afghan government's decision to recognize the DPRK as the sole legitimate Korean state (September 1978) was sufficient reason to maintain a foothold in Afghanistan even after the Soviet invasion of December 1979. At the same time, Afghan leaders' complaints about Iran's assistance to the mujahideen guerrillas fell on deaf ears in North Korea.<sup>238</sup>

Iran's UN delegates placed the Korean question at the bottom of their priority list. Their speeches at the opening of the UN sessions of October 1979 and October 1980 made no mention of Korea, and their statements of 1981–1983 devote several pages to Iraq, a couple of paragraphs to Afghanistan, and only one or two sentences to Korea.<sup>239</sup> At the Seventh Non-Aligned Summit Conference (New Delhi, 7–12 March 1983), the North Korean delegation played an active role in the dispute over Vietnamese-occupied Cambodia, whereas the speech of Iranian Premier Mir-Hossein Mousavi, which focused on Israel, Iraq, and Afghanistan, made no reference to Korea or Cambodia.<sup>240</sup> Thus, the overlap between Iranian and North Korean positions seems to have been narrower than the consensus reached by the DPRK and Ba'ath-ruled Iraq in 1970–1972.

North Korean diplomacy and Iranian-DPRK military cooperation seem to have proceeded along partly divergent paths. In the public sphere, North Korean leaders showed strong reluctance to take a stand on the Iran-Iraq War.

237. "Irani Migugininjiltürül sökpang (Migugi injilmunjewa kwallyönhan Iranüi yogurülchöpsu)," *Rodong sinmun*, 22 January 1981, p. 6; and "Iranhyöngmyöngün chönjinhago itta," *Rodong sinmun*, 11 February 1981, p. 6 (both articles obtained and translated by Yoo Jinil).

238. United Nations General Assembly, 34th Session, 21st Plenary Meeting, 4 October 1979, Official Records, A/34/PV.21, pp. 447, 457; Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Report, 18 November 1985, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Afghanistan, 1985, 24. doboz, 1-25, 005921/1985; and Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Report, 28 July 1986, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Korea, 1986, 88. doboz, 81-10, 00528/1/1986.

239. United Nations General Assembly, 36th Session, 26th Plenary Meeting, 5 October 1981, Official Records, A/36/PV.26, pp. 547–553; United Nations General Assembly, 37th Session, 27th Plenary Meeting, 12 October 1982, Official Records, A/37/PV.27, pp. 515–522; and United Nations General Assembly, 38th Session, 13th Plenary Meeting, 30 September 1983, Official Records, A/38/PV.13, pp. 186–192.

240. Hungarian Embassy to India, Ciphred Telegram, 11 March 1983, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Non-aligned countries, 1983, 130. doboz, 209-10, 0020/52/1983; and Hungarian Embassy to Iran, Report, 26 April 1983, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Non-aligned countries, 1983, 130. doboz, 209-10, 0020/79/1983.

When various Third World leaders such as Egypt's Hosni Mubarak (April 1983) and Cuba's Fidel Castro (March 1986) asked Kim Il-Sung to make use of his contacts with Iran to put an end to the war as soon as possible (i.e., to halt North Korean arms shipments to Iran), Kim did his best to dodge this thorny issue. At the same time, the North Koreans tacitly disagreed with Khomeini's conditions to end the war (the dismissal of Saddam Hussein and the payment of reparations) on the grounds that these demands were neither appropriate nor enforceable. Their attitude thus differed from the position of Iran's Arab allies, Syria and Libya, both of which had openly called for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Yet these diplomatic reservations did not prevent North Korea from gradually expanding its military assistance to Iran. By 1986, its involvement in the war had become so extensive that North Korean officers and artillerymen directly participated in the planning and conducting of Iranian offensive operations.<sup>241</sup> In 1986–1987, the weaponry North Korea supplied to Iran included such new categories as Hwasŏng-5 (Scud-B) short-range ballistic missiles, KN-1 (HY-2 Silkworm) anti-ship cruise missiles, 170-mm self-propelled artillery, anti-tank missiles, and Chaho-class fast attack patrol boats.<sup>242</sup> Judging from the contrast between the two states' large-scale material cooperation and their limited diplomatic consensus, the CIA had good reason to conclude that "Iranian–North Korean relations are based more on economic realities than on any sense of common struggle against 'imperialism.'"<sup>243</sup>

In the last stage of the Iran-Iraq War, Iran's occasional military clashes with the United States—a U.S. attack on an Iranian minelaying vessel (21 September 1987), the destruction of two Iranian oil platforms (19 October 1987), a naval clash (18 April 1988), and the U.S. shootdown of an Iranian passenger airplane (3 July 1988)—created an opportunity for North Korean leaders to demonstrate their public solidarity with Iran. On each occasion, *Rodong sinmun* promptly denounced the United States, highlighting the opprobrium that these actions generated in the Communist and developing countries.<sup>244</sup> In response to the shootdown of Iran Air Flight 655,

241. Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Report, 17 April 1983, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Egypt, 1983, 50. doboz, 36-10, 002775/1983; and Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Report, 28 July 1986; and Goodarzi, *Syria and Iran*, p. 82.

242. SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

243. CIA, "Iran: The Struggle to Define and Control Foreign Policy," Research Paper, May 1985, in CERR, CIA-RDP86T00587R000200190004-4. See also Bermudez, *Proliferation for Profit*, p. 3.

244. "Iransŏnbakŭl konggyŏk'an Migukŭl tanjoe," *Rodong sinmun*, 26 September 1987, p. 6; "Mijega Irane taehan muryŏk'chimnyakŭl kamhaeng," *Rodong sinmun*, 22 October 1987, p. 6; and "Mijega

the newspaper published as many as 26 articles.<sup>245</sup> Unlike *Neues Deutschland* (which regularly reported Iran's attacks on Kuwaiti and European oil tankers), North Korean propaganda did not cover the ongoing Iran-Iraq War—an omission that rendered it easier to present U.S. military operations in the Gulf as acts of unprovoked aggression.<sup>246</sup>

In the long run, the U.S.-Iranian clashes had a mixed impact on North Korean policy. The increasing risk of a large-scale confrontation with the United States, coupled with Iraq's growing military strength, eventually compelled the reluctant Iranian leaders to end the war without the fulfillment of their oft-repeated demands for reparations and the dismissal of Saddam Hussein.<sup>247</sup> Khomeini compared this concession to “drinking hemlock,” but North Korean leaders seem to have welcomed it, presumably on the grounds that the end of the Iran-Iraq War would enable them to cooperate with both Middle Eastern states and extricate themselves from a situation that strained their relations with numerous countries. *Rodong sinmun* promptly reported Iran's decision to accept UN Security Council Resolution 598 (18 July 1988), the end of combat operations (8 August 1988), and the restoration of peace (20 August 1988), and the North Korean Foreign Ministry issued two public statements expressing its satisfaction with these steps.<sup>248</sup> Yet the end of hostilities proved insufficient to overcome the rift that the war had created between Iraq and North Korea. Despite the DPRK's public sympathies with Iraq during the Gulf War of January–February 1991, the cruise missile strikes of September 1996, the air raids of December 1998 and March 1999, and finally the invasion of March 2003, Iraqi-DPRK diplomatic relations were

Irane taehae kangdojögün mujanggonggyököül kamaeng,” *Rodong sinmun*, 20 April 1988, p. 6 (all articles obtained and translated by Yoo Jinil).

245. See, among others, “Mijega horümüjühaehyöpsanggongesö paekchue Iranlyögaekkirül swattölgunün nalgangdojögint'erohaengwirül kamaeng,” *Rodong sinmun*, 5 July 1988, p. 6; and “Mijeüi Iranlyögaekkyökch'usagönün konggongyönhan kukchet'erohaengwi' segye yöro naradüri kyut'an,” *Rodong sinmun*, 7 July 1988, p. 6 (both articles obtained and translated by Yoo Jinil).

246. “Besorgnis in der UNO über Eskalation des Golfkonflikts,” *Neues Deutschland*, 19 October 1987, p. 1; and “Großtanker beschossen,” *Neues Deutschland*, 21 December 1987, p. 5.

247. James G. Blight et al., *Becoming Enemies: U.S.-Iran Relations and the Iran-Iraq War, 1979–1988* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), pp. 162–164.

248. “Irani Iran-Irak'üsaüi chöngghwarül hosohan Yuenanborisaoe kyörürül kongshiksarak,” *Rodong sinmun*, 21 July 1988, p. 6; “Urinün Irani ch'wihan choch'irül hwanyöngghanda (Chosön Minjujuüi Inmin Konghwaguk oegyobudaebiyönin tamhwa),” *Rodong sinmun*, 22 July 1988, p. 4; “Iran-Irak'ü chönjaengüi chöngghwanalcha palp'yo,” *Rodong sinmun*, 11 August 1988, p. 6; and “Iran-Irak'üsaie chöngghwaga shirhyöndoan kösül hwanyöngghanda (Chosön Minjujuüi Inmin Konghwaguk oegyobudaebiyönin tamhwa),” *Rodong sinmun*, 22 August 1988, p. 4 (all articles obtained and translated by Yoo Jinil).

not restored until 2008, by which time the Ba'ath regime was no longer in power.<sup>249</sup>

## Epilogue and Conclusions

Unable to reconcile with Iraq, North Korea continued to rely on Iran, but the end of the war seems to have enhanced Iran's bargaining position vis-à-vis the DPRK. In the immediate aftermath of the war, Iran broadened its contacts with both Koreas. In January 1989, Iran and South Korea agreed to restore ambassadorial relations, and Iranian–South Korean economic cooperation started expanding once again.<sup>250</sup> In 1988–1989, Iranian diplomats in Pyongyang openly expressed their agreement with Hungary's decision to recognize South Korea—a step furiously opposed by North Korea.<sup>251</sup> In parallel with these developments, Iranian President Ali Khamenei visited the DPRK in May 1989 to conclude new military and economic agreements. Having suffered massive damage during the eight-year war, Iranian officials were eager to learn how North Korea had undergone reconstruction after the Korean War. North Korean leaders agreed to assist Iran in mining, shipbuilding, the construction of irrigation systems, and ballistic missile technology, whereas Iran was to supply the DPRK with crude oil.<sup>252</sup> In 1991–1993, North Korea provided the Islamic Republic with Hwasŏng-6 (Scud-C) ballistic missiles (which had an operational range of 500 kilometers and served as the model for Iran's Shahab-2) and later with Hwasŏng-7 (Nodong-1) medium-range missiles, the model for the Iranian Shahab-3.<sup>253</sup>

Still, the upgrading of North Korean military assistance could not prevent the decline of Iranian-DPRK economic cooperation. At first, Iranian oil

249. See, among others, “Manjiyŏkchŏnjaengŭn tangjang chungjidoeyŏya handa Mijega Irak'ŭe taehan kunsajŏkkonggyŏkŭl hwaktae (Irak'ŭdaet'ongnyŏngi ch'imnyakŭl chitpusyŏbŏril kŏsŭl hoso),” *Rodong sinmun*, 18 January 1991, p. 6; “Miguk Irak'ŭe taehan sunhangmissail konggyŏkŭl kamaheung, kinjangan chŏngse chosŏng,” *Rodong sinmun*, 5 September 1996, p. 6; “Spokesman for DPRK Foreign Ministry on U.S. military attack on Iraq,” KCNA, 18 December 1998; “U.S. air raid on Iraq must be stopped at once,” KCNA, 11 March 1999; and “Spokesman for DPRK FM blasts U.S. assertion about Iraqi regime change,” KCNA, 31 March 2003.

250. Azad, *Koreans in the Persian Gulf*, pp. 90–91.

251. Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Report, 13 February 1989, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Korea, 1989, 51. doboz, 81-14, 00294/1/1989.

252. Hungarian Embassy to the DPRK, Report, 29 May 1989, in MNL, XIX-J-1-j, Iran, 1989, 41. doboz, 63-13, 002626/1989; and Levkowitz, “Iran and North Korea Military Cooperation,” p. 2.

253. Nelson E. Hansen, “North Korean-Iranian Cooperation in Ballistic Missile Development,” in Jungmin Kang, ed., *Assessment of the Nuclear Programs of Iran and North Korea* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), p. 116; and SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

shipments remained at the wartime level (1989: 920,000 tons; 1990: 980,000 tons), but as early as 1991–1992 they dropped to 220,000 tons per annum. In 1995, regular Iranian oil shipments were evidently discontinued altogether. Because Russian oil shipments were halted as early as 1991, the discontinuation of Iranian oil supplies has effectively made North Korea dependent on a single supplier: China.<sup>254</sup>

Nor did North Korea receive much support from Iran or Iraq when the North Korean nuclear weapons program was first placed on the agenda of the UN General Assembly in the broader context of nuclear safety. When UN General Assembly Resolutions 49/65 (15 December 1994) and 50/9 (1 November 1995) were passed, the DPRK was the sole state to cast a negative vote. On the first occasion, Iraq voted in favor of the draft resolution, and Iran abstained; on the second occasion, Iran voted for the draft resolution, and Iraq did not participate in the voting.<sup>255</sup>

Certain elements of North Korea's maneuvering between Tehran and Baghdad persisted even in the post–Cold War era. In the 1990s, the United States pursued a policy of “dual containment” toward Iraq and Iran, yet “the two neighbors continued to view each other and not the United States as their greatest source of insecurity.”<sup>256</sup> Facing their ongoing rivalry, North Korean propaganda preferred to highlight efforts by Iran and Iraq to reach a modus vivendi, rather than their recurrent disagreements. Presenting the United States as the main threat to the Middle East, *Rodong sinmun* duly reported the occasional acts of cooperation between Iraq and Iran: Saddam Hussein's decision to reconfirm the Iraq–Iran border as it had been delineated by the 1975 Algiers Agreement, Iran's protests against U.S. air raids on Iraqi civilian targets, Iran's humanitarian aid to war-torn Iraq, the exchange of Iraqi and Iranian prisoners-of-war, and so on.<sup>257</sup>

254. David von Hippel and Peter Hayes, “Fueling DPRK Energy Futures and Energy Security: 2005 Energy Balance, Engagement Options, and Future Paths,” Nautilus Institute Special Report, June 2007.

255. *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1994* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1995), p. 927; and *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1995* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1997), p. 1063.

256. Anoushiravan Ehteshami, “Iran–Iran Relations after Saddam,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (2003), p. 122.

257. “Irak'uga kukkyöngmunje tūng Iranüi yogujogönül surak,” *Rodong sinmun*, 22 August 1990, p. 6; “Iranoemusöng Irak'üüi min'ganinjyöktüre taehan Migugüi kongsübül kyut'an,” *Rodong sinmun*, 23 January 1991, p. 6; “Irani Irak'üinmine taehan kukchejögin injojuüijögwönjoe hyömnöyök,” *Rodong sinmun*, 28 January 1991, p. 6; “Irak'üwa Irani chönjaengp'orogyohwan chaegae,” *Rodong sinmun*, 18 March 1992, p. 6; “Irani Irak'üwaüi punjaengmunjerül hoedamül t'onghae haegyörhal ripchangül p'yomyöng,” *Rodong sinmun*, 17 May 1995, p. 6; and “Üigyönsangi munjerül haegyörhago hyöpchoharyönün Iran'gwa Irak'ü,” *Rodong sinmun*, 9 December 1997, p. 6.

In the sphere of public diplomacy, North Korea adopted a more ambivalent attitude. From 1992 to 1995, when the UN General Assembly regularly discussed the issue of human rights violations in Iran and Iraq, the votes cast by North Korea, Iran, and Iraq followed a fairly consistent pattern. If a draft resolution targeted Iran's human rights violations, North Korea invariably opposed it, whereas Iraq usually supported it; if a resolution was directed against Iraq, Iran invariably supported it, and the DPRK preferred to abstain. Iraq and Iran actively used the human rights issue to discredit each other, whereas Pyongyang sought to stay clear of their rivalry but showed a perceptible preference for Iran over Iraq. Apart from the fact that North Korea lacked diplomatic relations with Iraq, the DPRK may have taken into consideration that, in these years, Iraq faced extreme international isolation, and only a few states (Sudan and Libya) were ready to defend its human rights record. In contrast, the number of countries that proved willing to throw their weight behind Iran steadily grew from fifteen in 1992 to 26 in 1995, including such major states as China, India, Pakistan, and Indonesia.<sup>258</sup>

In the sphere of raw power politics, North Korea's post-Cold War maneuvering between Iran and Iraq was of an especially unsavory nature. In 1999–2001, the North Koreans held secret negotiations with Iraq about the transfer of technology for a surface-to-surface ballistic missile with a range of 1,300 kilometers (a range comparable to that of Iran's DPRK-inspired Shahab-3) but in the end failed to deliver the equipment for which Iraq had paid \$10 million in advance, nor did they heed Iraq's demands for a refund.<sup>259</sup> Apart from financial considerations, North Korea's decision to enter talks with Iraq was probably influenced by Saddam Hussein's growing assertiveness vis-à-vis the United States. From 1998 to 2000, North Korean propaganda noted that the United States was no longer able to create a coalition against Iraq as it had done in 1991 and praised Baghdad's decision to expel the UN inspectors.<sup>260</sup>

For North Korea, the resurgence of Iraqi military power appeared to be a favorable development, but Iranian leaders had good reason to regard it

258. *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1992* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1993), pp. 789, 792; *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1993* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1994), pp. 936, 938; *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1994*, pp. 1088, 1092; and *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1995*, pp. 800, 803.

259. *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WMD with Addendums: Delivery Systems* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004), pp. 58–61; and David E. Sanger and Thom Shanker, "For the Iraqis, a Missile Deal That Went Sour; Files Tell of Talks with North Korea," *The New York Times*, 1 December 2003, p. A4.

260. "U.S. is not 'only superpower,'" KCNA, 8 December 1998; "Behavior of Japan, political dwarf," KCNA, 23 December 1998; and "Imperialists' high-handed and arbitrary practices assailed," KCNA, 3 May 2000 (the last article was obtained by Hong Yong Ja).



as a security threat, all the more so because Saddam Hussein's efforts to resume his missile program were at least partly motivated by his ongoing rivalry with Iran.<sup>261</sup> In 1999 and 2001, angered by Hussein's support to the exiled Mujahedin-e-Khalq guerrillas, Iran repeatedly fired missiles at guerrilla camps in Iraq.<sup>262</sup> North Korea's missile talks with Iraq constituted an act of double deception insofar as they disregarded the security interests of Iran but also broke promises to Iraq.

North Korea's policies toward Iran and Iraq, both during and after the Cold War, showed several long-term patterns. First, North Korea's commitment to Iraq vis-à-vis Iran, or to Iran vis-à-vis Iraq, was by no means as permanent and unconditional as the solidarity the DPRK expected vis-à-vis South Korea. Even when North Korea's political or military collaboration with one of the two antagonistic states (such as with Iraq in 1971–1972 or with Iran in 1982–1984) reached a high level, and its contacts with the other state were almost non-existent, North Korean leaders were eager to reach out to the other country if they saw a chance for rapprochement, no matter whether their old partner liked it or not. If the new partner (e.g., Iran in 1972–1973) happened to maintain closer relations with South Korea, the North Koreans strove to challenge the ROK on home ground by gaining a foothold in this hitherto inaccessible country, instead of sticking to the state that loyally adhered to North Korea's standpoint on the Korean question.

Second, North Korean leaders usually sought to avoid taking a public stand on the Iraq-Iran dispute. They adopted an evasive stance not only in the years when they maintained cordial relations with both sides (as in 1974–1975) but also when they were on good terms with one state and lacked any contacts with the other (e.g., 1969–1970). Even when they definitely sided with one country against the other (e.g., with Iraq against Iran in 1971–1972 or with Iran against Iraq in 1980–1981), they refrained from launching the same type of sustained propaganda campaign against their partner's opponent that they directed against the United States, South Korea, and Israel. They praised the occasional attempts by Iraq and Iran to settle their differences (as in 1975, 1988, 1991, etc.).

Third, North Korea was likewise disinclined to confront Iraq and Iran over matters of domestic politics. Save a few critical comments that *Rodong sinmun* made on the persecution of the ICP from 1960 to 1963 (inspired by

261. *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor*, p. 4.

262. Amin Tarzi and Darby Parliament, "Missile Messages: Iran Strikes MKO Bases in Iraq," *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2001), pp. 125–133.

the attitude of the DPRK's Communist allies), North Korean propaganda preferred to publish only good news about the domestic conditions in Iraq and Iran. Unlike *Neues Deutschland*, it ignored Iraq's repressive measures against the Kurds but readily welcomed the occasional attempts to settle the Kurdish conflict by peaceful means.<sup>263</sup> Nor did it pay attention to the animosity between the ICP and the second Ba'ath regime, except when the two parties reached a temporary rapprochement.<sup>264</sup> In contrast to the Soviet Union and China, North Korean leaders were willing to forge interparty ties with the Ba'ath at the expense of the ICP. In the same vein, *Rodong sinmun* failed to publish any article on the Iranian revolution until its decisive victory and ignored domestic crises of the Islamic Republic that were at least briefly covered by *Neues Deutschland* (e.g., the terrorist attacks of 1981 and the leadership's anti-Communist turn in 1983).<sup>265</sup> In the face of various regime changes in 1963, 1968, and 1979, North Korean leaders tried to stay on good terms with the latest rulers in Iraq and Iran.

Fourth, North Korea's opportunistic and low-key attitude toward the twists and turns of Iraqi and Iranian politics was peculiarly combined with an occasional readiness to adopt an unusually extreme position in support of one or both—a stance that the Communist great powers were reluctant to take. For instance, the North Koreans praised the public hanging of Jewish “spies” in Baghdad, expressed agreement with the Ba'ath Party's uncompromising attitude toward Israel, temporarily backed Iraq's claims to the Shatt al-Arab, condemned the Iranian seizure of the Gulf islands, reached out to Khomeini soon after his homecoming, approved of the Iranian occupation of the U.S. embassy, and shipped arms to the Islamic Republic shortly after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War.

When these seemingly incongruous patterns are examined together, they reveal a picture that is even more complex than the model that Lyong Choi, Jong-dae Shin, and Han-hyung Lee created to describe the Iranian-DPRK partnership. Pointing out that “despite its ideological ties with Pyongyang, Tehran had no qualms working with North Korea's enemy,” these authors attributed Iran's limited commitment to the DPRK to three factors: the

263. “Irak'üesö K'urüdüjongmunjehaegyöullo minjokchökr'ongiri iruöjyöta,” *Rodong sinmun*, 17 March 1970, p. 6; and “K'urüdümunjeüi haegyörün Irak'üüi minjujuüijöng palchönnül pojanghayössümyö pandongseryögenün k'ün t'agyökül chuöta,” *Rodong sinmun*, 16 March 1971, p. 6.

264. “Ch'ukchön' Irak'ügongsandang chungangwiwönhoe,” *Rodong sinmun*, 22 August 1973, p. 1. On the Ba'ath-ICP rapprochement in 1972–1973, see Tareq Y. Ismael, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 168–169.

265. “Bombenanschlag in Teheran,” *Neues Deutschland*, 30 June 1981, p. 1; and “Erklärung des Auslandskomitees der Tudeh-Partei Irans,” *Neues Deutschland*, 17 May 1983, p. 6.

material benefits that Iranian leaders could draw from their economic cooperation with South Korea and from a nuclear deal with the United States; the logistical unfeasibility of direct military cooperation; and the different geopolitical positions of the two states.<sup>266</sup> Such practical considerations must have influenced North Korea's Iraq/Iran diplomacy in at least some of the episodes described here. In 1972–1973 and then in 1979–1980, North Korean leaders had good reason to expect that a diplomatic opening to oil-rich Iran would bring substantial material benefits—benefits that could offset the risks of alienating Iraq.

In other cases, however, North Korea had little to gain (or potentially much to lose) by refraining from giving full support to either Iraq or Iran. For example, in 1969–1970 Iran was firmly allied with South Korea and showed no interest in cooperating with the DPRK, yet North Korea did not take sides with Iraq against Iran, no matter how firmly Iraq championed North Korea's cause in the UN. In 1982–1983, when Iranian leaders were determined to invade Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussein, the risks of North Korea's attempt to restore diplomatic relations with Iraq greatly outweighed the potential benefits, but North Korean leaders were not daunted.

The supreme objective of North Korea's diplomatic strategy toward the Middle East and the Third World in general, and toward Iraq and Iran in particular, seems to have been to maximize the number of partners rather than to make a stable and preferential commitment to specific states. Notably, North Korean leaders' efforts to avoid entanglement in the disputes of their Middle Eastern partners were not confined to their Iraq/Iran diplomacy. They adopted a similarly evasive attitude toward multiple conflicts: between Kuwait and Qasim's Iraq, Ba'ath-ruled Syria and Ba'ath-ruled Iraq, Iraq and Sadat's Egypt, Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and so on. Because North Korea's overall policy in the Third World was aimed at eclipsing South Korea in the UN and the NAM, the DPRK was interested in cooperating with as many states as possible.<sup>267</sup> From this perspective, it made sense to avoid taking sides in intraregional disputes, to welcome attempts at Iran-Iraq reconciliation, and to target propaganda primarily against the United States and Israel. For instance, in 1974, North Korean leaders could gain more from simultaneously engaging Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Iran, and South Yemen than from forging ties with only one or two of these competing five states and neglecting the others.

266. Choi, Shin, and Lee, "The Dilemma of the 'Axis of Evil,'" pp. 598–599.

267. For an overview of the DPRK-ROK rivalry in the UN and the NAM, see Gills, *Korea versus Korea*; Moon, "Between Ideology and Interest"; and Young, *Guns, Guerrillas, and the Great Leader*.

The USSR, East Germany, and other Communist powers adopted a largely similar attitude toward the Middle East. In the face of Qasim's territorial claims on Kuwait or the recurrent Iran-Iraq disputes, Soviet officials usually encouraged both sides to solve their disputes by peaceful means, looked the other way, or singled out the United States or Britain as the main culprit. Because North Korea's early maneuvering vis-à-vis Iraq/Iran (1958–1963) faced greater handicaps than that of the USSR, East Germany, and the other East European countries, North Korean leaders had a strong incentive to stay on the good side of the host authorities, by one means or another. Once they gained a diplomatic foothold in a country, they sought to retain (or regain) it at any cost—hardly an easy task because Middle Eastern leaders were unusually prone to break off diplomatic or trade relations with a state that aroused their ire for one reason or another (as occurred in Iraqi-Mongolian relations in 1963, in Iraqi-U.S. relations in 1967, in Iranian–East German relations in 1969, and in Iraqi-DPRK relations in 1980). In some cases (e.g., the 1963 Ba'ath coup in Iraq or the 1978 Iranian protests), these conditions induced the North Koreans to adopt a more opportunistic and less critical attitude than the Soviet-bloc states did. In other cases (e.g., Iraq in 1969–1972 and Iran in 1979–1980), they sought to gain the trust of the radical Middle Eastern regimes by confronting the latter's opponents more aggressively than the other Communist powers were willing to do.

Nevertheless, the net result of these complicated maneuvers was not necessarily as favorable as North Korean leaders hoped. Their Middle Eastern partners (especially the Iraqi Ba'ath regime) eventually came to perceive the DPRK as a state that often adopted a shifty, unreliable, hypocritical, and opportunistic attitude toward Mideast issues, yet selfishly, aggressively, and dogmatically pursued its own national interests; whose economic capabilities fell behind those of South Korea; and which thus could hardly be regarded as an optimal ally unless Iraq or Iran faced serious international isolation and badly needed a partner willing to adapt to its extremist position.<sup>268</sup>

Paradoxically, the conditions that offered the best chance for the creation of a close relationship between North Korea and a Middle Eastern state—that is, the various intraregional conflicts—were largely at variance with the general approach of the DPRK's diplomacy in the Middle East. In several cases (e.g., Qasim's clash with Nasser in 1959, Iraq's conflict with Iran in 1969–1972, and Iran's war with Iraq in 1980), North Korean diplomacy directly benefited from the intraregional disputes, yet KWP leaders did not draw the conclusion

268. On Arab perceptions of North Korean shiftiness, opportunism, and selfishness, see also Szalontai, "Courting the 'Traitor to the Arab Cause,'" pp. 116–117.

that they should make a stable and preferential commitment to their new partner vis-à-vis its regional opponent. On the contrary, they readily explored opportunities to reach out to the enemy of their ally. Their attempts to play both ends against the middle rarely achieved much success.

## Acknowledgments

The authors want to thank Joseph S. Bermudez, Charles Kraus, Andrei Lankov, Alon Levkowitz, B.R. Myers, Christian Ostermann, Joshua Pollack, Shin Jongdae, Dae-Kyu Yoon, and the three anonymous reviewers for the advice and support they provided in preparing this article. We are especially indebted to Peter Ward and Hanna Kim for their invaluable assistance in providing access to a list of *Rodong sinmun* titles and the related articles and for translating numerous articles. Lee Junhee obtained and translated articles from *Dong-A Ilbo*, while Hong Yong Ja tracked down a difficult-to-access Korean Central News Agency article. Georgina Asfaw and Joseph Gilling from Taylor & Francis' Cold War Eastern Europe database generously provided access to numerous documents obtained from the UK National Archives. Mary Curry kindly assisted with citations of documents from the U.S. Digital National Security Archive (DNSArchive). Caroline Kobin-Haube helped us to gain access to the on-line archives of *Neues Deutschland*. This work was supported by the Laboratory Program for Korean Studies through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the Korean Studies Promotion Service of the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2019-LAB-1250001) (for Balázs Szalontai) and Hankuk University of Foreign Studies' Research Fund (for Yoo Jinil).