THE EXISTENCE of Sino-Soviet conflict has produced ambivalent attitudes in North Korea. On the one hand, the Pyongyang leadership recognizes that this conflict provides North Korea with a measure of flexibility and a freedom of maneuver. On the other hand, it sees the lack of bloc unity as a reason to fear manipulation by both the USSR and the People's Republic of China (PRC) as well as a constraint on North Korea's efforts to unify the Korean peninsula under its aegis. Indeed, whenever North Korea has found itself closer to one side than to the other, it has suffered consequences.

In light of the last consideration, Pyongyang since 1970 has been pursuing a policy of equidistance toward its big Communist neighbors, scrupulously avoiding comments critical of either. To be sure, the impression persists that North Korea's relations with China are warmer than its relations with the Soviet Union, for North Korea clearly feels closer to the PRC emotionally and ideologically. Pyongyang, for example, notes with much appreciation China's unsparing and ardent support of its policies and especially Peking's explicit praise of and deference to President Kim II-song. At the same time, North Korea's sense of solidarity with China is tempered by a painful awareness of its own heavy dependence on the USSR for economic aid, the supply of sophisticated weapons, and diplomatic support.

The books under review touch in various ways on North Korea's tortuous path to independence and self-reliance and the complications and problems that such a course has entailed. Wayne Kiyosaki's emphasis is, in his words, on "the role of the great powers in shaping North Korea's foreign policy," and his interpretive essay sheds much light on Pyongyang's handling of pressure from Moscow and Peking. Chin O. Chung provides an informative narrative of aspects of North Korea's relations with the PRC and the Soviet Union and of its reactions to selected issues in dispute between the two Communist neighbors. While his volume is essentially a chronological account of events, the interpretations sprinkled throughout represent a useful distillation and synthesis of the existing literature on the subject. The Ginsburgs-Kim book is a chronicle of the highlights of North Korea's diplomatic activities in general.

Robert Simmons' volume explores the strains and discord among the Communist allies during the Korean war. In the course of this exploration, he develops the argument that factional political struggle in North Korea constituted an important element of the background of the war. Although some of his conclusions are admittedly speculative, his interpretations are thought-provoking.

While the book edited by William J. Barnds covers a broad range of topics, three essays in it bear directly or indirectly upon our concerns here. Donald Zagoria and Young Kun Kim look perceptively at North Korea's
relations with the major powers. Robert Scalapino presents a lucid and incisive analysis of North-South Korean relations and the unification policies of the two sides. Gregory Henderson makes a plea for a unified independent Korea. While he views a unified Korea with a four-power guarantee of its neutrality and independence as an ultimate objective, he favors a gradualist solution, bestowing his blessing on intermediate measures, including those of the type South Korea has been advocating. Unfortunately, it is not clear how he proposes to move the two sides in Korea—with the respective vested interest of ruling groups that are sustained by profoundly divergent ideological, political, economic, and social systems—to agree to intermediate measures, let alone to travel the path to a unified Korea. No matter how intermediate, measures of any significance would necessarily have crucial implications for the distribution of power within each society as well as between the two societies.

AS THESE BOOKS attest, the interaction among the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), the USSR, and China has become quite complex. It may be useful, therefore, to explore the dynamics of this interaction—especially insofar as it affects the current situation on the Korean peninsula.

The major foreign policy goals of North Korea are completion of the revolution in all of Korea and promotion of socialist construction in Korea as a means of furthering the development of world revolution. (That these also look very much like domestic policy goals should not be surprising, for Pyongyang entertains no distinction between domestic and foreign policy objectives—the latter being viewed as instruments for implementing the former.) North Korean foreign policy places highest priority on the dual task of realizing national reunification and completing the revolution on the Korean peninsula.

The twin aspects of this task, it is important to understand, are closely intertwined. A South Korean revolution and national reunification are prerequisites for the completion of an all-Korean revolution. To put things another way, revolution in the South and national reunification have the common purpose of advancing all-Korean revolution. As the North Koreans see things, revolution in the South and reunification both necessitate the withdrawal of United States troops from Korea. A South Korean revolution involves not only a class struggle for a people’s democratic government but also national liberation from the United States. By the same token, the struggle for national reunification must take place throughout Korea under the aegis of the DPRK.

The North Korean view is that the fulfillment of its objectives requires: (1) strengthening of the revolutionary power base in North Korea, (2) bolstering of revolutionary power in South Korea, and (3) securing increased international support. In order to enhance its national power through socialist construction, North Korea seeks to safeguard and strengthen military, political, and economic ties with other socialist countries, especially the Soviet Union and China. It also believes that the development of economic ties with the Western nations would contribute to the attainment of this goal. To enhance the revolutionary potential in South Korea, Pyongyang argues that “contradictions” between revolutionary forces and antirevolutionary elements must be intensified. More specifically, the political consciousness of the masses in South Korea must be awakened in order to advance struggle under the leadership of a Marxist-Leninist party, and a united front of workers, peasants, and other progressive patriotic forces such as youth, students, and intellectuals must be formed. To increase its solidarity with international forces, North Korea believes it must (1) deepen its ties with socialist countries and Third World countries; (2) establish diplomatic relations with the countries with which South Korea maintains relations and, if possible, cut off South Korea’s ties with these nations; (3) forestall South Korea’s effort to develop links with socialist countries; (4) seek membership and participation in all types of international organizations; and (5) capture the allegiance of overseas Korean residents and mobilize them for its cause.

AS FOR THE USSR, Moscow believes that it is in the Soviet national interest to prevent the establishment of hegemonic influence in East Asia by other powers. This general conception underlies, and fundamentally shapes, Soviet policy toward Korea.

At a more concrete level, Soviet policy toward Korea seems to reflect the following premises:

(1) No development in or around Korea should be allowed to bring about a major deterioration in Soviet-US relations which might adversely affect Soviet interests elsewhere. In particular, a severe confrontation carrying the risk of military action should be avoided.
While a US presence in South Korea is not desirable in either the medium or long run, this presence is not detrimental to Soviet interests in the short run. In a sense, moreover, the American military presence provides leverage vis-à-vis North Korea.

(2) The course of Japan’s domestic or foreign policies should not be affected in a way injurious to Soviet interests. In Moscow’s eyes, it would be prudent not to encourage or provide a pretext for Japan to increase her military capabilities sharply, and especially to develop nuclear weapons. Nor should Japan be stimulated to move toward closer alignment with China or to undertake more intimate defense cooperation with the US. Finally, Japan’s economic cooperation with the Soviet Union should not be jeopardized.

(3) No development regarding Korea should lend support to China’s anti-Soviet programs, domestic or foreign. More specifically, Chinese influence in Korea should not be enhanced. Above all, Peking should not be allowed to establish predominant influence over North Korea. From the Soviet standpoint, it is crucial that the government in North Korea remain friendly to the Soviet Union, for in the event of a military conflict with the PRC, North Korea would be of strategic importance. Soviet naval activities could be hampered by any hostile power that controlled Korea.

A number of Western analysts, including several contributors to the volumes under review here, claim to see some indications that the Soviet Union may be contemplating application of the German formula to the Korean peninsula. The evidence cited includes private comments of Soviet scholars and Soviet grants of entry visas for South Korean nationals to participate in international conferences held in the Soviet Union.

While the Soviet Union may consider the North Korean formula for unification unrealistic and while Soviet analysts may accept the division of Korea as a fact and expect the division to continue for an indefinite period, it is important to point out that the Soviet government has never advocated a German formula. Nor has it made any serious diplomatic effort to promote the formula in regard to Korea. Moscow remains unresponsive, for example, to a call for direct talks with South Korean governmental representatives. Thus, the Soviet Union appears unlikely to support application of the German formula unless present circumstances concerning Korea alter radically. The most critical factor would probably be North Korea’s consent or acquiescence to such a course.

Whatever one’s judgment about the alleged Soviet inclination to adopt the German formula, it is not difficult to discern the existence of powerful constraints on Soviet flexibility. One is North Korea’s persistent admonitions. The Soviet government does not want to antagonize Pyongyang by taking actions which might undermine North Korea’s position on a matter the latter considers vital.

Another constraint is the PRC, which would undoubtedly seek to exploit the situation to the USSR’s disadvantage by accusing it of “betrayal.” Moscow is highly sensitive to North Korea’s ties with the Chinese and feels inhibited from taking actions that might result in increased intimacy between these two countries.

A final constraint is Soviet perceptions of US intentions toward Korea: notably, the degree of US support for South Korea and America’s evolving relations with North Korea. Here the troop withdrawal issue weighs heavily. The initial announcement in the spring of 1977 of President Jimmy Carter’s decision to pull out American ground forces apparently came as a surprise to Soviet analysts. Despite Carter’s campaign promises, they seem to have believed that the international ramifications involved would prevent any new administration from significantly reducing US forces, at least without a quid pro quo. Moreover, they found it incomprehensible that the US would unilaterally give up the powerful leverage it enjoys with respect to both Koreas and to other powers because of its military presence. For these reasons, they have remained skeptical that the Carter Administration would actually implement the force withdrawal plan as initially announced, and they have argued that if the US does so, it would not carry out withdrawal in such a manner as to jeopardize South Korea’s security or to bring about a disequilibrium in the balance of power in the region. At the same time, what Moscow sees as instability and uncertainty in US policy toward South Korea during the past several years has contributed to Soviet caution in considering the German formula. Paradoxically, the following proposition generally appears to hold: the greater the perceived degree and steadiness of American support for South Korea, the easier it would be for the Soviet Union to pursue a policy of improving relations with South Korea. (Only a perception that US abandonment of South Korea was imminent might provide the Soviet Union with...
more incentive to enter into negotiations with South Korea and to establish its presence in South Korea.

The Soviet government’s caution or “inflexibility,” however, is not merely the product of these various constraints. It derives at least as much, and probably more, from the fact that Moscow perceives no clear advantages that would accrue from behaving otherwise and that would offset the possible disadvantages entailed.

Under what circumstances might the Soviet position change? The following developments would appear conducive to a change:

1. Significant improvement in the relations between the two Koreas. This might involve the conclusion of a nonaggression or renunciation-of-force agreement, or simultaneous entry of two Koreas into the United Nations.

2. North Korea’s estrangement from the Soviet Union and a subsequent strengthening of the North Korea-China entente.

3. Significant movement in the relations between the US and North Korea. However, such movement would have to be of the sort that would not lead the Soviet Union to believe that the US was significantly diminishing its support for, or attempting to isolate, South Korea.

4. Fundamental rupture of the relations between the US and South Korea, with a corresponding significant loss of US influence in South Korea.

None of these circumstances is likely to arise in the near future. In the short run, therefore, the Soviet government will probably continue to back North Korea’s unification policies. Whatever Soviet analysts may say in private conversations, the Soviet government’s public stance effectively sets the limits of permissible Soviet actions.

However, while Moscow is unshakably determined to ensure the survival of North Korea as an independent socialist country, the Soviet Union also has a major stake in preventing a war in Korea. Consequently, the Soviet Union is likely, in the short term at least, to seek a relaxation of tension and, above all, tranquility on the Korean peninsula.

It should be stressed, nonetheless, that this Soviet position is not immutable. The assumption that the Soviet Union will be both willing and able to restrain North Korea, which this reviewer takes to be an important part of the Carter Administration’s rationale for its troop withdrawal decision, may not remain valid over the long haul.

ACCORDING TO many Western specialists, China’s policy toward Korea has several components. China tends to regard North Korea as part of its rightful sphere of influence and to attach considerable strategic importance to it. Furthermore, China recognizes that its claim to identification with the Third World is strengthened by firm support from North Korea, an Asian state. But as Peking sees things, the first priority of Chinese foreign policy is to contain Soviet influence in Asia, and for this purpose China must exploit the existence of parallel interests with the US and Japan. By developing a friendly relationship with the powerful US, China can obtain a counterweight to Soviet expansionism as well as facilitate the deepening of its ties with Japan and other Western countries and ensure US cooperation in the matter of Taiwan. To the Chinese leadership, then, a war in Korea is highly undesirable. Not only would it result in greater North Korean dependence on the Soviet Union and a consequent increase in Soviet influence, but it would also bring about a confrontation between China on one hand and the US and Japan on the other, with numerous adverse effects for China in the political, economic, and strategic spheres. For example, it might provide a powerful inducement for Japan to rearm. Thus, a US military presence in South Korea may not be without some merit from the Chinese standpoint, for it keeps South Korea from initiating military action against North Korea, thereby providing China with greater political leverage vis-à-vis North Korea than Peking might otherwise enjoy. China’s dilemma, as Zagoria puts it, is to what extent she can oppose a US military presence without undermining America’s credibility as a countervailing power in Asia.

These interpretations are plausible and persuasive. Indeed, some visitors to the PRC during recent years have come away with impressions that tend to reinforce them. Nevertheless, such views and judgments remain largely speculative in nature. What is unmistakably clear is that China has consistently expressed vocal public endorsement of North Korean policies, including a call for complete withdrawal of US forces from Korea. For the Chinese, support of North Korea’s unification policy is a matter of principle. After all, China, which still seeks to win control of Taiwan, can hardly rebuke North Korea for the latter’s insistence on one unified Korea. Moreover, racial, cultural, and ideological affinity, whether real or imagined, enhances the solidarity the PRC feels with North Korea in its struggle for South Korea’s liberation.
To sum up, North Korea regards its relations with its two Communist neighbors as of crucial importance to the realization of its national objectives of strengthening its own revolutionary power base and harnessing international revolutionary power to its cause. Given the nature of Soviet and Chinese interests, however, it would be foolish for Pyongyang to take for granted a compatibility of Soviet and Chinese policies with North Korea's objectives. North Korea may expect, and is presumably aware, that the road ahead will continue to be tortuous.
The Cuban-Soviet Link

By Cole Blasier


THE STORY of Fidel Castro in Cuba has become a modern fairy tale, exciting curiosity and imagination the world over. Although Castro was once described as a 20th-century Robin Hood, Cuba's economy has such great limitations that he now seems better cast as Cinderella. The United States emerged as a kind of wicked Stepmother in this tale, while the Soviet Union assumed the unaccustomed role of Prince Charming. In 1960, Castro joined the USSR in what became a solid union, although the pair did not "live happily ever after."

Proud and strong-willed from the beginning, Castro strayed from Soviet orthodoxy in both his domestic and foreign policies. Tensions between the two partners reached a peak in 1968 in the wake of the collapse of the national liberation movements that Castro had fostered in Bolivia and elsewhere. The USSR held back Castro's oil allowance as a protest against his disorderly housekeeping and his obsession with Cuba's producing 10 million tons of sugar a year by 1970.

In these quarrels, the Soviet Union was meticulously discreet in public about its Cuban partner. However, Castro, in fits of temper or pique, occasionally let slip clues about tiffs with the USSR. Only recently have both partners maintained a consistent decorum.

For many years, Castro was forced to remain cooped up at home. While this situation stemmed mainly from the punitive sanctions of the United States, Castro may have welcomed the privacy that the isolation afforded him, for it gave him time to establish his authority in his own ménage. Moreover, he may have been afraid to expose his troubled household to the temptations of the wider world.

Castro's isolation also suited his Soviet partner well, for it precluded tests of the union against richer and more powerful rivals.

Now, however, this marriage has successfully weathered the initial stages of courtship, adjustment, and consolidation. Both partners have achieved their major objectives in the relationship and feel secure with one another. One result is that Castro has been emerging more and more from his Caribbean domicile. This is not to say that the parties are headed toward divorce. Quite the contrary. Now that the relationship is on a firmer footing, Cuba and the USSR appear to have much to gain from a more open marriage.

SOVIET-CUBAN relations are the main theme of three of the books reviewed in this essay and of several chapters of the fourth, Bender's The Politics of Hostility. These four books were written by scholars in international relations with different national perspectives. Blanca Torres from the Colegio de México and Jacques Lèvesque from the University of Montréal come from countries that, like Cuba, have enjoyed the advantages and suffered the dis-