

NORTH KOREA AND THE LATIN AMERICAN REVOLUTION, 1959-1970

by

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Abstract

In the 1960s the North Korean leadership embraced the variety of radical Third Worldism associated with Cuba's Tricontinental Conference of 1966, which advocated a militant, united front strategy to defeat US imperialism via armed struggle across the Global South. This political realignment led to exceptionally intimate political, economic, and cultural cooperation with Cuba and a programme to support armed revolutionary movements throughout Latin America. In the process, North Korea acquired a new degree of prestige with the international left, influencing Cuban and Latin American left-wing discourse on matters of economic development, revolutionary organization and strategy, democracy and leadership. North Korea and Cuba became leaders of a radical Third Worldist tendency within the international communist movement that challenged the leadership of Moscow and Beijing, rejected the economic liberalization occurring in the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc, and championed militant internationalism. While most studies of this era in North Korea focus on its relationship with the Soviet Union, China, and events internal to the Korean peninsula, this dissertation shows how important Cuba and Latin America were to the North Korean leadership's international perspective and foreign policy formulation.

Lay Summary

In the 1960s the leadership of North Korea abandoned conventional communist politics and adopted a new ideological position associated with the Tricontinental Conference, an important political gathering in Havana, Cuba in 1966. This led to exceptionally intimate political, economic, and cultural cooperation with Cuba and a programme to support armed revolutionary movements throughout Latin America. In the process, North Korea influenced ideas about development, revolution, and governance in Cuba and Latin America. North Korea and Cuba became leaders of an upstart faction within the international communist movement that challenged the leadership of the Soviet Union and China and championed violent revolution in the developing world. While most studies of this era in North Korea focus on its relationship with the Soviet Union, China, and events internal to the Korean peninsula, this dissertation shows how important Cuba and Latin America were to the North Korean leadership's international perspective and foreign policy formulation.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, William David Moses (Moe) Taylor.

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List of Abbreviations

1J4: Movimiento Revolucionario 14 de Junio
 AAPSO: Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization
 ACDWF: All-China Women's Democratic Federation
 ACWF: All-China Women's Federation
 AIPC: All-India Peace Council
 AD: Acción Democrática
 AJR: Asociación de Jóvenes Rebeldes
 ALN: Ação Libertadora Nacional
 AP: Acción Popular
 ASC: Asian Solidarity Committee
 CAL: Comandos Armados de Liberación
 CPC: Communist Party of China
 COMECON: Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
 CPSU: Communist Party of the Soviet Union
 CTAL: Confederación de los Trabajadores de América Latina
 DCP: Partido Comunista Dominicano
 ELN can refer to:
 Ejército de Liberación Nacional (Colombia)
 Ejército de Liberación Nacional (Peru)
 Ejército de Liberación Nacional (Bolivia)
 ERP: Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo
 FALN: Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional
 FAPU: Frente de Acción Popular Unificada
 FAR: Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes
 FARN: Fuerzas Armadas de la Resistencia Nacional
 FDMC: Federación Democrática de Mujeres Cubanas
 FED: Federación Dominicana de Estudiantes
 FLN can refer to:
 Front de Liberación Nacional (Venezuela)
 Front de Libération Nationale (Algeria)
 FUERSA: Frente Universitario Estudiantil Revolucionario Salvador Allende
 GRUNK: Royal Government of the National Union of Kampuchea
 IUS: International Union of Students
 JCP: Japanese Communist Party
 KDYL: Korean Democratic Youth League
 KFTU: Korean Federation of Trade Unions
 KJU: Korean Journalists Union
 KPA: Korean People's Army
 KWP: Korean Worker's Party
 M-26-7: Movimiento 26 de Julio
 MAS: Movimiento al Socialismo
 MIR can refer to:
 Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (Peru)
 Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (Chile)

Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (Venezuela)
 MOEC: Movimiento Obrero Estudiantil Campesino 7 de Enero
 MOIR: Movimiento Obrero Independiente y Revolucionario
 MPD: Movimiento Popular Dominicano
 MR-12: Movimiento Revolucionario 12 de Abril
 MR-13: the Movimiento Revolucionario 13 de Noviembre
 MR-20: Movimiento Revolucionario 20 de Octubre
 OLAS: La Organización Latinoamericana de Solidaridad
 OSPAAAL: Organización de Solidaridad con los Pueblos de Asia, África y América Latina
 PCB can refer to:
 Partido Comunista Brasileiro
 Partido Comunista de Bolivia
 PCdoB: Partido Comunista do Brasil
 PCC can refer to:
 Partido Comunista de Cuba
 Partido Comunista Colombiano
 PCM: Partido Comunista Mexicano
 PCP: Partido Comunista Peruano
 PCS: Partido Comunista de El Salvador
 PCV: Partido Comunista de Venezuela
 PDP: Partido del Pueblo de Panamá
 PGT: Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo
 PLD: Partido de la Liberación Dominicana
 PLO: Palestinian Liberation Organization
 POLOP: Organização Revolucionária Marxista - Política Operária
 PRD: Partido Revolucionario Dominicano
 PRO: Partido Revolucionario Obrero
 PRV: Partido de la Revolución Venezolana
 PS: Partido Socialista
 PSP can refer to:
 Partido Socialista Popular (Cuba)
 Partido Socialista Popular (Dominican Republic)
 PTB: Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro
 UNCURK: UN Commission for the Rehabilitation and Reunification of Korea
 UND: União Democrática Nacional
 UNO: Odrííst National Union
 UP: Unidad Popular
 VPL: Vanguarda Popular Revolucionária
 WFDY: World Federation of Democratic Youth
 WIDF: Women's International Democratic Federation
 WPC: World Peace Council
 WTFU: World Federation of Trade Unions

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Introduction

This dissertation examines the relationship between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Latin America during the years 1959-70. It is a period which begins with the Cuban Revolution, and which represents North Korea's first phase of major engagement with the region. Although the focus is on North Korean foreign policy towards Latin America and the ideology and political strategy that underlay it, it also explores the appeal of North Korea as a model of revolutionary strategy and economic development, as well as a source of practical support, to a diverse spectrum of the Latin American left. It joins an emerging scholarship concerned with the transnational encounters connecting the Korean peninsula and Latin America, and the Third World internationalism of the Global South more broadly, during the Cold War era. In doing so this study also offers a contribution to our understanding of the legacy of socialism as a development strategy in the twentieth century, and the intellectual and political history of the Latin American left.

North Korea's relationship with the Global South in the Cold War era has received increased attention in recent years, especially since Charles K. Armstrong's *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950–1992* (Cornell University Press, 2013). Prior to Armstrong's book the subject had been studied in a small but important body of work which includes John Chay, Manwoo Lee, Barry K. Gills, and Gi-jong Lee. Since the appearance of *Tyranny of the Weak* the subject has been explored further by Vicki S. Kwon and Benjamin R. Young, and my own previous work on DPRK-Guyana relations during the PNC era (1964-92).¹

¹ Moe Taylor, "North Korean Fragments of Post-Socialist Guyana," *Transactions* 93 (2018): 31-42; Moe Taylor, "One Hand Can't Clap: Guyana and North Korea, 1974-1985," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 17, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 41-63; Moe Taylor, "Only a disciplined people can build a nation: North Korean Mass Games and Third Worldism in Guyana, 1980-1992," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 13, issue 4, no. 2 (January 2015).

Collectively this work has contributed to a greater understanding of North Korea's international role in the Cold War era, and the relationship between ideology and pragmatism in its state policy making. Nevertheless, North Korea's relations with Latin America and the Caribbean remain largely unexplored. The transnational history connecting Asia and Latin America generally is severely understudied, exceptions being important work on Asian immigration by Jeffrey Lesser, Kyeyoung Park, and Mieko Nishida, and some recent scholarship on Maoism in Latin America from José Abelardo Díaz Jaramillo, Rodolfo Antonio Hernández Ortiz, and Miguel Ángel Urrego. Similarly, while there is an extensive literature on the Cold War and left-wing movements in Latin America, it has not explored North Korea's important place in this history.

This dissertation argues that, in the aftermath of the Korean War, the North Korean leadership began to attribute growing importance to the Global South as a terrain of revolutionary struggle, and by extension, its own goals of reunifying the Korean peninsula. This process eventually led the North Korean leadership to embrace the variety of radical Third Worldism associated with Havana's Tricontinental Conference of 1966. While North Korea is commonly portrayed as opportunistically vacillating between Moscow and Beijing during the 1960s, by late 1964 it was moving towards a political stance independent of both. This political realignment was the basis of a new alliance between North Korea, Cuba, and North Vietnam, the three Third World members of the socialist camp, that, by late 1964, shared both a high degree of political consensus and an aversion to the "big power chauvinism" of Moscow and Beijing. The core of Pyongyang's Third Worldist line in the 1960s was that the defeat of US imperialism must be the primary task of the international communist movement, and that a tidal wave of armed insurrection throughout the Global South was the main path to achieving this goal. An insurgent

Third World, North Korean leaders believed, had within it the potential to “sever the lifeline of imperialism” and tip the global balance of power against the international military hegemony of the United States. The Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the multitude of guerrilla movements it inspired across Latin America convinced the North Korean leadership that the region would play a particularly important role in this new epoch of Third World upheaval. This analysis made Latin America an important focus of its foreign policy in the 1960s, leading to exceptionally intimate political, economic, and cultural cooperation with Cuba and a programme to support armed revolutionary movements throughout the region. In the process, North Korea acquired a new degree of prestige with the international left, influencing Cuban and Latin American left-wing discourse on matters of economic development, revolutionary organization and strategy, democracy and leadership. While most studies of this era in North Korea focus on its relationship with the Soviet Union, China, and events internal to the Korean peninsula, this dissertation shows how important Cuba and Latin America were to the North Korean leadership’s international perspective and foreign policy formulation. Moreover, this study illuminates a dimension of the Cold War in the 1960s often neglected in the existing scholarship: the informal “third bloc” constituted by North Korea, Cuba, and North Vietnam, which shook up the socialist camp and injected a fiercely radical current into the Third World left. The North Korean and Cuban leaderships supported one another as the two principle mavericks of the socialist camp, challenging Soviet and Chinese leadership of the international communist movement, while embracing ideological heterodoxy and Third World nationalism in matters of economic development and revolutionary strategy.

By the early 1970s, however, a number of factors – the defeat of the Latin American guerrilla movements, the de-escalation of the Vietnam war, Cuba’s shift to a more moderate and

pro-Soviet position, Sino-US rapprochement, the growing influence of Third World states within the United Nations, Nixon's announcement of a US troop withdrawal from South Korea - led to a major shift in North Korean foreign policy towards Latin America and the Global South more generally. As the basis of the DPRK-Cuba alliance evaporated in a changing international landscape, Pyongyang was forced to reevaluate the analysis and strategy that had guided its foreign policy in the previous decade. The North Korean leadership repositioned itself towards a considerably more moderate position, demonstrating an apparent new faith in what could be achieved through peaceful dialogue with Seoul, multilateralism, the Non-Aligned Movement, and expanding diplomatic relations with countries in the Global South it once dismissed as "fascist puppet states" of imperialism.²

In pursuing this subject, this dissertation connects the history of North Korea's foreign relations to the history of "Third Worldism," a subject that has received heightened interest from scholars in recent years. Contributions to the growing body of literature on Third Worldism include Jeffrey Byrne, Christopher R.W. Dietrich, Elaine Mokhtefi, Adom Getachew, and Carolien Stolte.³ Third Worldism is also addressed less directly in a range of other recent works on related topics of, for example, Caribbean radicalism, Pan-Africanism, the Sino-Soviet split, and on the theme of "transnational solidarity." A brief overview of the literature finds that scholars have preferred a variety of ways in different contexts to best categorize Third Worldism:

² "Repuestas a las Preguntas de Gabriel Molina, Jefe de Información del Periódico 'Hoy,' y de Otros Periodistas Cubanos," (6 July 1965), in Kim Il Sung, *Repuestas a las Preguntas de los Corresponsales Extranjeros*, (Pyongyang: Ediciones en Lenguas Extranjeras, 1974), 83.

³ Jeffrey Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016); Christopher R W Dietrich, *Oil Revolution: Anticolonial Elites, Sovereign Rights, and the Economic Culture of Decolonization* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Elaine Mokhtefi, *Algiers, Third World Capital: Freedom Fighters, Revolutionaries, Black Panthers* (Verso, 2019); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019); Carolien Stolte, "'The People's Bandung': Local Anti-imperialists on an Afro-Asian stage" *Journal of World History* 30, no. 1-2 (June 2019): 125-156.

as a movement, a project, an ideology, a form of nationalism, a form of internationalism, a vogue, a “sense of time,” or, one which I have used in the past, a zeitgeist. The actual term Third Worldism was not commonly used by the historical actors associated with it, nor do all scholars find it useful. The above suggests there are grounds to be sceptical of the very concept itself, and at very least, the need for explicit definition.

This dissertation departs from much of the existing literature on Third Worldism in that it rejects the very premise that we can speak of a singular “Third World/Worldist movement,” which is most commonly construed as born of the Bandung Conference of 1955 and reaching its apex with the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1970s. Such narratives often fail to adequately examine the material conditions and social forces from which political ideas and projects emerge, a trend reflective of the turn away from Marxism and indeed political economy altogether in the academy in line with certain post-modernist currents. Scholarship in this vein frequently ignores the diverse and contradictory ideologies and objectives contained within the multitude of political phenomenon emerging from the colonial and post-colonial world. Individuals and political projects with fundamentally different local contexts, representing different class interests and with drastically differing objectives are blended into a fictional unity, presenting “movements” and “traditions” that are in fact largely imaginary.

Unfortunately, the anti-Marxist turn in the academy has served to jettison the very body of crucial Marxist-informed scholarship from the Global South that can best help us understand Third Worldism. The ground-breaking work of intellectuals like Samir Amin, Issa G. Shivji, Walter Rodney, Clive Thomas, and many others,⁴ the bulk of which was produced in the 1970s

⁴ I would include in this group George Beckford, Oliver Cox, René Depestre, Rajendra Chandisingh, René Zavaleta Mercado, Marta Harnecker, George Priestley, Enzo Faletto, Haroub Othman, Bereket Habte Selassie, Abdulrahman

and early 1980s, interrogated the failures of decolonization, the challenges of underdevelopment and imperialism, the character of the post-colonial state, and the proliferation of self-styled socialist programmes in the Global South. Ironically, the agenda of rejecting Eurocentrism, “universalisms” and “meta-narratives” has resulted in the silencing of a whole canon of indispensable African, Caribbean, Latin American, Asian, and Middle Eastern scholars in favour of currently more fashionable post-colonial theory generated in the metropolitan academy. Even CLR James and Frantz Fanon, two thinkers who retain some prestige within the academy, are more celebrated than their ideas are seriously engaged with.

This dissertation treats Third Worldism both as a zeitgeist, the exact characteristics of which were by no means identical in all times and places, and as a descriptor for a diverse range of political projects emerging out of this zeitgeist. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the decline of the traditional European empires, the outburst of nationalist movements demanding independence across the Global South, and the ascendancy of a community of socialist republics led by the Soviet Union, created the universal impression that tectonic shifts were underway in the world, and that the so-called “Third World” was emerging as a new force in global politics. In some places it would be appropriate to speak of the “euphoria” of decolonization, those moments of mass social upheaval where suddenly the horizon of what is possible seems to broaden drastically. The establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945 and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in 1948, India’s independence in 1947, the Chinese Revolution of 1949, the armed national liberation struggles in Vietnam and Algeria, the rise of Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala, Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana,

Mohamed Babu, Baruch Hirson, Azinna Nwafor, Tabitha Petran, Anouar Abdel-Malek, Mahmoud Hussein, Samih Farsoun, Jitendra Mohan, M. R. Bhagavan, and Bipan Chandra, among others.

and the Cuban Revolution of 1959 were all key events signalling that the Global South now constituted a major challenge to the post-war international order.

In both popular media and scholarship the Asian-African Conference of April 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia is commonly cited as the birthplace of Third World solidarity, “Afro-Asianism,” neutralism, and non-alignment. However, as Aijaz Ahmed and Robert Vitalis have argued quite persuasively, the true happenings and significance of Bandung have been grossly distorted with remarkable effectiveness.⁵ The primary motivation of the five Asian governments that organized the conference – Indonesia, Burma, Ceylon, Pakistan, and India – was growing anxiety over the young People’s Republic of China (PRC). In particular, these leaders feared that Sino-US tension could spark a major military conflict in Asia.⁶ They were also aggrieved over China’s alleged support for communist forces within their territories, while Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand had the same concern regarding the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). For these reasons the PRC and DRV (along with South Vietnam) were invited to the conference, despite the fact that neither were recognized by most of the states present.⁷

The twenty-nine mostly Asian and Arab statesmen who participated in Bandung found unity in their opposition to colonialism and apartheid, and their support for nuclear disarmament, the United Nations, and increased regional cooperation. However only a few embraced Jawaharlal Nehru’s concept of “neutralism,” and there was no attempt to launch some collective Third World political project. Most of the governments represented were adamantly pro-Western

⁵ Aijaz Ahmed, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Verso, 2008); Robert Vitalis, “The Midnight Ride of Kwame Nkrumah and Other Fables of Bandung (Ban-doong)” *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2013).

⁶ George McTurnan Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), 4-8.

⁷ Out of the 29 countries present at Bandung, only India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Burma, Afghanistan, and North Vietnam recognized the PRC, while North Vietnam was recognized only by China.

and anti-communist, and several belonged to the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO).⁸ The majority wanted the conference to adopt a definition of colonialism that encompassed “communist colonialism,” including Moscow and Beijing’s material support for communist parties outside its borders.⁹ This is what Peter Willetts referred to when he asserted that contrary to the popular image, “Bandung in its composition and its decisions was the antithesis of non-alignment.”¹⁰ Neither Seoul nor Pyongyang were invited to Bandung, as the organizers wished to avoid the controversy of the divided peninsula and the recent Korean War altogether. Nor were Mongolia or the Soviet Central Asian republics welcome at the gathering. Representation of sub-Saharan Africa was limited to four states (Sudan, Ethiopia, the Gold Coast, and Liberia), none of whom were invited to participate in the subcommittee to draft a resolution on colonialism.¹¹

The popular image of Bandung as the birthplace of a Third World movement against superpower hegemony and white supremacy is mostly based on, ironically, the alarmist analyses of the US State Department and British Foreign Office from the time, amplified through the Western press.¹² Nevertheless, Bandung lived on as a powerful symbol, and the term “Bandung spirit” received widespread usage across the political spectrum, including, occasionally, by the Korean Worker’s Party. As Vitalis puts it, “Most of what continues to be written about the conference by public intellectuals, would-be revivers of the ‘Spirit of Bandung,’ and professors of postcolonial studies, is myth, as was what was written about Paul Revere, drawing on

⁸ SEATO was a US-led, anti-communist coalition of Asian states established in February 1955 and headquartered in Bangkok. It was routinely condemned by the North Korean government as an instrument of US imperialism in Asia.

⁹ Kahin, “The Asian-African Conference,” 18-22.

¹⁰ Peter Willetts, review of *The Third World without Superpowers: The Collected Documents of the Non-Aligned Countries*, by Odette Jankowitsch and Karl Sauvant (eds), *International Affairs* 55, no. 3 (1979): 439–41.

¹¹ Kahin, “The Asian-African Conference,” 21.

¹² Robert Vitalis, “The Midnight Ride of Kwame Nkrumah,” 269-270.

Longfellow's romance as a source. In both cases, 'facts matter little when a good story is at stake.'"¹³

A fuller understanding of Third Worldism that evades the myth of a singular, coherent movement born in 1955 and continuing in an unbroken line to the non-aligned initiatives of the 1970s, requires us to look at other important events before and after Bandung. The seeds of an explicitly socialist and anti-imperialist Third World internationalism were planted at Beijing's Asian Women's Conference in December 1949.¹⁴ The event was originally conceived by the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), an organization founded in Paris in November 1945 by women activists drawn from left-wing, communist, and anti-fascist circles.¹⁵ One of North Korea's most famous female leaders, Pak Chŏng'ae,¹⁶ was elected to the organization's executive committee in 1948.¹⁷ An initial plan to host the event in Kolkata was abandoned due to opposition from the Nehru government, which was uneasy with the radical tenor of the event.¹⁸ As a result, the WIDF collaborated with the recently-founded All-China Women's Democratic Federation (ACDWF)¹⁹ to hold the gathering in Beijing. Attended by 165 delegates from sixteen countries, the Asian Women's Conference reversed the precedent of the

¹³ Ibid., 266.

¹⁴ It should be noted that the Asian Women's Conference, and subsequent communist initiatives to build an Asian and Afro-Asian solidarity movement in the 1950s, had antecedents in the Soviet-sponsored anti-colonial activism of the 1920s, such as the Congress of Eastern Peoples in Baku in 1920, and the Congress of Oppressed People in Brussels in 1927, the latter which established the League Against Imperialism (LAI).

¹⁵ Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: the case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)," *Women's History Review*, 19, no. 4 (2010): 555.

¹⁶ Pak Chŏng'ae (1907-?): according to Andrei Lankov, her real name was Ch'oe Vera and she was a Soviet intelligence agent in the Japanese colonial period. Following liberation she quickly emerged at the top of the communist leadership in the North, serving on the Political Bureau of the KWP's Central Committee, and heading the Korean Democratic Women's Union (KDWU). She was purged from the party leadership in 1966, and only served in minor bureaucratic positions thereafter.

¹⁷ Francisca de Haan, "Eugénie Cotton, Pak Chong-ae, and Claudia Jones: Rethinking Transnational Feminism and International Politics," *Journal of Women's History* 25, issue 4 (Winter 2013): 80.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Armstrong, "Before Bandung: The Anti-Imperialist Women's Movement in Asia and the Women's International Democratic Federation," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 41, no. 2 (2016): 314-315.

¹⁹ Later renamed the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF).

Asian Relations Conference of two years earlier, by only inviting representatives from the northern half of Korea. The North Korean delegation included the famous dance performer Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi.²⁰ Although documents relating to the conference remain scarce,²¹ the event was certainly a landmark in the building of transnational networks of socialist feminism in the Global South.

In April 1955, just a few weeks before the Bandung Conference, the Asian Conference on the Relaxation of International Tension (CRIT) was held in New Delhi. It was organized by the All-India Peace Council (AIPC), an affiliate of the World Peace Council (WPC), the international network of peace activists supported by the Soviet government. Carolien Stolte argues CRIT represented the convergence of the traditional goals of the peace movement (disarmament, non-intervention) with the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist objectives more important to peace activists in the Global South.²² The proximity of the Delhi and Bandung conferences to one another, and the overlap in the themes of both, caused the international press coverage to frequently link the two. However officials of the Nehru administration, the CIA reported at the time, took “considerable pains to disassociate their government from this meeting.”²³ The four-person North Korean delegation was headed by Pak Chŏng'ae, who joined a number of prestigious guests, including the Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg, and the Bengali

²⁰ Emily Wilcox, “Crossing Over: Choe Seung-hui’s Pan-Asianism in Revolutionary Time,” *Muyongyŏksagirok'ak* [The Journal of Society for Dance Documentation and History] 51 (December): 84-85. Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi (1911-69) was an internally-renowned modern dance artist. Born in Seoul, she defected to North Korea in 1946 along with her husband, the literary critic An Mak, and her brother-in-law. In North Korea she continued to play a leading role in the performing arts. An is believed to have fallen in the purge of literary figures associated with Han Sŏrya in 1962. Ch'oe herself was purged from the party in 1967 and disappeared from public view. She died on 8 August 1969.

²¹ Armstrong, “Before Bandung,” 306.

²² Carolien Stolte, ““The People’s Bandung”: Local Anti-imperialists on an Afro-Asian stage” *Journal of World History* 30, no. 1-2 (June 2019): 136-138.

²³ “The Asian Conference for Relaxing International Tensions,” CIA memorandum, 14 March 1955, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP91T01172R000300050029-4.pdf>.

activist and Islamic scholar, Maulana Bhashani.²⁴ Pak delivered a speech at the conference and called for a follow-up event to address the division of the Korean peninsula.²⁵ The North Korean delegation also succeeded in having the final resolution include a statement demanding the removal of all foreign troops from the Korean peninsula, and affirming “the inalienable right of the Korean people to settle their own destiny themselves...”²⁶ The impetus to fuse the peace movement with the struggle against colonialism, and to provide communist leadership to the emerging networks of Third World solidarity, resulted in the conference giving birth to the Asian Solidarity Committee (ASC), with North Korea as a founding member.²⁷ National ASC committees were tied closely to local communist parties and considered “communist fronts” by the US government and its allies. ASC committees in the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, North Vietnam, and Mongolia were official state-sponsored bodies.

In January 1957 Gamal Nasser, at the high-point of his international prestige following the Suez Canal crisis, accepted a proposal from the ASC and WPC to host an Afro-Asian Solidarity conference. Held in Cairo in December 1957, the conference brought together the nascent Asian solidarity movement with Arab nationalists, anti-colonial activists from across Africa, and the international peace movement. According to the American peace activist Homer A. Jack, who attended as an observer, the conference resolutions called for Asia and Africa to be declared a “peace zone” free of nuclear weapons, pledged solidarity with ongoing anti-colonial struggles in Algeria, South Africa, Palestine, and across sub-Saharan Africa, and affirmed the

²⁴ Although there was no South Korean representation at the conference, according to the CIA memorandum mentioned above, an invitation was extended to South Korea, although it is not clear exactly to whom.

²⁵ Stolte, “The People’s Bandung,” 143-144.

²⁶ “The Asian Conference for Relaxation of International Tension,” supplement to *New Times* (Moscow) no. 16 (16 April 1965), 5.

²⁷ “A Report on Communist Colonialism and International Communism,” part one, US Information Press Service special packet (July 1956), 12.

right of all nations to institute economic nationalization.²⁸ North Korea was represented by a four-person delegation headed by the famous writer and KWP Central Committee member Han Sörya, while no invitation was extended to South Korea. Han sat on the subcommittee on Algeria, where his report compared the atrocities committed by French soldiers in the colony to those of Japanese and US forces in Korea.²⁹ A CIA report found it noteworthy that the North Koreans served as “the main Soviet bloc voice on Algeria” and that the delegation urged attendees to consider French imperialism in Algeria as “but part of the aggressive provocations of international reaction led by the U.S. imperialists.”³⁰

The Cairo conference inherited the existing ASC network to establish the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization (AAPSO), with its headquarters in Cairo.³¹ North Korea’s national affiliate was headed by Han Sörya, and Pak Yongkuk, chief of the KWP Central Committee’s International Department.³² Han was subsequently elected to the organization’s twenty-six member executive at the second AAPSO conference in Conakry, Guinea, in April 1960, alongside such notable figures as Patrice Lumumba, Jaramogi Odinga, Joshua Nkomo, and Mehdi Ben Barka.³³ However, Han was not given much opportunity to serve in his new role – he soon after fell out of favour with the KWP leadership and was purged from the party in 1962.³⁴ Nevertheless, North Korea retained its seat on the executive council and continued to play a

²⁸ Homer A. Jack, “The Cairo Conference,” *Africa Today* 5, no. 2 (March-April 1958): 3.

²⁹ *The Afro-Asian Conference: an Analysis of Communist Strategy and Tactics*, CIA report (October 1958 CIA) 16, Appendix I, 8, Appendix III, 45, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-00915R001000290043-2.pdf>.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Appendix I, 8.

³¹ With the founding of AAPSO the ASC ceased to exist as a separate organization. National ASC committees renamed themselves Afro-Asian Solidarity committees.

³² “Directory of the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization,” 15 April 1961, CIA report, 15, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-02646R000400080001-5.pdf>.

³³ “The Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization from April 1960 – April 1961,” CIA report (15 June 1961), 23, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-00915R001300050007-5.pdf>.

³⁴ Andrei Lankov, *Crisis in North Korea: The Failure of De-Stalinization, 1956* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2004), 33-34.

significant role in the organization and the plethora of conferences AAPSO organized in the late 1950s and early 1960s.³⁵

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was founded at a meeting of twenty-five heads of state in Belgrade in September 1961. The gathering was inspired by recent events such as the Suez Canal Crisis, the Soviet invasion of Hungary, rapid decolonization in Africa, and a flare-up of Cold War tensions in 1960-61.³⁶ However the Belgrade summit had a genesis quite independent of both Bandung and AAPSO. The primary initiative for the gathering came from Yugoslav president Josef Tito working in partnership with Nasser. Their vision was a coalition of the “non-aligned” states which could serve as a progressive force in world politics, forward the goals of peace and decolonization, and collectively assert its independence of both superpowers. It was intended to *pre-empt* Sukarno’s intentions to organize a second Bandung conference. Sukarno’s plans, backed enthusiastically by China, would exclude Yugoslavia and be far from non-aligned, given the orientation of most of the independent Asian and African states in 1961.³⁷ Nehru participated in the Belgrade summit reluctantly, critical of what he saw as its outdated fixation with colonialism.³⁸ Ironically, despite the significant number of countries that had gained their independence since 1955, less than half of those in Asia and Africa, and no

³⁵ For example, the CIA identified North Korea as one of the junior funding partners of AAPSO’s April 1961 executive committee meeting in Bandung, which produced a resolution on Korea demanding the withdrawal of US troops from the South and the unification of the peninsula. North Korea also sat on the preparatory committee for the 1962 Afro-Asian Writers Conference in Cairo. See “The Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization from April 1960 – April 1961.”

³⁶ Peter Willetts, *The Non-Aligned Movement: the Origins of a Third World Alliance* (London: Francis Printer, 1978), 10-14.

³⁷ Ibid. China was another reason that Tito, Nehru, and Nasser did not wish to see Sukarno’s plan for a second Bandung succeed. The Chinese government was a primary supporter of Sukarno’s plans and would presumably play a leading role in such an event. But Beijing was a virulent critic of Tito, India and China were embroiled in border tensions in the late 1950s, and Nasser resented China’s aggressive bid for leadership in AAPSO.

³⁸ Willetts, “The Non-Aligned Movement,” 13-18; Vitalis, “The Midnight Ride of Kwame Nkrumah,” 26.

Latin American government except Cuba, sent delegates to the Belgrade summit. Neither North nor South Korea were invited, on the grounds that neither could be considered non-aligned.³⁹

The Radical Third Worldism of the Tricontinental Conference

The Third Worldist political tendency that is a central focus of this dissertation – what I refer to as radical Third Worldism or the Third Worldist left – is one which emerged in the 1960s, whose chief reference points were the Vietnamese, Algerian, and Cuban revolutions, and which was most explicitly defined at Havana’s Tricontinental Conference of 1966. The Tricontinental was not the descendent of Bandung nor Belgrade, as the myth of one grand, singular “Third World movement” contends. It is more accurately conceived as the heir to the earlier attempts to build a popular, militant, and explicitly anti-imperialist Third World solidarity movement, whose previous primary vehicle had been first the ASC and then AAPSO. It was at the third AAPSO conference in Moshi, Tanganyika, February 1963, that a Cuban observer extended Fidel’s offer to host the first ever international conference of Afro-Asian-Latin American solidarity in Havana. Many of the delegates and observers to the Tricontinental were members of national AAPSO committees.

While Bandung had brought together the leaders of twenty-nine mostly Asian and Arab states, there were eighty-two countries represented in Havana, including twenty-seven delegations from Latin America and the Caribbean. Both the Soviet Union and China were invited to participate on equal ground with the members of the “Third World.” Observer status was granted to seven Eastern Bloc countries,⁴⁰ as well as communist parties and left-wing groups

³⁹ The twenty-five participants of the 1961 Belgrade summit were Afghanistan, Burma, Cyprus, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kampuchea, Lebanon, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Yemen, Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, the Belgian Congo, Cuba, and Yugoslavia. Source: Willett, “The Non-Aligned Movement,” 254-256.

⁴⁰ These were Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, East Germany, and Romania.

from Europe and North America. Of the five governments that organized Bandung, not one participated in Havana. India and Pakistan were represented by communist and socialist opposition parties. In fact, only a handful of non-socialist countries were represented by members of their ruling governments.⁴¹ At Bandung, respectable statesmen discussed decolonization, peace, and regional cooperation. The Tricontinental brought together communist militants, battle-hardened guerrillas, and international fugitives to the capital of revolutionary Cuba, where the talk was of armed struggle and world revolution, blood and sacrifice. The Vietnamese delegation came bearing gifts like a ring made from the metal of a downed US plane, and the helmet of a dead American pilot. “The fight is unto death” the conference organizers declared, “the peoples of the three continents must answer imperialist violence with revolutionary violence”⁴² Emperor Haile Selassie I, a star of the Non-Aligned Movement, was unwelcome - he had long been condemned by the Cuban leadership as an imperialist stooge guilty of crimes against his people. While he might be a direct descendent of King Solomon, the Cuban press mocked, “he has not inherited the wisdom of his distant ancestor.”⁴³ Yugoslavia was not even granted the observer status afforded to other socialist countries, and sent only a single journalist.

The Tricontinental represented an effort to bring together, in the words of the Moroccan socialist Mehdi Ben Barka, “the two great contemporary currents of World Revolution [...] the current which started with the October Revolution in the Soviet Union, and which is the current

⁴¹ These were Algeria, Cambodia, the Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, the United Arab Republic, and Syria.

⁴² “Antecedents and Objectives of the Movement of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America,” in *First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America* (Havana: General Secretariat of the OSPAAAL, 1966), 22.

⁴³ “Prepara Selassie Brutal Represión,” *Granma* (Havana), 19 December 1960.

of socialist revolution, and the parallel current of the revolution for national liberation.”⁴⁴ This tendency never coalesced into a formal movement or international with a clearly-defined ideology of its own. Arguably it defined itself more by what it sought to destroy than what it hoped to create. However radical Third Worldism was based on a number of ideas defined at the Tricontinental Conference and the international body it created, the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL). It placed the “oppressed peoples” of the Global South (implying a pan-class unity based on the shared reality of foreign domination and underdevelopment), rather than the proletariat traditionally defined, as the chief revolutionary subject in the then-current stage of history. In doing so radical Third Worldism replaced the class struggle at the heart of Marxism with an emphasis on “national liberation” against imperialism in its myriad of expressions: colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, apartheid, and the interventionist wars waged by Western governments, primarily, of course, the United States. Taking Vietnam, Korea, China, Algeria, and Cuba as its chief models of how a revolution could be carried out in predominantly agrarian societies, it championed armed struggle and celebrated an idealized figure of the guerrilla and the radicalized peasant. These departures from traditional Marxism-Leninism were reflected in the political tendency’s visual propaganda, in which the hammer and sickle (representing the worker and peasant classes) and the red flag (symbolizing socialism and internationalism) were replaced with the rifle (signifying method and sentiment rather than class) and symbols of nation – a peasant in traditional garb, an ancient monument, an outline of the country’s borders. In most, but not all places this political tendency was a rival to the established communist parties, and this was reflected in its dismissal of ideological orthodoxy and its skepticism towards the Soviet Union (China had a more ambiguous

⁴⁴ Quoted in the introduction to *First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America*.

status, admired by some and viewed critically by others). While ostensibly a movement for the Global South, the ideas of radical Third Worldism were embraced by large elements of the New Left in Western countries, the Black Power movement in the United States, and within some factions of the Trotskyist Fourth International. The essence of radical Third Worldism was succinctly captured in a summary of the “ideological differences between the Cuban leadership and the international communist movement” made by the Bulgarian ambassador in Havana, Stefan Petrov, in August 1968. He reported that the root of these differences was two divergent perspectives as to what constituted the “major antagonism of the contemporary age.” As he explained:

Cuba is of the opinion that it is the antagonism between imperialism and the national liberation movements rather than between socialism and capitalism; the world can be divided into two types of countries: poor and rich, irrespective of their social order; on the nature of peaceful co-existence. The latter is considered by Cuba’s leaders as a conciliation with imperialism; therefore they favor the idea of having “the first, second, third . . . many Vietnams”⁴⁵

As this dissertation examines, the radical Third Worldism of the Tricontinental Conference was enthusiastically embraced by the North Korean leadership, shaping its foreign policy in the latter half of the 1960s. In mapping this trajectory this dissertation challenges common conceptions of North Korea’s period of heavy involvement in the Global South as an essentially singular, temporary, and abnormal foreign policy phase. North Korean policy towards the Third World and its ideological premises in fact went through several distinct phases during the Cold War era, corresponding with changes in international and domestic circumstances.

⁴⁵ “Information from Bulgarian Ambassador in Havana Stefan Petrov to Bulgarian Leader Todor Zhivkov on the Domestic and Foreign Policy of Cuba,” August 15, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Central State Archive of Bulgaria (TsDA), Sofia, Fond 378-B, Opis 1, a.e. 1079; translated by Assistant Professor Kalina Bratanova; edited by Jordan Baev. Obtained by the Bulgarian Cold War Research Group. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116418>

Moreover, North Korea's embrace of Third Worldist political ideas was rooted in its own experience with Japanese colonialism, its self-identification, within a Marxist framework, as a "backward," "semi-feudal" society transitioning toward industrial-socialist modernity,⁴⁶ its problematic history with the Soviet and Chinese communist parties, and its predicament within the post-war, bi-polar international world system. Nor was its Third Worldism a secondary and compartmentalized aspect of state policy. Rather, it was a central component of the KWP's larger ideological matrix, inseparable from the other major developments of the same period: the elevation of the Kim Il Sung personality cult, and the growing emphasis on Chuch'e Sasang as the ideological basis of the party.

It is only natural that North Koreans identified with the burgeoning tide of anti-colonial revolt taking place in the 1950s and 1960s, because the Korean revolution was fundamentally an anti-colonial revolution. Official North Korean historiography describes pre-1945 Korea as a "semi-feudal, colonial society" where capitalist development was "extremely retarded."⁴⁷ This correlated to Lenin's broader concept of the place of Asia within the world system, in which it "only existed as material to fertilise capitalist culture and civilisation."⁴⁸ Kim Il Sung located Korea within the historical development of capitalism when he wrote that during the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, "the Asian continent was turned into a source of raw materials, a place of capital export and a market for surplus commodities for the world capitalist

⁴⁶ It should be noted that many scholars reject the categorization of premodern Korea as "feudalist." North Korean historiography utilizes a broad definition of feudalism, as an agriculture-based economic system in which state power is monopolized by a ruling class of large land-owners. See Yöng-ho Ch'oe, "Reinterpreting Traditional History in North Korea," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 40, no. 3 (May, 1981).

⁴⁷ Kim Il Sung, "The Tasks of the Korean Communists" (10 November 1937) in Kim Il Sung, *Works* vol. 1 (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1980), 137. This speech is one of a series attributed to Kim in the 1930-1945 period. These were most likely written at a later date to give a historical basis to ideological positions adopted post-1945.

⁴⁸ V.I. Lenin, "Address To The Second All-Russia Congress Of Communist Organisations Of The Peoples Of The East" (22 November 1919), in V.I. Lenin, *On Proletarian Internationalism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 265.

powers,” which in turn “greatly impeded the normal development of the economy of the Eastern countries where the capitalist relations were budding out to a considerable degree within the feudal society.”⁴⁹ This meant, according to Kim, that colonial Korea was unprepared for either a socialist or a bourgeois revolution:

Under these circumstances the basic tasks of the Korean revolution at the present stage are to carry out the tasks of the anti-imperialist national-liberation revolution to overthrow Japanese imperialist colonial rule and regain our lost country, and at the same time, to fulfill the task of the anti-feudal democratic revolution to eliminate feudal relations and pave the way for the country’s development along democratic lines.⁵⁰

The North Korean leadership’s embrace of radical Third Worldism can also be explained in part by its historical relationship to the Soviet and Chinese communist parties. From the North Korean perspective, this history is replete with incidents in which Koreans were mistreated and humiliated by their Russian and Chinese comrades. These include the mass execution of Korean communist partisans carried out by the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) in 1932-35, Stalin’s scapegoating and mass deportation of Soviet-Koreans in 1937, abuses committed by Soviet troops during their occupation of North Korea in 1945-48, Chinese attempts to dominate military decision-making and its control of the North Korean railway system during the Korean War, and Soviet and Chinese support for Kim’s rivals within the KWP in 1955-56.⁵¹ Taking such history into account makes it easier to understand why the international radical Third Worldist tendency solidifying in the 1960s was in certain ways more appealing to North Koreans than a firm alignment with Moscow or Beijing. Following the challenge to his leadership in 1955-56, Kim routinely defined his political position as a reaction to “big power chauvinism” and the long

⁴⁹ Kim Il Sung, “The Great Idea of Lenin on the National Liberation Struggle in Colonies in the East is Triumphant,” in Kim Il Sung, *Selected Works*, vol. 2 (Havana: Cuban Book Institute, 1972), 192.

⁵⁰ Kim Il Sung, “The Tasks of the Korean Communists,” 137.

⁵¹ On these events see Jae-Jung Suh (ed), *Origins of North Korea’s Juche: Colonialism, War and Development* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013); Hyun Ok Park, *Two Dreams in One Bed: Empire, Social Life, and the Origins of the North Korean Revolution in Manchuria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); “New Evidence on North Korea in 1956,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 16 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008).

history of “flunkeyists” within the Korean communist movement who wished to blindly follow the Comintern line rather than develop an original praxis suited to local conditions.

This dissertation examines how the North Korean leadership’s embrace of radical Third Worldism was the basis for a new relationship with Cuba and Latin America in the 1960s. North Korean leaders believed that the Cuban Revolution of 1959 was further proof that the Global South had become the primary terrain of revolutionary struggle on the world stage, as capitalism imploded and the power of the United States steadily declined. The spread of revolution from the island of Cuba across the Americas would liberate this geo-strategically and economically vital domain from US control, thereby delivering a crushing blow to Washington’s global empire. As the Soviet and Chinese leaderships seemed unable or unwilling to accept the fundamental tasks of the current historical juncture, North Korea forged new alliances in Latin America and the Global South more broadly in pursuit of its vision of a global, militant offensive against US imperialism. At the same time, the Cuban leadership, also frustrated with Moscow and Beijing, sought new allies who shared its radical outlook, in particular its utopian vision of creating “a New Man,” and its desire to help proliferate armed insurgency throughout the Global South. This occurred at a time in which a younger generation of the left across Latin America, disillusioned with the Soviet Union and the old communist parties, was increasingly drawn to alternative models of revolutionary socialism in the East. This process fundamentally changed North Korea’s relationship with the outside world, disrupted the status quo of the socialist camp, and engendered new relationships, new projects, and new discourses within the international left.

Chapter One

North Korea and the Cuban Revolution, 1959-1965

The Cuban Revolution of 1959 changed North Korea's relationship with the outside world. It led to Pyongyang's first and most enduring bilateral relationship in the Western hemisphere, and the events it set in motion made Latin America and the Caribbean a major preoccupation of North Korean foreign policy for three decades. Cuba became North Korea's gateway to the region, and its embassy in Havana the base of operations from which it built relationships with state and non-state actors in neighbouring countries. The wave of guerrilla movements Cuba inspired in the 1960s convinced Pyongyang that Latin America was on the precipice of a continental-wide revolution. These developments only reinforced the North Korean leadership's analysis that capitalism had entered irreversible crisis, US power was in decline, and the Global South was becoming the principal theatre of the world revolution. With the maturation of Cuban-DPRK relations during the first half of the 1960s, the ruling parties of both countries found a special unity over matters of revolutionary strategy, economic development, and the correct course for the world communist movement. This harmony in perspective opened up a new political space in international relations in which Pyongyang could assert its independence from Moscow and Beijing by closing ranks with Cuba and North Vietnam, creating a new, informal bloc within the international communist movement committed to militant internationalism.

Latin America and the Korean War

Most people do not associate Latin America with the Korean War, which broke out on 25 June 1950 and ended with the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement on 27 July 1953. The events connecting the region and its peoples to the conflict are familiar mostly to scholars, and

rarely treated as more than a footnote in the broader historiography. While technically only one Latin American nation, Colombia, was a belligerent in the conflict, the Korean War was a major event in the region as a whole, one which in many places galvanized the left, particularly youth, and forced governments to make tough decisions under the dual pressures of Washington and their own citizens. More relevant to this focus of this dissertation is that the Korean War forged the first bonds between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Latin American left.

Three days after North Korean military forces crossed the 38th Parallel on the morning of June 25, 1950, the Organization of American States (OAS) passed a resolution affirming it would stand with the United Nations and the United States in its response to the conflict.⁵² This resolution was followed by pledges of cooperation of one kind or another by the majority of the organization's individual member states.⁵³ Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua made initial offers to send troops, volunteers or personnel. Other countries suggested material assistance they might provide: Chilean copper and saltpeter, medical supplies from Venezuela, foodstuffs from Nicaragua. Uruguay suggested its citizens' blood plasma could be purchased with US dollars. Panama offered use of its military bases and merchant marine, and to requisition farmland that could feed UN Command troops. In the era of the Truman Doctrine, many of the oligarchical governments that prevailed in the region, threatened by the spectre of leftist subversion at home, were eager to do their part to fight the communist menace abroad, and to curry favour with Washington.

⁵² W.H. Chartener, "War aid from Latin America," in *Editorial Research Reports, 1950*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1950), available at <https://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqresrre1950091800>.

⁵³ Ibid.

These governments' enthusiasm for the war efforts was, however, not always shared by their citizens. On the Caribbean island of Cuba, the youth arm of the Partido Socialista Popular (People's Socialist Party, PSP), the island's historic communist party, as well as the Federación Democrática de Mujeres Cubanas (Democratic Federation of Cuban Women, FMDC) led protests when President Carlos Prío Socarrás threatened to send troops to the Korean peninsula.⁵⁴ One young Cuban activist, Candelaria Rodríguez Hernández (b.1928), was part of a Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) commission to North Korea in May 1951 to investigate atrocities committed by US forces.⁵⁵ Latin America was further represented on the commission by the Argentine women's activist, Leonor Aguiar Vázquez.⁵⁶ Assembling in Shenyang in northeast China, the commission traveled by train to Dandong, where they crossed the Yalu River by camouflaged boat to the North Korean city of Sinŭiju.⁵⁷ They later moved on to Pyongyang by jeep, where they were received by Kim Il Sung.⁵⁸ Rodríguez related her experience in a pamphlet published by the WIDF shortly after her return,⁵⁹ and later described Sinŭiju at the time as "literally a sea of blood."⁶⁰ Rodríguez was arrested and imprisoned upon

⁵⁴ The Cuban government's vacillating position on sending troops to Korea, and left-wing opposition to the proposal, was a frequent topic of Foreign Service Dispatches between the US embassy in Havana and the US Department of State during 1950-53. A collection of these is available at <https://www.latinamericanstudies.org/embassy-1950-54.htm>. See also, J.I. Moya Fábregas, "The Cuban Woman's Revolutionary Experience: Patriarchal Culture and the State's Gender Ideology, 1950-1976," *Journal of Women's History* 22, no. 1 (2010): 69.

⁵⁵ The decision to organize the commission was taken at a meeting of the WIDF executive in East Berlin in January 1951. The commission included twenty members and one observer from seventeen different countries, and was led by the Canadian Nora K. Rodd. See Monica Felton, *What I Saw in Korea* (self-published, 1951).

⁵⁶ *We Accuse! Report of the Committee of the Women's International Democratic Federation in Korea, May 16-27, 1951*. Women's International Democratic Federation, 1951.

⁵⁷ Felton, "What I Saw," 4-6.

⁵⁸ Candelaria Rodríguez Hernández, *Korea Revisted after 40 Years* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1994), 5-6.

⁵⁹ Entitled *What I Saw in Korea*, this pamphlet is quite rare. The English commission member Monica Felton also authored a pamphlet with the same title.

⁶⁰ Rodríguez, *Korea Revisted*, 48.

her return to Cuba, which further galvanized the local anti-war movement.⁶¹ The WIDF continued to play a pivotal role in international opposition to the Korean War.⁶²

In Brazil the newly elected Getúlio Vargas (1882-1954), leader of the Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (Brazilian Labour Party, PTB), came under pressure from the Truman administration to contribute troops.⁶³ Negotiations between the Truman and Vargas administrations on potential Brazilian participation generated fierce opposition from the left, as well as from nationalist sectors of the military establishment.⁶⁴ The recently legalized Partido Comunista Brasileiro (Brazilian Communist Party, PCB) launched a massive campaign seeking to move public opinion and encourage dissent with the Brazilian Armed Forces. In August 1950 Brazilian communist leader Luís Carlos Prestes (1898-1990), declared: “Nothing, absolutely nothing, for imperialist war! Not one Brazilian soldier to help US aggression in Korea.”⁶⁵ In contrast to narratives which saw Korea as the innocent victim of superpower rivalry, the PCB voiced its full support for the DPRK Korean People’s Army (KPA), drawing a connection between the war and Brazil’s struggle against the political and economic domination of the United States: “The Asian peoples' struggle against imperialism is an integral part of our own struggle for Brazil's independence from imperialist rule.”⁶⁶ The Brazilian anti-war movement created a long-standing bond between the PCB and the Korean Worker’s Party (KWP), which would survive the

⁶¹ After the revolution Rodríguez held posts in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, and later became chairwoman of the Lawyer’s Association of Havana. In November 1993 she returned to North Korea and met Kim Il Sung, eight months before his death. She was awarded the Order of Friendship First Class by the North Korean government.

⁶² Suzy Kim, “The Origins of Cold War Feminism During the Korean War,” *Gender & History* 31, no.2 (July 2019): 460–479.

⁶³ Sonny B. Davis, “Brazil-United States military relations in the early post-world war II era,” *Diálogos* 6 (2002): 25-27.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 23-28.

⁶⁵ Luís Carlos Prestes, quoted in Jayme Ribeiro, “O PCB e a Guerra da Coréia: Memória, História e Imaginário Social,” *História e Perspectivas* 42 (Jan-Jun 2010): 216-217.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

vicissitudes of the Sino-Soviet split in later years. Meanwhile, the conservative União Democrática Nacional (National Democratic Union, UND), which had won nearly thirty percent of the vote in the October 1950 elections, urged solidarity with the US in the fight against communism, and cited the dangers of jeopardizing US investment in the country. Vargas ultimately struck a compromise, refusing to send troops but signing a commercial agreement in December 1951 to provide rare-earth elements vital to American war production, such as monazite and cerium salts.⁶⁷

The Korean War was also central to the political turmoil that rocked Puerto Rico in the early 1950s. The war came at a time when Luis Muñoz Marín (1898-1980), the first elected governor of the island, was leading the campaign for Public Law 500, an act of US congress which, if endorsed in a Puerto Rican referendum, would end direct colonial rule and make the island a “Free Associated State” with its own flag, constitution, and limited autonomy. The “commonwealth formula,” as it was called, was seen as a third way between Puerto Rico’s then-current colonial status and full independence. In this context Muñoz Marín and many others along the political spectrum – including the Socialist Party - believed the participation of Puerto Rico’s 65th Infantry Regiment, the *Borinqueneers*, in the Korean War would accelerate decolonization.⁶⁸ Politicians and journalists argued that joining the war effort would prove to the United States that Puerto Ricans were neither racially inferior nor less committed to the anti-communist cause, and hence worthy of greater self-government. It was also hoped involvement in the war would serve as a much-needed economic boon to the island, and the salaries and benefits of the US Armed Forces were extremely attractive in a society marked by poverty and

⁶⁷ Vagner Camilo Alves, *Da Itália à Coréia: decisoes sobre ir ou nao à guerra* (Belo Horizonte: UFMg, 2007), 171-174.

⁶⁸ Harry Franqui-Rivera, *Soldiers of the Nation: Military Service and Modern Puerto Rico, 1869-1952* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 180-184.

high unemployment. A total of 43,434 Puerto Ricans, from both the island and the continental United States, served in Korea.⁶⁹ Nor were Puerto Ricans the only Latinos fighting with the US Armed Forces. Although the US Department of Defense did not maintain statistics on the matter, first or later-generation Latin American immigrants volunteered and were conscripted in large numbers as the war progressed, and largely or majority Latino units were not uncommon.⁷⁰ The majority of these soldiers were Chicanos (Mexican-Americans) born or raised in the US, many of whom saw service in the war as a path to escape poverty and prove their worth in a society that treated them as second-class citizens.⁷¹

Not all Puerto Ricans supported Public Law 500 or participation in the Korean War. As US troops were reaching Pyongyang in October 1950 there were nationalist uprisings in several Puerto Rican cities, eventually put down by the US military and Puerto Rican National Guard, with dozens killed and hundreds arrested. We can only speculate how the course of the war may have changed if Puerto Rican nationalists had succeeded in their assassination attempt on Harry Truman the following month. At the University of Puerto Rico during the 1950s, students fought pitched battles with police over US military efforts to recruit on campus.⁷² Such solidarity was reciprocated with North Korea's strident support for Puerto Rican independence in subsequent decades, and nationalist leaders like Marta Sánchez Olmeda and Rafael Anglada López were frequently hosted in Pyongyang by Kim Il Sung.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 186.

⁷⁰ Steven Rosales, *Soldados Razos at War: Chicano Politics, Identity and Masculinity in the U.S. Military from World War II to Vietnam* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Marta Sánchez Olmeda, *Los Movimientos Independentistas en Puerto Rico y su Permeabilidad en la Clase Obrera* (Río Piedras, Editorial Edil, 1990), 123.

When Free Associated Statehood was adopted in July 1952, the new flag and a copy of the new constitution were shipped to the Puerto Rican soldiers in South Korea. There is an obvious irony in the fact that in the Korean war, the soldiers of the North's Korean People's Army (KPA), pro-communist partisans in the South and Chinese "volunteers," who believed they were fighting against the forces of imperialism, were pitted against poor Puerto Ricans who had been told they were helping to liberate their homeland from colonial rule, and proletarianized Chicanos clinging to faith in the American dream. The contradictions of how nationalism, race, and empire intersected in the war is captured by an anecdote related by Henry Franqui-Rivera (2018), who cites a Puerto Rican corporal who, after being released from two years of imprisonment in a POW camp, told a US reporter that his Chinese captors "often tell me about big trouble and revolution in Puerto Rico because American [*sic*] exploits masses. I tell them I am American and they are liars."⁷³ Such fragments coexist alongside the bitter reflections of Chicano veterans documented by scholars like William Arce and Steven Rosales.⁷⁴ After enduring racism from white soldiers and superiors during the war, in which they were often chosen first for the most unpleasant or dangerous tasks, many returned to the United States only to find that the realities of discrimination and dismal employment opportunities had not changed for them.⁷⁵ On the other hand, Chicano veterans, conscious of the sacrifice they made in Korea, were also less likely to passively accept second-class citizenship. Steven Rosales (2018) cites the Korean War as a pivotal moment in the development of Mexican-American identity and political mobilization, as many veterans went on to play important roles in the Chicano civil rights movement of the 1960s.

⁷³ Rosales, *Soldados Razos at War*, 195.

⁷⁴ Ibid.; William Arce, *Nation in Uniform: Chicano/ Latino War Narratives and the Construction of Nation in the Korean War and Vietnam War* (PhD Diss., University of Southern California, 2009).

⁷⁵ Rosales, *Soldados Razos at War*; William Arce, *Nation in Uniform*.

Colombia was the one independent Latin American nation to participate in the Korean War, sending 4,314 troops in May 1951.⁷⁶ Recently elected President Laureno Gomez (1889-1965) did not need congressional approval, as Colombia was under martial law in response to the decade-long conflict known as La Violencia (1948-58).⁷⁷ A fascist sympathizer and encouraged by promises of US economic aid, Gomez articulated Colombia's involvement as a heroic crusade in defence of "Christian civilization."⁷⁸ However, the impact of *el Batallón Colombia* on the course of the war was likely less than that of the war on Colombia. Not only did it result in a massive influx of US military aid, but the war served as a training ground in anti-communist ideology and counter-insurgency methods that would later be adapted to Colombian soil. The end of the war in Korea was the beginning of five years of military rule in Colombia (1953-58). Alberto Ruiz Novoa (1917-2017), one of the commanders of the Colombian forces in Korea, became head of the Colombian National Army in 1960 before being appointed Minister of Defence under the conservative administration of Guillermo León Valencia (1909-71) in 1962. The Colombian scholar Germán Arciniegas Angueyra (1900-99), in his famous 1952 work *Entre la Libertad y el Miedo* (Between Liberty and Fear), accused President Gomez of exploiting the war to obtain massive quantities of arms from the US, that subsequently were never fired in Korea, but rather used for the pacification of the Colombian countryside. "We do not know how many Colombians the reds have killed in Korea so far, but we know that in Colombia the dead has reached fifty thousand"⁷⁹ Arciniegas remarked. The Peruvian journalist Genaro Carnero Checa (1930-2010) - later a stalwart of the international DPRK solidarity movement - drew the

⁷⁶ Bradley Lynn Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950-1954," *The Journal of Military History* 69, no. 4 (2005): 1164-1165.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 1141-1142.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 1146.

⁷⁹ Germán Arciniegas, *Entre la Libertad y el Miedo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1952), 238.

connection between the Korean War and the Colombian military's brutal counter-insurgency operations in subsequent years. Colombian soldiers "returned to their homeland as the enemy of their own people, trained by the United States in the war against liberty. Is it then strange that those soldiers murdered peasants, burned villages and crops, and are photographed smiling next to the decapitated corpses of their compatriots?"⁸⁰ The most well-known critic of Colombian participation in the war, the politician and journalist Gilberto Zapata Isaza (1913-2009), also went on to become a leading figure in the DPRK solidarity movement, as General Secretary of both the Colombia-Korea Friendship and Culture Association, and the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Committee to Support the Independent and Peaceful Reunification of Korea. He was a regular guest of Kim Il Sung in Pyongyang until the latter's death in 1994, treated as the true representative of Colombia, a country whose government never recognized the DPRK.⁸¹

Even in countries where young men did not face being sent to fight in Korea, the war had a powerful impact. The writings of internationally prominent critics of the US intervention like I.F. Stone, Claude Bourdet, E.N. Dzelepy, Wilfred G. Burchett, and Alan Winington were translated into Spanish and published in Latin America.⁸² The communist-dominated International Union of Students (IUS), which had affiliates at university campuses across Latin America, rallied opposition to the war and published a Spanish edition of *Students and the War in Korea* in 1951. This quite remarkable book was simultaneously a primer in Korean history, a

⁸⁰ Genaro Carnero Checa, *El Aguila Rampante: El Imperialismo Yanqui Sobre América Latina* (Ciudad de México: Editorial Stylo, 1956), 89.

⁸¹ José Raúl Jaramillo Restrepo, Vice-President of la Universidad Autónoma Latinoamericana (UNAUCLA), personal communication with the author, 13 July 2015, Medellín; "Infausta Noticia," Oficina de Comunicaciones de la Universidad Autónoma Latinoamericana (UNAUCLA) 5 May 2009, available at <http://blogs.unaula.edu.co/2009/05/infausta-noticia.html>; Jorge Mejía Martínez, "El amigo Gilberto," *El Mundo* (Medellín), online edition, 13 May 2009, available at <https://www.elmundo.com/portal/resultados/detalles/?idx=116200>.

⁸² I. F. Stone, *La historia oculta de la guerra de Corea* (Ciudad de México: Sociedad de Estudios Internacionales, 1952); E. N. Dzelepy, I. F. Stone, Claude Bourdet, *La Guerra de Corea* (Buenos Aires: Prensa Libre, 1952); Wilfred Burchett and Alan Winington, *Koje unscreened* (Peking, 1953).

scathing indictment of the US-led intervention, a report on the South Korean student movement since 1945, and an overview of the achievements of socialism in North Korea, particularly in the fields of education.⁸³ The World Federation of Trade Unions (WTFU), whose Latin American affiliate was the Confederación de los Trabajadores de América Latina (Confederation of Workers of Latin America, CTAL), called on all workers to oppose the US-led intervention, and organized an annual “International Week of Solidarity” with Korea each July during the war.⁸⁴

The fact that Washington succeeded in convincing only a single government to contribute troops testifies to the political climate of the time. There was widespread hostility towards the United States stemming from its long history of military interventions and support for right-wing tyrants. The end of the Second World War signaled an abandonment of the so-called Good Neighbour Policy, as Washington decision-makers affirmed the need for heavy-handed measures to secure their interests in the region. While billed by its architects as a United Nations “police action,” the Korean War was widely seen as a unilateral act of unjustified military aggression to secure US geo-political interests, something Latin Americans had witnessed many times before. For a generation of the left, the Korean War demonstrated the fundamentally criminal role the United States played in the world, a sentiment reinforced when less than a year after the armistice, a CIA-created mercenary army overthrew the democratically-elected government of Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala. The field commander for the covert operation was in fact Albert R. Haney, brought over from Seoul where he had been CIA station chief during the war. One Argentinian commentary from 1952 described the Korean War as “disinformation and political extortion without precedent [...] in part a civil war and on the other hand a clash of the

⁸³ *Students and the War in Korea* (Prague: International Union of Students, 1951).

⁸⁴ *The World Federation of Trade Unions, 1945-1985* (Prague: World Federation of Trade Unions and PRACE Czechoslovak Trade Unions, 1989), 64-65.

geopolitical interests of the two superpowers, it has been presented as a conflict that concerns all countries, inducing them to sacrifice, in distant lands, for alien objectives, the lives of their youth, their economic development and all domestic policy.”⁸⁵ On the other hand, the war was also many people’s introduction to a young socialist republic in Asia of which hitherto little was known. It sparked curiosity that would grow alongside the Third Worldist tendency within the left, as many young Latin American radicals disillusioned with the Soviet Union were increasingly drawn to alternative models of socialist development and revolutionary praxis from the Global South.⁸⁶

The discrepancy between the initial offers of support coming from Latin American governments, and what support actually materialized, can only partially be explained by the level of popular opposition, however. The contributions proposed by many countries were in fact turned down by General Douglas MacArthur as too insignificant. US policy was to refuse foreign units of less than one thousand men. Moreover, foreign countries were expected to cover the financial burden of transporting their own troops to the peninsula and supporting them for their first sixty days. These were costs many Latin American governments were unable or unwilling to take on, for economic and political reasons.

As Korea grabbed the attention of Latin America in the 1950s, so did Latin America become of increasing interest to the North Korean leadership. The Korean Worker’s Party (KWP) issued a statement on the Tenth Inter-American Conference in Caracas in March 1954, praising the recent Bolivian and Guatemalan revolutions and condemning Washington’s “greedy,

⁸⁵ Editor’s introduction to E.N. Dzelepy, I.F. Stone, Claude Bourdet, *La Guerra de Corea* (Buenos Aires: Prensa Libre, 1952), 9.

callous, despoiling, aggressive policy” towards the region.⁸⁷ The Guatemalan revolution, the subsequent US intervention and anti-dictatorial struggle which followed received particular attention from the KWP, which issued numerous statements of solidarity with the Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo (Guatemalan Labour Party, PGT) in the 1950s.⁸⁸ This was part of a broader, growing focus on the Global South as a site of revolutionary change fed by the wave of anti-colonial revolt that had followed the Second World War. The outbreak of armed national liberation struggle in Vietnam and Algeria, the Chinese Revolution of 1949, the Suez Crisis, the triumph of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, all appeared to signal a tectonic shift in the global balance of forces. As discussed in the introduction, neither North nor South Korea were invited to the Bandung Conference of April 1955. North Korea was, however, represented at the numerous Asian and Third World solidarity conferences organized in the late 1940s and 1950s, in which communists were more influential and South Korea was generally excluded. They included Beijing’s Asian Women’s Conference of December 1949, the Asian Conference on the Relaxation of International Tension, held in New Delhi just a few weeks before Bandung, and the founding conference of the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) in Cairo in December 1957. Although North Korea’s expressions of solidarity with the Third World were in line with Soviet and Chinese policy since the death of Stalin, this increased attention to the Global South also foreshadowed a more radical and unorthodox Third Worldist position that would emerge in the 1960s.

⁸⁷ “U.S. pushes Latin American dependence,” Pyongyang, 01 April 1954, translated and published in *Daily Report, Foreign Radio Broadcasts*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Washington), 02 April 1954.

⁸⁸ See transcripts of the North Korean radio broadcasts, “Youth League Message” (2 July 1954), “U.S. Blamed for Guatemalan Conflict” (24 July 1954), and “Protest to Guatemala,” (25 October 1955), in the Readex collection, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports, 1941-1996*.

On 22 April 1956 Ch'oe Yonggŏn, North Korea's Vice-Marshall and Minister of National Defence, delivered a public address in Pyongyang on the occasion of Vladimir Lenin's eighty-sixth birthday. Although Lenin would lose his centrality in the ideological matrix of the KWP by the early-mid 1970s, in the 1950s the party still based its legitimacy on its commitment to the teachings of the late Russian leader. Ch'oe praised Lenin as a "giant of revolutionary theory and revolutionary deeds," and an "immortal revolutionary fighter" whose ideas had "armed the oppressed peoples" of the world and "threw open the broad road to the advancement of Marxism."⁸⁹ Lenin had proven the relevance of Marx to the Global South, as he "exposed and condemned the hateful attempts of the renegades of the Second International to confine Marxism to the narrow confines of the allied nations in Europe."⁹⁰ More specifically, Ch'oe explained, Lenin had correctly foreseen the central role the anti-colonial struggles of the Global South would play in the course of the twentieth century. India's liberation from British rule in 1947 and the Chinese Revolution of 1949 had freed a billion people from imperialism's grip, and now: "The flames of national liberation are raging not only in Asia but all over the world. The African peoples have been awakened, and in Latin American countries, including Brazil and Chile, the national liberation movement is growing. Thus, the question of completely wiping the shameful colonial system from the face of the earth has been placed on the agenda."⁹¹ While the northern half of the peninsula had been liberated and a true people's government established, Koreans in the south continued to toil under oppressive colonial rule. The United States "have held on South Korea a political, economic and military stranglehold, have perpetuated wanton pillage and

⁸⁹ "86th Birthday of Lenin commemorated," North Korean Home Service (Pyongyang), 22 April 1957, Readex collection, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports, 1941-1996*.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

violence, have ruthlessly destroyed the national economy, have converted South Korea into a market for their surplus products, and transformed it into a complete colony.”⁹²

While outside North Korea Ch'oe Yonggŏn is much less well known than the three presidents who constitute the Kim dynasty – Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un - he was in fact a key figure in the leadership of the early republic. Ch'oe was born to a peasant family in T'aech'ŏn county in P'yŏng'anbuk province at the turn of the century. Official Soviet historiography claims he joined the student movement upon coming of age and, as a result, spent two years in prison in his early twenties. After his release he crossed the border into Manchuria to join the anti-Japanese partisan forces organized by the Communist Party of China (CPC). His bravery and leadership in those dangerous days of guerrilla struggle earned him a prominent place following Korea's liberation in August 1945 and the creation of the Democratic People's Republic in September 1948. He was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Korean People's Army (KPA) and Minister of National Defence in the republic's first governing cabinet. He was considered second in authority only to Kim Il Sung, and in the 1950s his portrait often stood next to that of the supreme leader. He was a chief commander and strategist during the Korean War - or the Great Fatherland Liberation War, as it is known as in North Korea – that engulfed the peninsula in 1950-53, and later held the position of President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly from 1957 until his death in 1976.⁹³

Ch'oe's reflections on the legacy of Lenin, considered against his own remarkable biography, suggests how Korea's historical position as a small country on the periphery of the global capitalist system, its colonial experience, the division of the peninsula, and the trauma of

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ “Inmul saengae chŏngbo: Ch'oe Yonggŏn,” available at <http://people.aks.ac.kr>. See also Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2011), 81.

the Korean War influenced the KWP's gradual move towards an increasingly Third World-oriented political line. In 1945 Korea was a predominantly agrarian society emerging from four decades of colonial rule under the Japanese Empire. Five years later, North Korea endured a horrific military invasion by an international coalition led by the United States, which razed the country to the ground, killed some two million people and left a generation psychologically scarred.⁹⁴ The political maturation of the KWP was also shaped by a deeply unequal and at times humiliating relationship between Korean communists and their Russian and Chinese comrades. These tensions stemmed from the Communist Party of China's (CPC) violent purge of Korean partisans in 1932-35 and Stalin's mass deportation of Soviet-Koreans in 1937, among other incidents.

This history does much to explain why the KWP emerged from the Korean War to identify with the nationalist awakening taking place throughout the Global South, combined with a visceral anti-Americanism and a strong desire to assert its independence within the socialist camp. From the perspective of the KWP, the southern half of Korea was under the colonial occupation of the United States and, like other peoples around the world, the Korean people were now tasked with a national liberation struggle. This was not a fanciful interpretation of conditions in the South. As Bruce Cumings (2011) has documented, the southern half of the peninsula was aflame in guerrilla resistance and civilian uprisings during 1945-50, which were drowned in blood during brutal counter-insurgency operations conducted by US and ROK military forces.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Cumings, *The Korean War*, 35.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 116-139.

This situation made the central goal of the KWP clear: to “complete the Korean revolution” by expelling US troops from the South, overthrowing what it saw as an illegitimate puppet-regime in Seoul and unifying the peninsula under its leadership. This goal was always placed within a Marxist-Leninist context of the broader world revolution, the construction of socialism and the eventual transition to communism. The KWP’s strategy for accomplishing unification was in essence three-fold: continue to build and fortify socialism in the North, support the revolutionary movement in the South, and align in solidarity with the international revolutionary movement. It is in this last regard that the North Korean leadership came to see the Global South as having an increasingly important role to play.

The KWP’s increasingly nationalist and Third Worldist orientation was also driven by the desire of Kim Il Sung and his followers to solidify their hold over the party. In the aftermath of the Korean War, Kim was threatened by rival factions critical of his growing personality cult and his economic policies. These elements had closer ties to the Soviet and Chinese communist parties, and for Kim, raised fears about how Moscow and Beijing might interfere in the KWP’s internal affairs to the benefit of his enemies. Kim responded in a December 1955 speech, “On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing Chuch’e in Ideological Work,” best known as Kim’s first public presentation of his concept of “Chuch’e,” a term which roughly translates to English as “self-reliance.” Kim attacked those within the party who allegedly wished to slavishly emulate foreign models, and who failed to realize Marxism-Leninism must be creatively applied to Korean conditions. Kim argued that the KWP should embrace nationalism and celebrate Korean history and traditional culture. This was important to effectively connect with the masses (including those living in the South) and to build the kind of pride and patriotism the young republic needed. Kim painted a picture of struggle between

patriotic “revolutionaries” – the former guerrillas who had fought under Kim’s command – and petit-bourgeois intellectuals who treated Korean culture with disdain, admonished all things foreign, and were out of touch with ordinary people. Internal party tension came to a climax in August 1956, when Kim’s leadership was challenged at the KWP’s Central Committee plenary session. Kim, who had prior warning of the attack, countered with a major purge of the KWP leadership, resulting in several top cadres being expelled from the party and subsequently seeking refuge in China and the Soviet Union. From 1956 onwards the North Korean leadership increasingly stressed the KWP’s independence within the international communist movement, embraced heavily nationalist rhetoric, and strove to build new allies within the Global South.⁹⁶

Latin American opposition to the Korean War meant that when the war ended in 1953, the KWP had a network of supporters and sympathizers across the region. Delegations of students, journalists, and communist youth organizations that had spoken out against the war were invited to Pyongyang during the late 1950s. These included the Argentine sociologist Carlos Strasser, at the time a young law student at the University of Buenos Aires, the Mexican anthropologist and journalist Gregorio Rosas Herrera, and the Chilean communist youth leader Alfredo Urria. Official North Korean organizations like the Korean Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU), the Korean Journalists Union (KJU), and the Korean Democratic Youth League (KDYL)⁹⁷ sought to expand relations with their counterparts in Latin America through written

⁹⁶ On the events of 1955-56, see Chen Jian, “Limits of the ‘Lips and Teeth’ Alliance: An Historical Review of Chinese-North Korean Relations,” in *Uneasy Allies: Fifty Years of China-North Korea Relations*, Woodrow Wilson Centre for Scholars Asia Program Special Report no. 115 (September 2003): 4-10; Avram Agov, “North Korea’s Alliances and the Unfinished Korean War,” *The Journal of Korean Studies* 18, no. 2, (Fall 2013): 225-262; Andrei Lankov, *Crisis in North Korea: The Failure of De-Stalinization, 1956* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007); “New Evidence on North Korea in 1956,” Woodrow Wilson Centre for Scholars Cold War International History Project Bulletin, issue 16 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008): 447-527.

⁹⁷ These organizations were established in 1945-46 following liberation from Japanese rule, and followed the typical pattern of “mass organizations” in socialist countries: auxiliary arms of the party, tasked with an educational role and conceived as avenues for popular participation in the building of socialism.

correspondence and exchanging delegations. The KFTU was particularly active in this regard, cultivating partnerships with Latin American trade unions and issuing protest letters over the treatment of workers and the persecution of labour organizers. For example, the KFTU spoke out against the 1955 arrest of Guatemalan trade unionist and PGT leader Bernardo Alvarado Monzón (1925- 1972),⁹⁸ and voiced its support for the ongoing struggles of Cuban sugar and tobacco workers in early 1957.⁹⁹ While one could be cynical about the impact such letters had on Fulgencio Batista or a Chief Justice in Guatemala, such acts were principled acts of solidarity, and they reminded Latin American elites that the world was watching. Young North Koreans and Latin Americans were also brought together via the many international gatherings of the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) and the International Union of Students (IUS). North Korea celebrated the WFDY's "International Day of Solidarity with Youth and Students Against Colonialism" each February with events at schools and worksites across the country. While it is well known that Moscow hosted the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students in July 1957, less known is that the KDYL held its own international youth gathering three months later in Pyongyang. KCNA press releases from the time described how these visitors were treated to tours of "construction sites, factories and educational establishments in Pyongyang, as well as rural and fishing villages."¹⁰⁰ While clearly a smaller-scale affair than the Moscow festival, it is significant that all the visiting delegations were from non-European countries: Cuba, Chile, Argentina, Indonesia, Sudan, and Japan. The joint statement by the KYDL and the Japanese delegation celebrated the "spirit of Bandung" and called for solidarity between the peoples of

⁹⁸ "Protest to Guatemala," KCNA (Pyongyang), 25 October 1955, in the Readex collection, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports, 1941-1996*.

⁹⁹ "Letter to Cuba," KCNA (Pyongyang), 21 February 1957, in the Readex collection, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports, 1941-1996*.

¹⁰⁰ "Argentine Youths Leave," Korean Central News Agency (Pyongyang), 23 September 1957, reprinted in *Daily Report: Foreign Radio Broadcasts*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Washington) 26 September 1957.

Asia and Africa to “destroy colonialism at its foundation and to defend world peace.”¹⁰¹ The activism of the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF) also continued to serve as a network through which KWP cadres built relationships in Latin America and elsewhere.

On 8 September 1958, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) celebrated its tenth anniversary. In a speech prepared for the occasion, Premier Kim Il Sung gave an overview of the remarkable transformations North Koreans had witnessed during the past decade, despite the catastrophic war that shook the peninsula during 1950-53. A dramatic rise in agricultural and industrial production, higher wages, increased household food consumption, widespread electrification, massive housing construction, and hitherto undreamed of educational opportunities for the youth all attested to a dramatic improvement in the living standards of ordinary people.¹⁰² Kim’s speech evoked Roger Griffin’s “sense of beginning,” that “mood of standing on the threshold of a new world [...] a mood of heady expectancy which is the dialectical twin of the obsession with the closing of an era...”¹⁰³ In the Korean context, this meant an exodus from a dark age of backwardness and foreign domination into a new era of socialism, one associated with the modernity traditionally seen as exclusive to other, foreign nations. “We now stand in a period of great progress in socialist construction” Kim argued. “Our people do not want to live in the old way nor do they want to lag behind. They want to strike

¹⁰¹ “Japan, DPRK Youth Issue Statement,” North Korean Home Service (Pyongyang), 13 October 1957, translated and published in *Daily Report: Foreign Radio Broadcasts*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Washington), 14 October 1957.

¹⁰² Kim Il Sung, “Chosŏnminjujuŭiinmin'gonghwagukch'anggŏn 10 Chunyŏn'ginyŏm Kyŏngch'uktaehŭisesŏ Han Pogo” [Report at Celebration Marking the Tenth Anniversary of the Founding of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea], 8 September 1958, in Kim Il Sung, *Chŏnjip*, vol. 22 (Pyongyang: Korean Workers’ Party Publishing House, 1998), 280-288.

¹⁰³ Roger Griffin, introduction to *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1.

down all outdated things and live in a new way. They are rushing ahead to live a life not inferior to that of other peoples.”¹⁰⁴

Turning to the state of world affairs, Kim’s assessment was filled with optimism. “The basic characteristic of the current crisis” he explained, “is that socialism is winning decisively on the world stage and the forces of imperialism are weakening all the more, heading towards their downfall.”¹⁰⁵ The socialist camp, which now encompassed one third of the earth’s population, was surpassing the capitalist countries in its economic and technological development, symbolized dramatically by the recent successful launching of the Sputnik earth satellites. The advanced capitalist societies of the West were mired in economic crisis and the ranks of the unemployed swelled higher each day. The aggressive imperialism of the United States, “the heinous enemy of humanity” (illyuŭi hyungak'an wŏnssu) was increasingly exposed and isolated, no longer able to rely on the support of the United Nations, as demonstrated in the Lebanon crisis.¹⁰⁶ Of particular importance, however, was the tide of anti-colonial revolt which was sweeping the Global South.

The time when the imperialists could exploit and rule over the peoples of colonial and dependent countries as it pleased has passed. In the ten years following the Second World War, more than 700 million people cast off the yoke of colonial slavery and won national independence [...] On the Asian continent the imperialist colonial system has almost completely collapsed, and today the flames of national liberation struggle are sweeping the Arab East and African continent.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Kim, “Chosŏnminjujuŭiinmin'gonghwagukch'anggŏn 10 Chunyŏn'ginyŏm,” 280.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 309.

¹⁰⁶ In July 1958 the US military intervened in Lebanon at the request of Lebanese president Camille Chamoun. Chamoun faced mounting unrest which he blamed on outside interference by the United Arab Republic (UAR). However US military intervention was opposed by UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, who did not share US fears over Arab nationalism, did not believe UAR interference in Lebanon was significant, and believed the UN could help facilitate a domestic solution to the crisis. See Michael Graham Fry, “The United Nations Confronts the United States in 1958,” in Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen (eds), *A Revolutionary Year: The Middle East in 1958* (London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2002): 143-180.

¹⁰⁷ Kim, “Chosŏnminjujuŭiinmin'gonghwagukch'anggŏn 10 Chunyŏn'ginyŏm,” 310.

In the midst of this global upsurge, Kim affirmed that “proletarian internationalism lies at the base of our country’s foreign policy”¹⁰⁸ and claimed the North Korean government was “actively supporting the national liberation movements of colonial peoples.”¹⁰⁹ He condemned the Soviet policy of peaceful coexistence, that “treasonous act of the revisionists who have completely deviated from the principle of proletarian internationalism and are buttering up the US imperialists and bowing before them.”¹¹⁰ Although Kim posited Asia and Africa as the principle battleground in this ongoing revolutionary offensive, he added that “The struggle of the Latin American people against the domination of US imperialism also grows stronger each day.”¹¹¹

As Kim delivered these words in Pyongyang, on the other side of the world Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara and his column of rebel fighters pushed ahead in their hellish, forty-two-day, 300-kilometre trek through swamp and mountains from the Sierra Maestra to Las Villas province. They were malnourished, sick and exhausted, battered by rain, bogged down in mud, and frequently under fire from Batista’s soldiers and warplanes. The column eventually reached its destination in the Escambray mountains on 16 October with its ranks depleted, and Che set about forging the disparate rebel bands operating in the area into a cohesive force under his command. On New Year’s Eve the combined forces of Che and Camilo Cienfuegos took the provincial capital of Santa Clara after three days of intense fighting, prompting Batista to board a plane for the Dominican Republic. Two days later the rebels arrived in Havana, greeted by ecstatic crowds, to proclaim the revolution triumphant.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 314.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 310.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Because of the historic links stemming from Cuban opposition to the Korean War, even prior to the establishment of diplomatic relations between Pyongyang and Havana, the KWP was represented at two important political conferences that helped define the emerging trajectory of the Cuban revolution. The First Congress of Latin American Youth in July-August 1960 in Havana was an early effort by the Cuban leadership to share its vision of revolution in the Americas with young leftists from across the region. It came the same month that Khrushchev famously stated that the Soviet Union would use missiles to defend its new ally, while Eisenhower retorted that the US would not permit “a regime dominated by international communism in the Western Hemisphere.”¹¹² The gathering, whose guest of honour was Jacobo Árbenz, was later described by the US government as Cuba’s “first mass effort to recruit youngsters for guerrilla training.”¹¹³ Addressing the congress, Che Guevara laid out many aspects of his political thinking that would provide common ground for Cuba and North Korea during the 1960s. In the colonial and semi-colonial countries, genuine land reform must be the fundamental task of any revolutionary movement. The universal desire of poor peasants for land reform was the tinder box that needed to be lit, and transforming the agricultural sector would provide the basis for industrial development once the revolution has triumphed. Secondly, rural-based guerrilla warfare was the principal strategy through which such a revolutionary movement could defeat the superior military forces of the enemy and seize power. And thirdly, each revolution must first and foremost be based on popular hopes and desires rather than conformity to rigid doctrines:

¹¹² *Nodong Simun* called Eisenhower’s speech “the wicked language of a vicious and shameless imperialist,” which exposed US intentions to “wreck the Cuban revolution and subjugate the country.” See “US Imperialists, hands off Cuba!,” *Nodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang) July 12 1960, translated and reprinted in *Daily Report, Foreign Radio Broadcasts*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Washington), 12 July 1960.

¹¹³ *The Tricontinental Conference of Africa, Asian and Latin American Peoples; a staff study, 89th Congress, 2nd session, Senate* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 5.

...if this revolution is Marxist — and listen well that I say Marxist — it is because the revolution discovered, by its own methods, the road pointed out by Marx [...] The Cuban Revolution was moving forward, without worrying about labels, without checking what others were saying about it, but constantly scrutinizing what the Cuban people wanted of it. The revolution quickly found that it had achieved, or was on the way to achieving, the happiness of its people...¹¹⁴

Che also gave voice to the fiercely independent streak running through the Cuban revolution that would build kinship with its North Korean allies: “If [other countries] want to do what we would do, good; if not, that's up to them. We will not tolerate anyone telling us what to do. We were here on our own until the last moment, awaiting the direct aggression of the mightiest power in the capitalist world, and we did not ask for help from anyone.”¹¹⁵

The following month, a KWP delegation attended the PSP's Eighth Party Congress, the first held since the overthrow of Batista. Following the precedent of North Korea and the People's Republic of China, the PSP leadership maintained that as Cuba was a “semi-feudal” country, its revolution was not proletarian-socialist but rather a “patriotic and democratic national liberation and agrarian revolution.”¹¹⁶ While these conditions, the PSP argued, made possible an alliance between all “patriotic” classes, including the national bourgeoisie, it was the fate of the proletariat to play a leadership role and advance the revolution to its next logical stage: the transition to socialism. At the congress General Secretary Blas Roca made the historic call for the PSP to fuse with Fidel's Movimiento 26 de Julio (July 26 Movement, M-26-7) and other revolutionary forces into a single organization, a process which eventually lead to the creation of the Partido Comunista de Cuba (Communist Party of Cuba, PCC) in October 1965.

¹¹⁴ Che Guevara, “Speech to the First Latin American Youth Congress” (28 July 1960), available at the Marxist Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1960/07/28.htm>.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Blas Roca, quoted in Samuel Farber, “The Cuban Communists in the Early Stages of the Cuban Revolution: Revolutionaries or Reformists?” *Latin American Research Review* 18, no. 1 (1983): 65.

While traditionally at odds with one another – the PSP had long criticized M-26-7 as petit-bourgeois adventurers - the rapid radicalization of the revolution, and the ideological and organizational weakness of M-26-7 facilitated a growing partnership between the communist old guard and the Sierra leadership. The First Congress of Latin American Youth and the PSP's Eighth Party Congress, both in the summer of 1960, signaled that the revolution was acquiring two important characteristics that would shape the future of Cuban-DPRK relations. Cuba was now on its way to becoming the newest member of the “international socialist system” and the first such country in the Western hemisphere, a process made official in a speech by Fidel in April 1961.¹¹⁷ The Cuban leadership also believed its victory over the Batista regime was only the first step in a still unfolding continental revolution against US imperialism, one in which it would play a leading role.

Cuban-DPRK bilateral relations

North Korea established formal diplomatic relations with Cuba on 29 August 1960, three months after the Soviet Union and a month before China.¹¹⁸ The announcement took place in Havana during the visit by the North Korean delegation that had arrived several weeks earlier for the PSP's Eighth Congress, headed by two senior officials. The first was Han Sangtu (1910-?), a veteran of the red peasant union movement who had been sentenced to prison twice during the Japanese colonial period, and in the 1950s was elected to the Presidium of the Politburo.¹¹⁹ The

¹¹⁷ Fidel's speech on 16 April 1961 came during the opening stages of the Bay of Pigs invasion. In it he declared: “This is what they cannot forgive: the fact that we are here right under their very noses. And that we have carried out a socialist revolution right under the nose of the United States!” He continued, “*Compañero* workers and peasants: This is a socialist and democratic revolution of the humble, by the humble, and for the humble. And for this revolution of the humble, by the humble, and for the humble, we are ready to give our lives.” Available at <https://johnriddell.com/2016/11/27/fidel-castro-on-the-fight-to-defend-cubas-socialist-revolution>.

¹¹⁸ “North Korea and Cuba to Establish Diplomatic Relations,” CIA bulletin, 1 September 1960, CREST electronic database, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland.

¹¹⁹ “Inmul saengae chŏngbo: Hansangdu,” available at <http://people.aks.ac.kr>.

second was Foreign Minister Pak Sŏngch'ŏl (1913-2008), one of Kim's Manchurian partisans who went on to serve as premier and vice-president of the Supreme People's Assembly.¹²⁰ The delegation also concluded a cultural cooperation agreement to exchange delegations of scientists, educators, and writers, cooperate in the fields of athletics, radio broadcasting, and journalism, and arrange visiting art exhibitions.¹²¹ A resident embassy would follow in January 1961, with Hong Tongch'ŏl serving as the first ambassador. The formal North Korean statement claimed that Korean-Cuban relations had “developed in the course of the joint struggle of the Korean and Cuban people against imperialism and colonialism and for national independence,”¹²² a reference to Cuban opposition to the Korean War and North Korean support for Cuban labour struggles during the 1950s. It also tied the Korean War and the Cuban Revolution together as two monumental victories in the still unfolding international struggle against US imperialism:

Following the liberation from Japanese imperialist rule, the Korean people heroically crushed the armed aggression of the US imperialists and are attaining great achievements in their present struggle for the peaceful unification of the fatherland and for socialist construction in the northern half of their republic. The Cuban revolution, which overthrew the Batista dictatorship, a faithful US puppet, in Cuba—a country long considered the backyard of the United States—has shaken to the root the colonial ruling structure of the US imperialists who have long dominated Latin America as its virtual rulers. Both the Korean and Cuban peoples stand face to face with the US imperialists who, in spite of their ignominious defeats, still refuse to keep their blood-stained hands from either Korea or Cuba.¹²³

A flurry of bilateral activity followed the August agreement. In October, Cuban Ministry of Health officials visited North Korea to study its healthcare system and identify areas for

¹²⁰ “Inmul saengae chŏngbo: Pak Sŏngch'ŏl,” available at <http://people.aks.ac.kr>. Pak was Premier during 1976-77 and vice-president of the Supreme People's Assembly from 1977 to 1997.

¹²¹ “Cuba and DPRK sign cultural agreement,” KCNA (Pyongyang) 30 August 1960, translated and published in *Daily Report: Foreign Radio Broadcasts*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Washington), 31 August 1960.

¹²² “A New Stage in the Development of Friendly Relations Between Korea and Cuba,” *Nodong Simun* (Pyongyang), 31 August 1960, translated and published in *Daily Report: Foreign Radio Broadcasts*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Washington), 1 September 1960.

¹²³ Ibid.

cooperation, while a North Korean trade union delegation visited Havana for an Algerian solidarity conference organized by the WFTU. Ending the month, representatives of the Asociación de Jóvenes Rebeldes (Association of Rebel Youth, AJR), the youth arm of M-26-7, were invited to Pyongyang by the KDYL. At a large evening event with young North Koreans in Sinch'ŏn County, AJR leader Fernando Ravelo Renedo¹²⁴ declared: "Now we are waging a common struggle. Let us call each other brothers and comrades-in-arms. Let us become comrades-in-arms who go to Cuba from Korea and come to Korea from Cuba if need be."¹²⁵

Such activity was the lead up to Che's historic visit to North Korea in December 1960. Three days after the announcement of further US economic sanctions against Cuba,¹²⁶ Che and his entourage embarked on a lengthy trip that included Prague, Moscow, Leningrad, Stalingrad, Irkutsk, Beijing, Shanghai and Berlin.¹²⁷ This two-month tour of the socialist world was an effort to secure the sale of Cuba's remaining 1960 sugar crop, and obtain the kind of assistance necessary to reorient its economy from its traditional dependency on the United States. Although Che was accompanied for much of the trip by Soviet foreign officer and intelligence agent Nikolai Leonov, when the two arrived in Pyongyang they were immediately separated and remained so for the duration of his stay, reflecting the thorny relationship by then prevailing between Pyongyang and Moscow.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Fernando Ravelo Renedo: fought in the guerrilla front led by Raul Castro during the revolution, subsequently an intelligence agent, diplomat, and foreign affairs official, closely involved in Cuba's relations with Latin American revolutionary groups. Some sources implicated him in narcotrafficking activities, and he was indicted by a Miami court in November 1982. He passed away in June 2017.

¹²⁵ "Cuban group tours S. Hwanghae area," KCNA (Pyongyang), translated and published in *Daily Report: Foreign Radio Broadcasts*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Washington), 1 November 1960.

¹²⁶ Already in July 1960, the Eisenhower administration terminated that year's Cuban sugar import quota. In December 1960 the ban on Cuban sugar was extended to the first quarter of 1961.

¹²⁷ For the sake of time the Cuban delegation split up at different junctures, and other members also visited Vietnam, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, and Albania.

¹²⁸ Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: a Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1997), 467.

Amongst mass rallies, grand banquets, and factory tours, including the site of the famous Vinylon factory in Hamhŭng as it approached completion, the over-arching theme of the diplomatic celebrations was that the Korean and Cuban peoples had a shared history of anti-colonial struggle, and a common enemy in US imperialism. Both peoples, *Rodong Sinmun* declared, “underwent indescribable sufferings and misfortunes for a long time under the yoke of imperialism and colonialism,” and so now understood “how precious are mutual support and cooperation” [...] “The day will surely come when the US imperialists, the vicious common enemy of the Korean and Cuban peoples, are made to take their blood-stained claws off South Korea and Cuba.”¹²⁹ Che visited the Hwanghae Iron and Steel Complex, where he was greeted by workers chanting “*Cuba si, yanquis no!*” and singing the anthem of the July 26 Movement.¹³⁰ During his visit he praised North Korea’s focus on heavy industry, and commented that “I have seen here clearly what a free people can do when they stand up [...] Sooner or later the South Korean people will see the truth clearly. The truth cannot be kept in darkness by the demarcation line or any other obstacles.”¹³¹ Behind the scenes, the two sides negotiated the signing of several agreements on trade, banking, scientific and technical cooperation and cultural exchange. This included a North Korean commitment to purchase twenty thousand tons of the 1960 sugar crop, while the Cubans received machine presses, mining equipment, and “all kinds of machinery,” according to Che.¹³² It should be noted that North Korea’s sugar purchase was by no means insignificant: while it was much less than what the Soviets and Chinese agreed to purchase (2.7

¹²⁹ “Newspaper Editorials,” KCNA (Pyongyang), 01 December 1960, translated and published in *Daily Report: Foreign Radio Broadcasts*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Washington) 02 December 1960.

¹³⁰ “Encomia el Che la decisión de Corea,” *Revolución* (Havana) 6 December 1960.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² “Esta Revolución se ha hecho para todo el mundo: Guevara,” *Revolución* (Havana), 7 February 1961.

million and 1 million tons respectively), useful comparisons can be made with North Vietnam, which agreed to purchase five tons, and Mongolia, which purchased a single ton.¹³³

Interviewed on Cuban television upon his return, Che remarked that out of all the countries he visited on his trip, “Korea is one of the most extraordinary. Perhaps the one that impressed us the most of all.”¹³⁴ For Che, what he saw and learnt in North Korea confirmed the utter depravity of US empire, but also the incredible possibilities for the underdeveloped world when the masses had both a high level of revolutionary consciousness and correct leadership. He was moved by war-time photos of Koreans - “people filled with hate, that hatred of the people when it reaches the deepest part of their being” - who for two years endured “an orgy of death,” in what might have been “the most barbaric systematic destruction ever implemented anywhere.”¹³⁵ He relayed gruesome accounts of American soldiers who slaughtered children with flamethrowers and poison gas, tore fetuses from the stomachs of pregnant women with bayonets, and pilots who, when there was nothing left to destroy, took to carpet bombing oxherds. And yet today there was virtually no trace of this destruction, and the country had seemingly been built anew. A once colonized, backward, illiterate people now enjoyed universal basic education, and “practically limitless cultural development.”¹³⁶ Che’s experience in North Korea influenced his own ideas about how socialism was to be built in Cuba, as evidenced in the Great Economic Debate of the mid-1960s, discussed in Chapter Four.

Che’s visit at the end of 1960 initiated a decade of exceptionally close cooperation between Havana and Pyongyang, the “indestructible friendship” as it is referred to in official

¹³³ “‘Ayuda Tremenda’ presta la URSS a la Republica Cuba,” *Revolución* (Havana), 5 December 1960.

¹³⁴ “Esta Revolución se ha hecho para todo el mundo: Guevara.”

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

pronouncements to the present day. During the first half of the 1960s, such activity often fell under the umbrella of cultural and scientific cooperation, with exchanges in fields as diverse as ballet, basketball, music, poetry, film, civil aviation, healthcare, education, radio broadcasting, journalism, and architecture. Economic and technical cooperation flourished as well, and such projects, given extensive coverage in the Cuban press, introduced a new word into the Cuban lexicon: *Ch'öllima*, translated from Chosŏnmal into Spanish as *Chullima* or *Shullima*. A mythological winged horse of Korean folklore, it was adopted as the symbol of a campaign launched by the North Korean state in 1956 to accelerate industrial production, often compared by historians to the Soviet Stakhanovite movement or China's Great Leap Forward. It reflected the strong voluntarist current within North Korean economic policy, which endowed the masses with the power to transform objective reality through grandiose feats of collective labour.¹³⁷

North Korea made a substantial contribution to the modernization of Cuba's fishing industry, one of the central development goals of the 1960s with which Fidel was involved personally.¹³⁸ On 15 August of 1962 Che and the DPRK ambassador to Cuba presided over the inauguration of the Ch'öllima Shipyard (*Astillero Chullima*) on Havana's Almendares River.¹³⁹ The date was chosen in recognition of National Liberation Day in North Korea - the anniversary of liberation from Japanese rule. Presented as a sister-factory to the Sinp'o Shipyard in North Korea's Hamgyŏngnam province, vessels produced at the facility included the Lambda 75, a

¹³⁷ Kim Il Sung, "Chosŏnminjujuŭiinmin'gonghwagugesŏi sahoejuŭigŏnsŏlgwa namjosŏn hyŏngmyŏnge taehayŏ" [On Socialist Construction in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the South Korean Revolution] 14 April 1965, in Kim Il Sung, *Chŏnjip*, vol. 35 (Pyongyang: Korean Workers' Party Publishing House, 2001).

¹³⁸ Ian T. Joyce, *The Fisheries of the Cuban Insular Shelf: Culture, History and Revolutionary Performance* (PhD Diss., Simon Fraser University, April 1996).

¹³⁹ "Funden en "Chullima" el primer barco de ferrocemento que se hace en Cuba," *Granma* (Havana) 4 July 1969.

traditional staple of Cuba's fishing fleet, as well as the first domestically-manufactured trawler.¹⁴⁰

Two months later the Cuban Missile Crisis erupted, with the revelation of the existence of Soviet-built ballistic missile launching facilities in Cuba. In response to the US naval blockade of the island from 22 October to 20 November, Pyongyang announced an all-out, nation-wide labour mobilization to aid the Cuban people. The workers of the Korean-Cuban Friendship Factory in Pyongyang, it was reported, had increased production by thirty percent in order to meet their annual production goal early and produce an additional ten tons of steel nuts and sixty thousand textile machine parts for the Cuban people, while the Hwasŏng Co-operative Farm of Korean-Cuban Friendship in Ryongsŏng declared it would produce an extra five million tons of grain for Cuba that year.¹⁴¹ The bulletin of the North Korean embassy in Havana carried stories of workers and youth across the country forming Ch'ŏllima Brigades to accelerate production and meet annual quotas early, thereby allowing them to produce extra steel parts, disc harrows, machine tools, and electric components for Cuba. It featured interviews with factory workers who had forfeited their annual vacations and housewives inspired to join their husbands on the assembly line night shift in solidarity with their Cuban brothers and sisters.¹⁴² A breakthrough in the Cuban Missile Crisis came with a 27 October agreement between the Khrushchev and Kennedy administrations. Moscow agreed to remove all its missiles from Cuba, in return for a US pledge to never invade Cuba, and to remove US nuclear missiles stationed in Turkey.¹⁴³ In

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.; Edgar P. Young, "Cuba's Fishing Revolution," *Fishing News International* 6, no. 6 (June 1967): 25.

¹⁴¹ Such "friendship farms" are a tradition of North Korea's international diplomacy. The Hwasŏng Co-operative Farm of Korean-Cuban Friendship still exists to this day.

¹⁴² "En respaldo del pueblo coreano que lucha contra la agresión del imperialismo de los Estados Unidos," *Boletín de Corea* (Havana), no. 7 (December 1962).

¹⁴³ Timothy Naftali, introduction to "The Malin Notes: Glimpses Inside the Kremlin during the Cuban Missile Crisis," in The Cold War International History Project bulletin issue 17/18 (Fall 2012, "The Global Cuban Missile Crisis at 50"): 299-303. As Naftali notes, there is some uncertainty as to whether or not Khrushchev was aware of

December North Korea launched the Korea-Cuba Solidarity Committee with a celebration at the House of Culture in Pyongyang presided over by Han Sangtu and Vice-premier I Chuyŏn.

When Cuba was struck by Hurricane Flora in October 1963, one of the deadliest Atlantic hurricanes of modern times, North Korea sent a cargo ship of relief supplies including five thousand tons of rice, five tractors, tools, and medicines, which was greeted by cheering crowds at the port of Isabela de Sagua.¹⁴⁴ In December 1963, Pyongyang announced it was sending eighty North Korean metallurgy technicians to Cuba, the first of many teams of experts sent to the island during the decade.¹⁴⁵ In the early 1960s North Korea also provided scholarships to young Cubans to study or receive technical training in Pyongyang and Kusŏng, where they joined a community of international students mostly from Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe.

The North Korean government's determination to provide such levels of support at a time when it faced serious economic challenges of its own – as Kim Il Sung conceded publicly in November 1970¹⁴⁶ - testifies to the great importance it placed on the newborn relationship. Indeed, the KWP leadership saw the Cuban Revolution as being of immense historical and political importance, the “first breakthrough in the American colonial system”¹⁴⁷ and the opening

Kennedy's decision to remove US missiles from Turkey when the Soviet leader agreed to remove missiles from Cuba.

¹⁴⁴ “Memorandum of a Conversation with the USSR Ambassador, c. V. P. Moskovskiy,” January 07, 1964, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, State Central Archive in Prague. Translated by Adolf Kotlik <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116747>; “Relief Goods to Cuba,” Pyongyang International English, 5 February 1964, in the Readex collection, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports, 1941-1996*.

¹⁴⁵ “Metallurgy experts to Cuba,” Radio Havana, 5 December 1963, translated and published in *Daily Report, Foreign Radio Broadcasts*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Washington), 17 December 1963.

¹⁴⁶ The opening up of diplomatic archives of the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries has provided ample evidence of North Korea's domestic economic challenges in the 1960s. In particular, they reveal that the priority given to heavy industry and strengthening the country's military forces hindered the governments ability to raise living standards. Kim Il Sung conceded these facts during his address to the Fifth Party Congress in November 1970.

¹⁴⁷ Kim Tok-hwan, “Cuba's path to socialism praised,” *Kulloja* no. 7 (1 July 1970), reprinted in *Translations on North Korea* no. 180 (29 Sept 1970).

salvo in the coming Latin American revolution. It relished the humiliating defeat the US had suffered in the failed invasion of the Bahía de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs) in April 1961, and what the event supposedly proved: that Washington's power was in sharp decline while the revolutionary Global South was in ascendant. It was a sentiment echoed by Cuban leader Vilma Espin when she proclaimed in Moscow in 1965: "If little Cuba, located only ninety miles from North American imperialism, is able to carry out its revolution, then all peoples everywhere can do so."¹⁴⁸

The close bond emerging between North Korea and Cuba in the early 1960s also reflected a large degree of consensus on a range of political questions, from revolutionary strategy, to economic policy, to what should be the correct course of the international communist movement. This partly reflected the similar backgrounds of both groups of leaders: guerrillas from the Global South, stronger in their anti-imperialism and their patriotism than in their commitment to Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. Both Cuba and North Korea were in different stages of building socialism from a predominantly agrarian, highly-dependent economic foundation, and conceptualized their respective revolutionary projects as part of a broader historical narrative of resistance to foreign domination. Moreover, they occupied a similar position within the Cold War international system. Both were under US economic sanctions, although these were of much greater consequence to Cuba, given its geography and its traditional integration with the North American economy. Cuba faced constant aggression from the US government and terrorist groups based in Miami, including the CIA's now infamous schemes to assassinate Fidel. North Koreans lived with fifty thousand US troops stationed in the southern half of the peninsula, and, since 1958, an arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons aimed at Pyongyang. The capacity of

¹⁴⁸ *The Tricontinental Conference of Africa, Asian and Latin American Peoples*, 5.

Washington to project its power around the world was the primary obstacle to the central foreign policy goals of both governments: for the Cubans, the spread of revolution in Latin America; for the North Koreans, the reunification of the peninsula. As a result, both parties shared fundamental reservations about the Soviet policy of peaceful coexistence and held high hopes for how revolution throughout the Global South could alter the global balance of forces against US imperialism. These commonalities were frequently commented upon by both parties themselves. As Cuban president Osvaldo Dorticós told Ch'oe Yonggŏn in November 1967:

...there exist similar circumstances in the case of Korea and in the case of Cuba that facilitate our reciprocal understanding and back this solidarity. Korea, like Cuba, is waging a tenacious struggle, hard, difficult, but full of faith in the construction of a future; Korea, like Cuba, develops this work in constant battle with imperialism, especially with US imperialism; Korea, like Cuba, suffers imperialist infiltration and sabotage; Korea, like Cuba, on various occasions is the object of imperialist provocations; Korea, like Cuba, is always potentially threatened by imperialist aggression. But what is more important: Korea, like Cuba, facing these aggressions and these threats, is firm, determined to remain within the revolutionary and communist spirit, to deepen the revolutionary content of all its work, to develop the ideological, economic and military power of the country to face that threat; Korea, like Cuba, is prepared to fight with arms in hands for the defence of its integrity and its independence; Korea, like Cuba, is prepared to combat in any circumstances against imperialism for the defence of its land, its nation and its principles. These are essential identities that unite us.¹⁴⁹

On the other hand, as junior members of the socialist camp, the two governments shared another dilemma: they relied on the economic and military support of the larger socialist countries, and that dependency carried with it a persistent threat to their political sovereignty. This mutual desire to maintain political independence from the Soviet Union and China would facilitate a new alliance between North Korea, Cuba, and North Vietnam by the mid-1960s.

¹⁴⁹ *Visita a Cuba de la delegación Coreana* (Habana: Ediciones Políticos, 1968), 42.

North Korea, Cuba, and the Sino-Soviet Split

By the early 1960s long-simmering tensions between the Communist Party of China (CPC) led by Mao Zedong and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) under Nikita Khrushchev had erupted into open hostility. The factors involved in this breakdown in relations were many and still the subject of debate among historians. Lorenz M. Lüthi (2010), while not ignoring earlier roots in the Stalin era, identifies the threat to Mao posed by Khrushchev's de-stalinization policy, initiated in 1956, as the origin of the conflict. He further cites Moscow's policy of peaceful coexistence and its critical view of the CPC's radical policies of the late 1950s, as well as Mao's hostile reaction to Soviet proposals for joint military cooperation, as deepening the rift. Mingjiang Li (2012) disputes the importance commonly attributed to 1956 and disagreement over peaceful coexistence, seeing the split as fundamentally a contest for leadership within the international communist movement, in which Moscow's proposals for joint naval bases in China was the principle turning point. Jeremy Friedman (2015) has placed greater weight on Moscow and Beijing's competing vision for the Global South in the context of the anti-colonial upheaval of the 1950s.¹⁵⁰

While the origins of the Sino-Soviet split were diverse and complex, it is clear that central to the conflict was disagreement over the correct policy towards the United States and the tide of anti-colonial revolt occurring throughout the Global South. At the twentieth congress of the CPSU in February 1956, Khrushchev had announced the doctrine of peaceful coexistence. Recognizing the dangers of thermonuclear war, he argued that the socialist and capitalist camps

¹⁵⁰ Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Mingjiang Li, *Mao's China and the Sino-Soviet Split* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

could peacefully coexist and that the eventual triumph of socialism internationally was ensured by its inherent superiority as a socio-economic system. While Moscow was unequivocal in its opposition to colonialism, and supported armed struggle in certain circumstances, it favoured peaceful transitions that avoided instability and the escalation of international tensions. It believed that conditions in the Global South generally called not for armed insurrection, but rather “development along the road of social progress and genuine national independence,” in which communists participate in united fronts with “all patriotic, progressive and democratic forces.”¹⁵¹ This position translated into a friendly foreign policy towards the independent governments of the Global South largely irrespective of their political orientation, offering generous developmental assistance and commercial trade. In this context, the communist parties of Latin America were advised to pursue change through legal means and participate in national elections as part of progressive coalitions, given the necessary conditions existed.

The CPC under Mao rejected the “revisionist” position of peaceful coexistence as opportunistic, cowardly, and a betrayal of the Marxist-Leninist principle of proletarian internationalism. It was the Chinese Revolution’s legacy of “people’s war” that showed the way forward for the Global South, and armed national liberation struggles demanded the support of the socialist camp without fear of how Washington might react. “The storm of the people's revolution in Asia, Africa and Latin America requires every political force in the world to take a stand” Mao declared in October 1963. “Only when imperialism is eliminated can peace prevail.”¹⁵² The CPC leadership pointed towards several episodes that allegedly proved Moscow

¹⁵¹ Leonid Brezhnev, “Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the 23rd Congress of the CPSU,” in *23rd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (Moscow: Novosti Press Publishing House, 1966), 35.

¹⁵² Mao Zedong, “US Imperialism is a paper tiger,” (14 July 1956), available at the Marxist Internet Archive, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_52.htm.

had forsaken those peoples struggling against colonialism and imperialism: its cautious policy in Vietnam, its initial support for the 1960 UN peacekeeping mission in the Congo, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Denouncing the CPSU as unworthy of the leadership of the international communist movement, the CPC worked to build an alternate block of parties supportive of its “anti-revisionist” line while extending aid to armed insurgencies throughout the Global South.

Initially the North Korean leadership carefully guarded its neutrality in the Sino-Soviet split, even if it occasionally made statements criticizing revisionism. However, a number of interconnected developments caused it to become increasingly hostile towards Khrushchev before coming out in strong support of the Chinese position in the fall of 1962. In May 1961 a military coup in South Korea brought the ardent anti-communist Park Chung Hee to power, drastically increasing North Korean fears of an imminent military conflict.¹⁵³ The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 was interpreted by the North Korean leadership as confirmation that it could not rely on Soviet protection in the event of US/South Korean aggression.¹⁵⁴ North Korea responded negatively to Soviet pressure to fall in line vis-à-vis the Sino-Soviet rivalry, such as when Moscow ignored a North Korean plea for military aid in December 1962.¹⁵⁵ A Hungarian diplomat’s account of Soviet Premier Alexi Kosygin’s December 1965 visit to Pyongyang relates that “Korean leaders were distrustful of the CPSU and the Soviet government.” Kim Il Sung reportedly told Kosygin “the Soviet Union had betrayed Cuba at the time of the Caribbean crisis,

¹⁵³ James F. Person, introduction to “The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Origins of North Korea’s Policy of Self-Reliance in National Defense,” NKIDP e-Dossier no. 12 (October 2012), 1-2.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 2-4.

¹⁵⁵ Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong, Kim Il-Sung, and Sino-North Korean Relations, 1949-1976* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 149-150; Person, introduction to “The Cuban Missile Crisis,” 2-3.

and later it also betrayed the Vietnamese,” and that furthermore it “did not support the national liberation struggle of the Asian and African peoples.”¹⁵⁶

Kim’s address to the Third Supreme People’s Assembly in October 1962 in the midst of the Cuban Missile Crisis made clear how his international perspective had evolved. In the speech, Kim explicitly linked his rejection of peaceful co-existence to Korea’s own history of anti-colonial struggle, and the continued division of the peninsula:

How can we quit the struggle against imperialism when half of the country and two-thirds of the population still remain under imperialist oppression? How can we go along with giving the US imperialists a charming image when every day they spill our people’s blood and humiliate our brothers and sisters? For us to give up the revolution and quit the anti-imperialist struggle would mean abandoning South Korea to US imperialist plunder forever and leaving the south Korean workers and peasants to endure the exploitation and oppression of the national traitors.¹⁵⁷

The Soviet Union had every right to pursue peaceful relations with the United States, Kim argued. What was unacceptable, was to try to restrain the revolutionary impulse elsewhere, ostracizing those communists who did not conform to their revisionist line, and interfering in the internal affairs of fraternal countries.¹⁵⁸ Kim affirmed the KWP’s commitment to do “everything in our power” to support national liberation struggles throughout the Global South.¹⁵⁹ While North Korea’s anti-revisionist stand was frequently interpreted by outsiders as a sign of its loyalty to China, it was adamant that its position remained an independent one. A CIA intelligence report in 1967 assessed that the KWP, along with the communist parties of Vietnam,

¹⁵⁶ “Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry,” January 08, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, National Archives of Hungary (MOL), XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1965, 73. doboz, IV-100, 001819/1965. Translated for CWIHP and NKIDP by Balázs Szalontai. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116488>

¹⁵⁷ Kim Il Sung, “Tang chojiksaöpkwa sasangsaöbül kaesön kanghwa halte taehayö,” [On Improving and Strengthening the Organizational and Ideological Work of the Party], 8 March 1962, in Kim Il Sung *Chönjip*, vol. 29 (Pyongyang: Korean Workers’ Party Publishing House, 2000), 131-132.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 131.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 132-133.

Indonesia, and Japan, “were not obedient retainers of the Chinese but rather their voluntary allies, whose anti-Khrushchev position had derived in large part from what they regarded as his soft line toward the United States.”¹⁶⁰

As Cuban leaders were confronted with the Sino-Soviet split, it was evident the Chinese line was more compatible with their perspective on the United States, and their intention to aid revolutionary movements throughout Latin America. So obvious was this affinity that many observers during the early 1960s ventured to speculate that Cuba was drifting towards Beijing’s side. Many of the new Latin American guerrilla groups saw the Cuban and Chinese revolutions as complimentary models: both spoke to the tasks of revolutionary movements in the Global South, and emphasized the role of the peasantry and the primacy of guerrilla warfare. But while much of the Cuban leadership viewed Beijing favourably, they could not afford to jeopardize Soviet assistance. As one CIA analysis commented cynically, while Fidel sympathized with the Chinese position, he was “far from willing to commit himself to Mao’s side in the Sino-Soviet struggle for power, if only because he was wholly dependent on the Soviet Union economically and because Peiping did not have the economic strength to replace the USSR and in underwriting the Cuban economy.”¹⁶¹ The Cuban response was to retain its neutrality as long as possible, hopeful that the two socialist powers would eventually reconcile. Nevertheless, between 1959 and 1964 this common position on the necessity of armed struggle in the Global South allowed the Cuban, Chinese, North Korean, and Vietnamese parties to collaborate in supporting revolutionary groups in Latin America, as we will examine in Chapter Three.

¹⁶⁰ “The Sino-Soviet Struggle in the World Communist Since Khrushchev’s Fall,” part 1, CIA Intelligence report, ESAU XXXIV (September 1967) 1, available at <https://archive.org/details/ESAU-CIA/page/n1>.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, xii.

By contrast, the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, which ended when Khrushchev agreed to remove Soviet missiles and allow international inspectors without consulting his Cuban allies, severely damaged Cuban-Soviet relations. The Cuban People's Militia even invented a new chant: ("Nikita mariquita, lo que se da no se quita, pim pam fuera, abajo Caimanera"¹⁶² ("Nikita you little sissy – that which is given is not taken back - *pim pam* out – down with *Caimanera*)."¹⁶³ The Cuban press reprinted Chinese editorials chastising Moscow's actions and making comparisons to the 1938 Munich Agreement, as did North Korea.¹⁶⁴ While ultimately the Cuban leadership still depended on Moscow's support, the somewhat romantic view of the Soviet Union many Cuban leaders demonstrated in the 1959-62 period was forever tarnished. Much of the communist old-guard in the government were demoted to be replaced with Fidel's comrades from the Sierra Maestra. Moreover, the Cuban leadership was increasingly open about its intent to aid armed revolutionary movements throughout the region, as well as its disagreements with Soviet policy and the Latin American communist parties.¹⁶⁵ Cuban leaders' frustration with the Soviet bloc were reciprocated: following the missile crisis the Hungarian ambassador to Cuba reported "It has turned out that within the layer of Cuban leaders the number and, most of all, the influence of those who may be really called Marxists and communists is smaller than we believed. We can feel the impact of various nationalist or petit-bourgeois opinions and of the practical standpoints and measures originating from them."¹⁶⁶ Chief among

¹⁶² K.S. Karol, *Guerrillas in Power*, translated by Arnold Pomerans (New York: Hill & Wang, 1970), 272.

¹⁶³ Caimanera is the Cuban name for the US military base in Guantanamo Bay.

¹⁶⁴ Karol, *Guerrillas in Power*, 277.

¹⁶⁵ "The Sino-Soviet Struggle in Cuba and the Latin American Communist Movement," CIA staff study, ESAU XXIII-63 (November 1963) xi.i, available at <https://archive.org/details/ESAU-CIA/page/n1>.

¹⁶⁶ "Hungarian Embassy in Havana (Beck), Report on 'Relations Between Cuba and the Socialist Countries Since the [Cuban Missile] Crisis'," January 28, 1963, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Hungarian National Archives (MOL), Budapest, Foreign Ministry, Top Secret Files, XIX-J-I-j-Kuba, 3. d. Translated by Attila Kolontári and Zsófia Zelnik <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116845>

these standpoints was “instead of the economic building work, they still pay the most attention to ‘world revolution,’ that is, as the Cubans put it, to the Latin American revolution...”¹⁶⁷ It was precisely this priority given to “world revolution” that would bond the Cuban and North Korean leaderships during the 1960s.

Despite all the indications of a different trajectory, both Cuba and North Korea experienced a dramatic deterioration of relations with China beginning in late 1964, the coinciding timelines reflecting the degree to which their foreign policy interests had become intertwined. In October 1964, Leonid Brezhnev succeeded Nikolai Khrushchev as General-Secretary of the CPSU. The new administration which emerged took important steps towards improving relations with Cuba and the Asian communist parties that had been alienated by its predecessor. These policies included a greater commitment to supporting Vietnam, new promises of economic and military aid to Cuba and North Korea, and an altered tone signaling it would be more respectful of the autonomy of fraternal parties. Moreover, a November 1964 meeting in Havana achieved a *modus vivendi* between the Cuban government and the pro-Soviet Latin American communist parties, even if below the surface differences remained, a subject addressed in Chapter Four. Encouraged by these developments, Cuba initiated new efforts to bridge the Sino-Soviet rift. In December 1964 a delegation of representatives of Latin American communist parties headed by senior Cuban official Carlos Rafael Rodríguez (1913-97) visited the Soviet Union and China with the aim of mediating an end to the feud. In Moscow, Soviet officials assured the delegates they were prepared to “forget the past” and “sit down at the table for discussions without conditions.”¹⁶⁸ By contrast, the Venezuelan delegate Eduardo Mancera

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Eduardo Gallegos Mancera quoted in Agustín Blanco Muñoz, *¡Comunista por siempre!: habla Eduardo Gallegos Mancera* (Caracas: Catedra Pío Tamayo, 2009), 529-532.

described their three days in Beijing as “traumatizing.”¹⁶⁹ Mao was so aggressive, sarcastic, and insulting that Mancera was convinced the Chairman had reached advanced stages of senility. Mao ridiculed Fidel in absentia and was incensed over Cuban requests that the Chinese cease anti-Soviet propaganda activities on the island. He reminded his guests that the countries of Latin America were only four-hundred or five-hundred years old, compared to the five-thousand year-old civilization of China. He insulted the Uruguayan delegate by suggesting few people could locate his country on a map.¹⁷⁰ The meeting confirmed that the recent improvement in Soviet-Cuban relations, and Cuban efforts to restrict Chinese propaganda activities on their island in particular, had convinced Mao that Havana was fully committed to Moscow.

Meanwhile, Cuban leaders were becoming increasingly frustrated with China’s efforts to play a leadership role in the Latin American revolutionary movement. Beijing ignored Havana’s authority in this regard and fostered its own network of groups that heeded Maoist theory. When invited to Beijing in March 1965, delegates of these parties were informed that the Cuban leadership had chosen revisionism and was now “an enemy of revolutionary struggle in Latin America.”¹⁷¹

These events paralleled and influenced a similar deterioration of Sino-DPRK relations. The North Korean leadership had grown particularly critical of the manner in which Beijing pursued its crusade against Soviet revisionism at the expense of the anti-imperialist struggle, especially as the conflict in Indochina escalated. North Korean leaders also resented Mao’s increasingly belligerent attitude towards their Cuban allies, and his presumption of a leadership

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Quoted in “The Sino-Soviet Dispute within the Communist Movement in Latin America,” CIA Intelligence report, ESAU XXVIII (15 June 1967) 23, fn, available at <https://archive.org/details/ESAU-CIA/page/n1>.

role in Latin America. By late 1964 the Soviets could perceive a growing dissonance, surmising that the KWP was reacting negatively to the “great Han nationalism and political adventurism of the Chinese leaders” and that now “the idea of the independence of KWP policy began to again be stressed with special force.”¹⁷² As a comparison, a CIA report from the same time reaching virtually identical conclusions blamed the breakdown in Sino-DPRK relations on the “rigid dogmatism and political ineptitude” of the CPC: “The concept of a Sino-centric world, at least insofar as truth and right are concerned, is as strong in Peking today as it was under the emperors centuries ago.”¹⁷³

In August 1964 the first US aerial bombing of North Vietnam commenced in the wake of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, followed by the launch of a sustained bombing campaign and the deployment of ground troops the following March. Vietnamese leaders welcomed a substantial increase in Soviet military aid under Brezhnev, especially as they saw the need to switch from purely guerrilla tactics to more conventional warfare, requiring military resources the Chinese could not provide.¹⁷⁴ Beijing, meanwhile, in the zealotry of its anti-revisionist campaign, lambasted Vietnamese leaders for their apparent shift in loyalties, refused to participate in any multilateral effort to support Vietnam that involved Moscow, and blocked Soviet military aid shipments that needed to pass through Chinese territory.¹⁷⁵ In such circumstances, the imagined

¹⁷² “Excerpts from the Report of the Soviet Embassy in Pyongyang, ‘Some New Aspects of Korean-Chinese Relations in the First Half of 1965,’” June 04, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 21, papka 106, delo 20, listy 14-27. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Sergey Radchenko. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110503>

¹⁷³ “China’s Growing Isolation in the Communist Movement,” CIA Current Intelligence Weekly Special Report (5 August 1966), 1, CREST electronic database, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland.

¹⁷⁴ Nicholas Khoo, *Collateral damage: Sino-Soviet rivalry and the termination of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.; “A 7 May 1967 DVO Memo about Intergovernmental Relations between the DPRK and Romania, the DRV, and Cuba,” May 07, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF f. 0102, op. 23, p. 112, d. 24, pp. 39-42. Obtained for NKIDP by Sergey Radchenko and translated for NKIDP by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116701>.

paradigm of China's internationalism versus Soviet compromise lost much of its power. As the North Korean leadership had come to view Cuba as leading the Latin America revolution, and Vietnam as the crucial frontline of the anti-imperialist struggle, Beijing's behaviour towards its allies was unacceptable – a view the DPRK made explicit in a December 1964 *Rodong sinmun* editorial attacking Chinese “dogmatism.”¹⁷⁶ The Soviets assessed in December 1966, “As events progressed in Vietnam the KWP leadership became increasingly convinced that the Chinese ruling group was hiding behind high-sounding phrases about the battle against imperialism but is in fact being obstructive in this battle,” and that now, “the Korean leaders condemn the Chinese leaders for their great power chauvinism, dogmatism, and ‘left’ opportunism.”¹⁷⁷

The parallel with which Cuban and North Korean attitudes towards the Soviet Union and China shifted between the Cuban Missile Crisis and the fall of Khrushchev demonstrates how close their perspectives had become intertwined. This falling out with Beijing, and improvement in relations with the Brezhnev administration, however, did not signal a renewed acceptance of Moscow's leadership for either party. While the North Koreans and Cubans welcomed the change in Soviet policy, both maintained a principled disagreement with the concept of peaceful coexistence and their skepticism of Moscow's commitment to the Global South. What was emerging, instead, was a third, independent bloc led by North Korea, Cuba, and North Vietnam, that was increasingly bold in its willingness to speak on behalf of what had become known as the Third World, and to criticize the two major socialist powers.

¹⁷⁶ Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, *A Misunderstood Friendship*, 175.

¹⁷⁷ “First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in North Korean Reports on Sino-Korean Relations in 1966,” December 02, 1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF, f. 0102, op. 22, p. 109, d. 22, pp. 38-49. Obtained by Sergey Radchenko and translated by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114591>

Two events in 1965 demonstrated this new dynamic taking shape within the international communist movement. At the Second Economic Seminar of Afro-Asian Solidarity in Algiers in February, Che argued it was wrong for the socialist countries to trade with developing countries based on prices determined by the global capitalist market.

How can it amount to “mutual benefit” to sell at world market prices the raw materials that cost the backward countries immeasurable sweat and suffering, and to buy at world market prices the machinery produced in today's big automated factories? [...] the socialist countries are, in a certain manner, accomplices of imperialist exploitation. It can be argued that the amount of exchange with the underdeveloped countries constitutes an insignificant part of the foreign trade of these countries. That is very true, but it does not eliminate the immoral character of that exchange.¹⁷⁸

He stated plainly that it was the duty of the socialist camp to fund the development of those countries of the Global South attempting to break with imperialism, as well as to provide its full and unconditional support to national liberation movements waging armed struggle.

Arms cannot be commodities in our world, they must be delivered at no cost and in the quantities needed and possible to the peoples that demand them, to fire on our common enemy [...] The response to the ominous attacks by US imperialism against Vietnam or the Congo should be to supply those brother countries with all the defence equipment they need, and to give them our full solidarity without any conditions.¹⁷⁹

Two months later in April 1965, Kim Il Sung delivered a speech in Jakarta on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Bandung Conference. In his address he lashed out at the “revisionists and great-power chauvinists” who interfered in Korea’s internal affairs during 1956-57, backing those “anti-party elements” who “conspired to overthrow the leadership of our party and government,”¹⁸⁰ a reference to Soviet and Chinese support for his rivals within the

¹⁷⁸ Ernest Che Guevara, “En Argelia. Conferencia Afroasiatica” (24 February 1965) in *Lecturas para la Reflexion 4: Solidaridad e Internacionalismo* (Havana: Ocean Sur, 2013), 67-68.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 77.

¹⁸⁰ Kim Il Sung, “Chosŏnminjujuŭiinmin'gonghwagugesŏi sahoejuŭigŏnsŏlgwa namjosŏnhyŏngmyŏnge taehayŏ” [On Socialist Construction in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the South Korean Revolution] 14 April 1965, in Kim Il Sung, *Chŏnjip*, vol. 35 (Pyongyang: Korean Workers’ Party Publishing House, 2001), 145.

KWP at that time. He also alluded to Soviet pressure to join COMECON¹⁸¹ in the late 1950s, criticizing those who discouraged North Korea from developing its own manufacturing industries and who would have preferred it to remain a dependent exporter of raw materials.¹⁸² Kim's speech in Jakarta came just two months after Kosygin's visit to Pyongyang where the Soviet minister offered a renewal of economic and military aid. The CIA reasoned that Kim's speech "was evidently intended in part to warn the CPSU that it had better not hope again to use such aid as an instrument for interference in internal Korean party affairs."¹⁸³ Moreover, Kim emphasized that while his party opposed Soviet revisionism, it did so independently of Beijing, "on the basis of our own judgement and conviction and in accordance with our actual circumstances."¹⁸⁴ Like Che in Algeria two months earlier, Kim criticized the economic trade policies of the larger socialist countries, dismissing Moscow's concept of an "international socialist division of labor" and condemning "the great power chauvinist tendency to prevent the independent and comprehensive development of the economy of other countries."¹⁸⁵ Tellingly, numerous scholars cite Kim's April 1965 speech in Jakarta as the first time Chuch'e was presented as a paramount ideological position.¹⁸⁶ Kim articulated Chuch'e as the embodiment of "the spirit of self-reliance," the principle of creatively adapting Marxism-Leninism to the "historical conditions and national peculiarities" of each country, as the antithesis of "dogmatism and flunkeyism towards great powers."¹⁸⁷ Kim's speech in Jakarta further demonstrates the

¹⁸¹ The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, the main economic organization of socialist states founded in 1949.

¹⁸² Kim Il Sung, "Chosŏnminjujuŭiinmin'gonghwagugesŏi sahoejuŭigŏnsŏlgwa," 157.

¹⁸³ "The Sino-Soviet Struggle in the World Communist Since Khrushchev's Fall," part 2, CIA Intelligence report, ESAU XXXIV (September 1967) 14, available at <https://archive.org/details/ESAU-CIA/page/n1>.

¹⁸⁴ Kim Il Sung, "Chosŏnminjujuŭiinmin'gonghwagugesŏi sahoejuŭigŏnsŏlgwa," 168.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 172.

¹⁸⁶ Charles K. Armstrong, "Illusions of Autonomy and the Autonomy of Illusions," *Pacific Affairs* 87, no. 4 (December 2014): 801; Alzo David-West, "Marxism, Stalinism, and the Juche Speech of 1955: On the Theoretical De-Stalinization of North Korea," *The Review of Korean Studies* 10, issue 3 (September 2007): 141.

¹⁸⁷ Kim Il Sung, "Chosŏnminjujuŭiinmin'gonghwagugesŏi sahoejuŭigŏnsŏlgwa," 166-168.

manner in which the gradual elevation of Chuch'e Sasang in KWP ideology progressed in tandem with North Korea's increasingly Third Worldist foreign policy orientation.

The attack on the Cuban ambassador in Pyongyang

While DPRK-Cuban friendship was strengthening during 1965, one incident threatened to derail it. The KWP suffered a major embarrassment on 28 March of that year, when the Cuban ambassador to North Korea, Lázaro Vigoa Aranguren, his wife and a group of visiting Cuban doctors were attacked by a mob in the streets of Pyongyang. The incident was sparked when the Cubans, who had been touring the city by car, stopped to photograph a building partially destroyed in the war. A large mob surrounded the car, pounding it with their fists and hurling insults, “especially against the Cuban ambassador as a black man,” an East German report on the incident noted, while a nearby group of militiamen stood idle.¹⁸⁸ The mob was eventually dispersed by an armed security service unit, which shocked the Cubans with their heavy-handedness as they “proceeded to exercise extraordinary brutality against the crowd, including the children.”¹⁸⁹

A lengthy report prepared by the East German ambassador reveals how seriously the incident was taken. A series of high-profile meetings between the Cuban ambassador and North Korean officials followed, including one with Kim Il Sung, who vowed to punish all those involved. At one such meeting, Kim's deputy Ri Hyosŏn (purged in May 1967) reportedly told the Cuban ambassador that: “the leadership of the Party in the DPRK was at a very low level” and that “the cadre do not understand how to perform true political and ideological education,

¹⁸⁸ “Information about a Grave Incident with the Cuban Ambassador on 25 March 1965 in Pyongyang,” April 21, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, SAPMO-BA, Berlin, DY 30, IV A2/20/252. Translated for NKIDP by Bernd Schaefer. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111818>.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

they command the masses and work with instructions and orders. The level of training of the masses is extremely low. They cannot differentiate between friends and foes. They completely misinterpret our call for revolutionary vigilance.” Reading the report, one is unclear what the Cubans and East Germans found more distressing: the inexplicable behaviour of the mob, or the viciousness of the security officers who beat children with rifle butts. “Witnessing the brutality the security services used against adults and children brought the wife of the Cuban ambassador to the brink of a nervous breakdown”¹⁹⁰ the report ended.

The incident reminds us that behind the public displays of fraternal unity, conflicts, and misgivings of varying proportions inevitably surfaced in the relations between the two countries. Eduardo Murillo Ugarte, a Chilean communist who studied and worked in Pyongyang between 1960 and 1967, recalls how a minor scandal once arose when a Cuban man and a local North Korean woman attempted to get married. According to Murillo, the union was permitted “only after six months of talks between representatives of the Cuban Embassy in Pyongyang and the North Korean authorities.”¹⁹¹ This itself may have reflected the exceptionally strong state of Cuban-DPRK relations, as Murillo’s testimony joins many others in asserting that romantic relationships between North Korean and foreigners were strictly forbidden, albeit unofficially.

As disconcerting as such incidents must have been to Cuban leaders, it was not sufficient to slow the momentum of its growing alliance with North Korea. During the latter half of the 1960s, the bonds between the two leaderships, based on their commitment to militant internationalism and a mutual interest in safeguarding their sovereignty from the two major socialist powers, continued to strengthen. These developments correlated to a reconfiguration of

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Eduardo Murillo Ugarte, personal communication with the author, 4 April 2018.

North Korean foreign policy as it moved even further away from orthodox Marxism-Leninism to an increasingly militant and Third Worldist position. It is this next phase in North Korea's relations with Latin America that is the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter Two

Building the Anti-imperialist, Anti-US United Front, 1966-1970

The year 1966 was a pivotal juncture in the evolution of North Korean foreign policy. January began with the Tricontinental Conference in Havana, a key event of the radical Third Worldist tendency North Korea would align itself with for the remainder of the decade. In the following months Pyongyang publicly rebuked both the “right opportunism” of the Soviets and the “left opportunism” of the Communist Party of China (CPC), hosted the most high-profile Cuban delegation to date, and formalized its new foreign policy line at the KWP’s Second Party Conference in October. These events signaled that the new direction in North Korean policy discernible since late 1964 had fully crystallized, expressed in Kim Il Sung’s call for an “anti-imperialist, anti-US united front” and a closer alignment with Cuba and North Vietnam. The North Korean and Cuban leaderships found unity in the conviction that the defeat of US imperialism must be the central goal of the international communist movement, and that this could be achieved through a global campaign of guerilla struggle – “two, three, many Vietnams” in the famous words of Che Guevara. This perspective made both leaderships highly critical of both the Soviet doctrine of peaceful coexistence, and what was seen as China’s divisive sectarianism. This degree of political consensus was the basis for a new, informal bloc between North Korea, Cuba, and North Vietnam, which was willing to assert its independence of Moscow and Beijing, speak on behalf of the Third World, and pledged its commitment to backing armed struggle worldwide. Within this context political and economic cooperation between North Korea and Cuba reached new heights.

The Tricontinental Conference of 1966

During the first two weeks of January 1966, Havana was the site of the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America, better known as the Tricontinental Conference. Bringing together representatives of socialist and communist parties, armed revolutionary groups, and select governments from across the Global South, the Cuban press described it as the first time in history that “the delegates of the anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist militant organizations of the three continents meet” in order to “unify efforts towards the eradication of all forms of colonialism....”¹⁹² Attracting over six hundred attendees from eighty-two countries,¹⁹³ at that moment the Tricontinental Conference represented the high tide of the radical Third Worldist tendency that had emerged from the anti-colonial ferment of the post-war era.¹⁹⁴ A US Senate report described the conference as “the most powerful gathering of pro-Communist, anti-American forces in the history of the Western hemisphere.”¹⁹⁵ Lionel Soto,¹⁹⁶ of the Partido Comunista de Cuba (Communist Party of Cuba, PCC) Central Committee, saw the Tricontinental as the accumulation of centuries of resistance to European colonialism, which had forged a revolutionary unity between all peoples of the Global South.

¹⁹² “Antecedents and Objectives of the Movement of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America,” in *First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America* (Havana: General Secretariat of the OSPAAAL, 1966), 17.

¹⁹³ This consisted of 512 official delegates and 141 observers and guests.

¹⁹⁴ The Tricontinental Conference had roots in the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization (AAPSO), headquartered in Cairo, whose founding conference in December 1957 involved the efforts of the communist-dominated Asian Solidarity Committee (ASC), the World Peace Council, and Gamal Abdel Nasser. According to Lionel Soto, it was at the third AAPSO conference in Moshi, Tanganyika, February 1963, that a Cuban observer extended Fidel’s offer to host the First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America in Havana. Many of the African, Asian, and Middle Eastern delegates to the Tricontinental Conference were members of national AAPSO committees. Lionel Soto, “La 1 Conferencia Tricontinental,” *Cuba Socialista* 15, no. 58 (June 1966): 61-62.

¹⁹⁵ *The Tricontinental Conference of Africa, Asian and Latin American Peoples; a staff study, 89th Congress, 2nd session, Senate* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 1.

¹⁹⁶ Lionel Soto Prieto (1927-2008), historian, PSP militant, following the revolution he served as the National Director of the Schools for Revolutionary Instruction, and as the Cuban ambassador to the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, among other roles.

It has been the craving for liberty, for independence and sovereignty, the incessant search for their national destinies, that has historically united the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America, as an inevitable counterpart to foreign exploitation. Their mutual ignorance of each other's traditions, rich cultural legacies, heroes and sufferings matters not. A bond has united those three continents that are now emerging with devastating power, and constitute the social dynamite behind the grand transformations of the present.¹⁹⁷

Soto's words capture the Tricontinental's lofty vision that an ascendant Third World, united through a common experience of colonial oppression, had become the vanguard of world-historical change. It is quite remarkable who was brought together in the Habana Libre Hotel during those two weeks in January 1966: Salvador Allende, then representing the Partido Socialista (Socialist Party, PS) in the Chilean senate; Cheddi Jagan, the recently deposed premier of British Guiana, on the eve of the publication of *The West on Trial*; Floyd Britton, the famed revolutionary murdered in a Panamanian prison a few years later; Enrique Lister Forján, hero of the Spanish Civil War; Josephine Baker, the American entertainer and partisan of the French resistance; Luis Turcios Lima, the Guatemalan guerilla commander who would be killed in a mysterious car accident before the year's end;¹⁹⁸ the English red sailor and writer Jack Woodis; the acclaimed Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa. It was at this gathering that the Guinean revolutionary Amílcar Cabral delivered what would become a foundational text of anti-colonial praxis, "The Weapon of Theory," in which he famously urged the African intellectuals of the national liberation movements to "commit class suicide." Fidel, in his closing remarks on the final day of the conference, told his assembled guests that although they represented an array of ideological positions, they all shared "the most important factor that today unites the peoples of these three continents and the world: the fight against colonialism and neo-colonialism, against

¹⁹⁷ Lionel Soto, "La 1 Conferencia Tricontinental," *Cuba Socialista*, 15, no. 58 (June 1966): 57.

¹⁹⁸ Luis Turcios Lima was killed on 2 October 1966, when the car he was driving burst into flame. The exact cause of the explosion has been the source of some debate.

racism, and finally, against all those phenomena which are the contemporary expression of what we call imperialism, having its centre, principal axis and principal support in Yankee imperialism.”¹⁹⁹

North Korea was amongst the eighty-two countries represented at the conference, in what was a key moment in its growing engagement with Latin America. It was represented by a nine-person delegation headed by Kim Wŏlpyŏng, a member of the KWP Central Committee. Kim addressed the conference with what would be the central message of his party to the international left throughout the Cold War: all their goals and aspirations – independence and sovereignty, economic development and peace, a socialist alternative to capitalism – were not possible without first defeating US imperialism. It was a message echoed throughout the conference by the Cuban hosts and other delegates from around the world, demonstrating the way in which North Korean foreign policy thinking had grown sharply in tune with the then contemporary current of radical Third Worldism. In fact, the conference proclamations seemed to borrow from a trademark rhetorical convention of Kim Il Sung. While the North Korean leader frequently referred to US imperialism as “the heinous enemy of humanity” (illyuŭi hyungak'an wŏnssu), a phrase often buttressed with a string of equally unflattering descriptors, the Tricontinental resolution called US imperialism “the implacable enemy of all people’s of the world.”²⁰⁰ Listening to the North Korean presentation were representatives of several Latin American guerilla groups who, during the 1960s, sought Pyongyang’s assistance in their respective revolutionary projects, including Guatemala’s Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (Rebel Armed Forces,

¹⁹⁹ Fidel Castro, “Speech Delivered by Major Fidel Castro Ruiz, Prime Minister of the Revolutionary Government and First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba, in the Closing Session,” (16 January 1966), in *First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America* (Havana: General Secretariat of the OSPAAAL, 1966), 165.

²⁰⁰ *The Tricontinental Conference of Africa, Asian and Latin American Peoples*, 15.

FAR), the Dominican Republic's Movimiento Revolucionario 14 de Junio (June 14 Revolutionary Movement, 1J4), Peru's Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Left Movement, MIR) and Venezuela's Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (Armed Forces of National Liberation, FALN).

While the ongoing war in Vietnam was certainly front and centre at the Tricontinental, the event was also a major foreign policy success for Pyongyang in terms of its desire to draw international attention to the situation on the Korean peninsula and to build support for its demand for the withdrawal of US troops. "Antecedents and Objectives of the Movement of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America," was the primary document produced by the conference. It analyzed the international situation facing the world at the time within the long history of anti-colonial struggle, dwelling extensively on Korea. In doing so it condemned the US imperialists who "continue to occupy the southern half of Korea, have turned it into a nuclear rocket base and are constantly carrying out war provocations along the military demarcation line in violation of the Armistice Agreement."²⁰¹ It argued that the US Navy's Seventh Fleet was an instrument of nuclear blackmail in Asia, and that the recently established Japan-South Korea Treaty²⁰² was "blatantly opening a road towards the re-invasion and the overseas expansion into South Korea of Japanese militarism."²⁰³ The conference's "Sub-Commission on Burning Issues" produced a resolution on Korea which formalized such critiques, demanding "the immediate withdrawal from South Korea of US troops which are the fundamental cause of all the misfortunes of the South Korean people and the main obstacle to

²⁰¹ "Antecedents and Objectives of the Movement of Solidarity," 9.

²⁰² The Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea, signed 22 June 1965.

²⁰³ "Antecedents and Objectives of the Movement of Solidarity," 9.

Korea's unification..."²⁰⁴ The resolution further declared 25 June to 27 July of each year the international "Month of Solidarity with the Korean People,"²⁰⁵ in which all progressive forces were called upon to "organize and display [...] large movements and actions in support of the just struggle of the Korean people."²⁰⁶ Although Korea was not a major theme of Fidel's speech at the conference, he took time to condemn the presence of South Korean troops in Vietnam, using it to illustrate the point that the struggle was not merely against US imperialism, but also Washington's allies in the Global South.²⁰⁷

The role of the Soviet Union and China in the Tricontinental has been the source of much confusion, principally due to the various contradictory reports appearing internationally at the time. Many US commentators claimed that Moscow enthusiastically endorsed the conference's message of armed struggle, proving that "peaceful coexistence" was nothing but a cynical ploy.²⁰⁸ The Chinese leadership and its allies abroad, by contrast, accused the Soviets of attempting to impose peaceful coexistence on the conference.²⁰⁹ The Argentine Marxist Adolfo Gilly, in a somewhat bizarre editorial for *Monthly Review* in April 1966, claimed that at the conference Fidel abandoned armed struggle and now supported "the pact between *yanqui* imperialism and the Soviet leadership."²¹⁰ Because many equated armed struggle with Maoism,

²⁰⁴ "Resolution on Korea," in *First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America* (Havana: General Secretariat of the OSPAAAL, 1966), 111.

²⁰⁵ In fact, a less ambitious annual "Week of Solidarity with the Korean People" from 25 June to 1 July was originally called for at the AAPSO executive committee meeting in Bandung in April 1961. From 1966 onwards Pyongyang would encourage all its allies to celebrate the month of solidarity proposed at the Tricontinental, which in North Korea is called "Month of Joint Anti-US Struggle." The date corresponds to the outbreak of the Korean war (25 June 1950) to the signing of the Armistice (27 July 1953).

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Fidel Castro, "Speech Delivered by Major Fidel Castro Ruiz," 167.

²⁰⁸ See the aforementioned US Senate Report, *The Tricontinental Conference of Africa, Asian and Latin American Peoples*.

²⁰⁹ "French Communist Journal Sums Up Tricontinental Conference Results: Many Delegates Identified," translation of an article by Albert-Paul Lentin for *Démocratie Nouvelle* (Paris), no. 1 (January 1966), reproduced in the Readex collection *Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS) Reports, 1957-1995*, 16-19.

²¹⁰ Adolfo Gilly, "A Conference Without Glory and Without a Program," *Monthly Review* 17, no.11 (April 1966): 21.

some outside observers, like the US Senate subcommittee, claimed that “on the ideological plane, the Maoist philosophy scored a series of smashing triumphs.”²¹¹

In fact, the Tricontinental was a political victory for neither Moscow nor Beijing, both of whom were de-centered from its vision of global revolutionary struggle. While the conference resolution paid lip-service to peaceful coexistence for the sake of unity with the pro-Soviet communist parties, it was framed as an aspiration rather than a policy. It was drowned out by the dominant theme of revolutionary violence, and did not prevent Cuban commentary on the conference from condemning the Soviet doctrine as an “ideological deviation” perpetuated by “reformist, defeatist, status quo elements.”²¹² On the other hand, the Cuban government barred the six major pro-Chinese communist parties in Latin America from sending delegates or even observers to Havana.²¹³ The CPC’s participation in the conference was overshadowed by its on-going war of words with Fidel. Shortly before the gathering Fidel lambasted Beijing for reducing its rice supply to the island just as the US was tightening its sanctions.²¹⁴ Coming at the height of Cuba’s prestige within the international left, the Chinese delegation bore the image of the big country bullying the small island on the frontlines of the anti-imperialist struggle.

The conference gave birth to the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL), headquartered in Havana, which was to carry on the work of promoting armed struggle and militant internationalism. A meeting in Havana the following May formalized a twelve-member Executive Secretariat presided over by Cuba, and produced the organization’s General Declaration. North Korea was granted a seat alongside

²¹¹ *The Tricontinental Conference of Africa, Asian and Latin American Peoples*, 38.

²¹² Lionel Soto, “La 1 Conferencia Tricontinental,” 69.

²¹³ “The Sino-Soviet split within the Communist Movement in Latin America,” CIA Intelligence Report, ESAU XXVIII (15 June 1967) 161, fn, available at <https://archive.org/details/ESAU-CIA/page/n1>.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

Syria, the United Arab Republic, Guinea, and the National Liberation front of Vietnam. The seven remaining seats were held by left-wing opposition parties and guerilla movements representing the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Chile, Puerto Rico, Pakistan, the Congo (Léopoldville), and Africa's Portuguese colonies.²¹⁵ The first issue of OSPAAAL's monthly organ, *Boletín Tricontinental*, was published the same month, and came to play a key role in building North Korea's prestige amongst the international left during the later half of the 1960s. *Boletín Tricontinental*, with its famous colour posters, was published in Spanish, English, and French, and distributed internationally. It reached an audience of young people in Latin America, Europe, and North America in a way that *Moscow News* or the *Peking Review* never matched. Informing readers about armed struggles and the crimes of US imperialism around the world, practical texts on military strategy and interviews with guerilla commanders on the frontlines appeared alongside essays and speeches of Fidel, Che, Kim Il Sung, and Ho Chi Minh. KWP material condemning the Park Chung Hee government, demanding the withdrawal of US troops from South Korea, and extolling North Korea as a model for national liberation movements, were a regular feature. For example, its August 1968 issue carried an editorial entitled, "No force is capable of bending the will of the Korean people," which claimed

...the Korean people - following the brilliant tradition of the glorious anti-Japanese armed struggle – in a heroic battle waged under the outstanding leadership of the Marshal Kim Il Sung, vanquished the US imperialists, defended the freedom of the homeland and the achievements of the Revolution and have contributed to the anti-imperialist struggle for national liberation of all the peoples and as well as the struggle for peace in Asia and the world.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ "General Declaration of the Executive Secretary of the OSPAAAL," *Tricontinental Bulletin* (Havana) no. 3 (June 1966), 12.

²¹⁶ "No force is capable of bending the will of the Korean people," *Tricontinental Bulletin* (Havana) no. 29 (August 1968): 43.

In addition to its monthly bulletin, OSPAAAL also published books in various languages, including collections of Kim's writings and speeches. OSPAAAL's influence was augmented by its radio programs, *Esta Marcha de Gigantes* (This March of Giants) and *Noticiero Tricontinental* (Tricontinental Newscast), broadcast in three languages in the Americas, Europe, and the Mediterranean.

The Tricontinental Conference and the creation of OSPAAAL had a noticeable impact on the KWP leadership. For several years to come, Kim would celebrate the event as a turning point in the world revolutionary struggle: "The aims and ideals this organization pursues have aroused the sympathy of hundreds of millions of Asian, African and Latin American people and are exerting a profound influence on the course of the great changes taking place in the world today," Kim declared.²¹⁷ Many of the central themes of the conference remained pillars of North Korea's foreign policy statements for the remainder of the decade: the necessity of armed struggle; Vietnam as the most crucial battlefield of the anti-imperialist cause; the ongoing shift from traditional colonialism to neo-colonialism; the demand that the Soviet Union and China put aside their differences and lend their full support to national liberation struggles; Venezuela, Peru, Colombia, Bolivia, and Guatemala as the countries best posed to further the Latin American revolution begun by Cuba; and most importantly, the central importance of defeating US imperialism.

North Korea's new fiercely independent, Third Worldist line was formalized at the KWP's Second Party Conference in October 1966, the first one held since 1958. Its main themes were the priority of defeating US imperialism, the importance of the national liberation struggles

²¹⁷ Kim Il Sung, *Let us Intensify the Anti-Imperialist, Anti-US Struggle* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1968), 1.

of the Global South, and the “sacred internationalist duty” to support Vietnam and Cuba. A content analysis of the portion of Kim’s speech devoted to “the international situation and some problems of the international communist movement”²¹⁸ is revealing. Kim mentions Vietnam eighty-six times, and Cuba twenty times. By comparison, the Soviet Union and China are each mentioned just twice. Kim refers to the Communist Party of Cuba nine times, the Workers Party of Vietnam three times, and the Japanese Communist Party once, without a single mention of any other party.

Kim’s speech to the Second Party Conference was also a bold effort to redefine the inter-party and inter-state relations of the communist movement. Kim responded to criticism from the Chinese and Albanian parties that the KWP avoided taking sides in the Sino-Soviet split: “They say we are taking ‘the road of unprincipled compromise’ and ‘straddling two chairs.’ This is nonsense. We have our own chair.”²¹⁹ In fact, Kim declared that the entire concept of international leadership in the communist movement was outdated:

Times have changed, and the days when the communist movement needed an international centre are gone. There has been no “centre” or “hub” of the international communist movement since the dissolution of the Third International [in 1943]. Therefore the “hub” of the revolution cannot shift from one country to another. Moreover, no country can become the “hub of the world revolution,” nor can any party become the “leading party” of the international communist movement.”²²⁰

Kim recalled the KWP’s “bitter experience of interference by great power chauvinists in its internal affairs”²²¹ and alluded to “incessant violations of the norms of mutual relations between fraternal parties.”²²² With the latter statement, Kim used language identical to what

²¹⁸ Kim Il Sung, “Hyŏn chŏngsewa uri tangŭi kwaŏp” [The Present Situation and the Tasks of Our Party], 5 October 1966, in Kim Il Sung, *Chŏnjip*, vol. 37 (Pyongyang: Korean Workers’ Party Publishing House, 2001), 231`.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 263.

²²⁰ Ibid., 260.

²²¹ Ibid., 262.

²²² Ibid.

Fidel had used when he criticized the Chinese leadership the previous February.²²³ Reminding his audience that the KWP had rejected the great power chauvinists and would do so again, Kim proclaimed the principles of “complete equality, independence [chajusǒng], mutual respect, non-interference, and comradely cooperation” as the basis for relations between parties.²²⁴ Moreover, every party should develop its own, independent interpretation of Marxism-Leninism in accordance with national conditions.²²⁵

The North Korean leadership’s revised foreign policy stance declared that support for the Vietnamese struggle was the crucial litmus test of political integrity, and called on all socialist countries to send volunteers to Vietnam. “The attitude towards the Vietnamese question is a touchstone that distinguishes the revolutionary position from the opportunistic position, and proletarian internationalism from national egoism.”²²⁶ Beginning in 1966, North Korean foreign policy statements frequently included attacks on the “right opportunism” of the Soviets and the “left opportunism” of the Chinese, although rarely mentioning either offenders by name:

It is wrong to shun the struggle against imperialism, alleging that independence is good and revolution is also good, but peace is more precious. Is it not quite true that the line of seeking unprincipled compromise with imperialism only encourages its aggressive actions and increases the danger of war? Peace secured by slavish submission is not peace. Genuine peace will not come unless a struggle is waged against the breakers of peace, unless the slave’s peace is rejected and rule of the oppressor is overthrown. We are opposed to the line of compromise with imperialism. At the same time, we cannot tolerate the practice of only shouting against imperialism, but, in actual deed, being afraid of fighting against imperialism. The latter is a line of compromise in an inverted form. Both have nothing to do with the genuine anti-imperialist struggle and will only be helpful to the imperialist policy of aggression and war.”²²⁷

²²³ “The Sino-Soviet split within the Communist Movement in Latin America,” 27-28.

²²⁴ Kim Il Sung, “Hyǒn chǒngsewa uri tangŭi kwaǒp,” 259.

²²⁵ Ibid., 261.

²²⁶ Ibid., 239-240.

²²⁷ Kim Il Sung, “Let us Intensify the Anti-Imperialist, Anti-US Struggle,” 4.

Having rejected both the Soviet doctrine of peaceful coexistence and China's anti-revisionist crusade, Kim proposed what he called the "anti-imperialist, anti-US united front." This project remained the KWP's central rallying call during the latter half of the 1960s. Kim declared that "The basic strategy of the world revolution today is turning the main blow to American imperialism," and this required the broadest possible coalition of forces opposed to US global hegemony.²²⁸ In contrast to Kim's traditional emphasis on Marxist-Leninist leadership, he now argued that

The Asian, African and Latin-American countries have differing social systems, and there are many parties with different political views in those countries. But all those countries and their parties except the stooges of imperialism, have common interests in opposing the imperialist forces of aggression headed by U.S. imperialism. The difference in social systems and political ideals should never be an obstacle the joint struggle and concerted action against US imperialism. No one must be allowed to split the anti-US united front and refuse joint action, attaching the first importance to his own specific national or partisan interests."²²⁹

Kim argued that Washington's global counter-revolutionary strategy was to concentrate massive military resources in particular insurgent flashpoints, thereby overwhelming local revolutionary forces that would otherwise sweep away their domestic enemies. But if armed revolutionary movements continued to proliferate across the Global South, threatening US assets and the security of Washington-allied governments, US military forces could be stretched progressively thinner, preventing them from concentrating in any single area. "It will be helpful if the peoples of the revolutionary countries all over the world sever one arm, one leg, or one ear, one tooth of the American imperialists, or even pinch them or pluck out their hair" Kim declared. "They say that the power of the American imperialists is strong, but they can be well trounced if

²²⁸ Kim Il Sung quoted in Ko Hun-il, "Imperialism is a castle built on air," *Kulloja* no. 6 (June 30 1968) reprinted in *Translations on North Korea*, no. 92 (30 June 1968): 98-109, here 108.

²²⁹ Kim Il Sung, "Let us Intensify the Anti-Imperialist, Anti-US Struggle," 7.

we jump on them and strike them one by one.”²³⁰ It was a strategy that the North Koreans themselves identified as synonymous with Che Guevara’s famous call for “two, three, many Vietnams.” Interviewed by the Cuban press in November 1967, Ch'oe Yonggŏn, president of the Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly, remarked: “Che Guevara’s idea to create one, two, three, many Vietnams is a revolutionary idea. The more countries that rise up to struggle against Yankee imperialism in the world, like Vietnam, so much the better, and it will accelerate the development of the world revolution.”²³¹ Kim Il Sung summarized the concept of the anti-imperialist, anti-US united front in this way:

The peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America have common interests and have a relationship of mutual support in their anti-imperialist, anti-US struggle. When Africa and Latin America are not free, Asia cannot be free; when the US imperialists are driven out of Asia, it will benefit the liberation struggle of the African and Latin American peoples. Victory on one front over US imperialism will sap its strength that much, facilitating victory on other fronts. In whatever part of the world US imperialist forces of aggression may be wiped out, it will be a very good thing for all peoples of the world. It is necessary, therefore, to form the broadest possible anti-US united front to isolate US imperialism thoroughly, and administer blows to it by united efforts wherever US imperialism is engaged in aggression. Only by so doing, is it possible to disperse and weaken the force of US imperialism to the last degree and lead the people on every front to beat US imperialism with an overwhelming power.”²³²

It is important to note that the KWP used the term imperialism both in its traditional meaning of aggressive state expansionism, and in the sense of Lenin’s concept of imperialism as a *system*, representing the final phase of global capitalism. On one hand, the anti-imperialist, anti-US united front was intended to stretch thin, wear down, and drive out US military forces from the Global South. On the other hand, however, it was also articulated as a broader process

²³⁰ Ko Hun-il, “Imperialism is a castle built on air,” 108.

²³¹ *Visita a Cuba de la delegación Coreana* (Habana: Ediciones Politicos, 1968), 110.

²³² Kim Il Sung, “Let us Intensify the Anti-Imperialist, Anti-US Struggle,” 5.

that would ultimately bring about the collapse of imperialism as a system, as Third World revolutions would cut the flow of wealth from the periphery to the metropole. As Kim explained:

Asia, Africa and Latin America hold seventy-one percent of the land surface on the globe. There live more than two-thirds of the world population and [*sic*] are inexhaustible natural wealth there. Imperialism has grown and fattened by grinding down those peoples and robbing them of their riches. Even today imperialism is squeezing tens of billions of dollars in profits from these areas every year. When Asia, Africa and Latin America are completely cleared of old and new colonialism, there will be no more imperialist Western Europe nor imperialist North America.”²³³

Having pioneered this new direction for the KWP at the Second Party Conference of October 1966, Kim also moved to eliminate any potential opposition and solidify his hold over the party through a purge of the leadership. Dissent within the Central Committee had been brewing, centered around Pak Kŭmch'ŏl, a top-ranked party leader and widely seen as Kim's future successor. Pak and others were critical of the growing extravagance of Kim's personality cult, the enormous emphasis placed on military spending at the expense of raising living standards, and evident nepotism within the party hierarchy – particularly the ascension of Kim's younger brother, Kim Yŏngju, despite his lack of credentials. In the five months following the Second Party Conference, Kim and his supporters moved to eliminate this potential threat. The so-called Gapsan faction²³⁴ of the Central Committee were condemned at the Fifteenth Plenum in May 1967, putting an end to the last major challenge to Kim's authority within the party.²³⁵

²³³ Ibid., 2.

²³⁴ The Gapsan faction were called so because they were former members of the Gapsan Operations Committee, a clandestine organization that provided intelligence and support to the anti-Japanese partisans during the 1930s.

²³⁵ James F. Person, *Solidarity and Self-Reliance: The Antinomies of North Korean Foreign Policy and Juche Thought, 1953-1967* (PhD diss., George Washington University, 2001), 214-229; “The 1967 Purge of the Gapsan Faction and Establishment of the Monolithic Ideological System,” *NKIDP e-Dossier* no. 15, available at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-1967-purge-the-gapsan-faction-and-establishment-the-monolithic-ideological-system>.

While the Soviets were pleased that Kim's speech to the KWP's Second Conference signaled the end of its close collaboration with China, reservations remained. The Hungarian embassy in Moscow reported there were "several questions in which the Soviet standpoint differs from the Korean one."²³⁶ Moreover, the Soviets disapproved of "the tone of Kim Il Sung who, by emphasizing the independence and uniqueness of the Korean party, actually wants to say that in the entire international working-class movement, it is solely the Korean party that follows a right Marxist-Leninist road, whereas the other parties make one mistake after the other."²³⁷

By contrast, Kim's speech at the Second Party Conference was received with overwhelming enthusiasm in Havana. On 6 October Cubans awoke to Kim's face on the front page of *Granma*, under the headline: "Kim Il Sung: Yankee imperialism must be given blows in Asia, Africa and Latin America, so that its forces will be dispersed to the maximum."²³⁸ The front page also showcased a list of positions attributed to Kim in summarized point form, including "The Cuban Revolution is the continuation of the Great October Revolution in Latin America," "It is incorrect to only scream against North American imperialism in place of taking specific actions to stop its aggression" (a reference to the Chinese leadership), and "The socialist countries must send volunteers to Vietnam." Kim's speech at the conference was then treated to a full inside page, as it was twice more in the days that followed.²³⁹

²³⁶ "Report, Embassy of Hungary in the Soviet Union to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry," October 20, 1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1966, 74. doboz, IV250, 005007/1966. Translated for NKIDP by Balázs Szalontai. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116646>

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ "Kim Il Sung: Deben Darse Golpes en Asia, África y América Latina a los Imperialistas Yanquis, para sus Fuerzas se Dispersen al Máximo," *Granma* (Havana), 6 October 1966.

²³⁹ "Los Partidos Comunistas no Deben Seguir Ciegamente a Nadie y Mantener su Independencia" *Granma* (Havana), 8 October 1966; "Exhorta Corea a los Países Socialistas a Golpear a E.U. para Destrozar su Agresión," *Granma* (Havana), 13 October 1966.

North Korea backed up its call for a global offensive against imperialism with military action of its own. The same month of the Second Party Conference in October 1966, guerilla-style operations across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) began to proliferate rapidly, with US intelligence reporting seven “small-scale but deliberated attempts to kill or capture ROK or US personnel” in the proceeding twelve months, and several hundred lesser incidents.²⁴⁰ In September 1967, two South Koreans trains were the targets of North Korean sabotage operations.²⁴¹ This was followed four months latter with the attack on the Blue House, when a North Korean commando team carried out a daring but unsuccessful assassination attempt of South Korean President Park Chung Hee. Two days later, the Korean People’s Army (KPA) attacked and captured the USS Pueblo, an American spy ship it claimed had entered its territorial waters. In October 1968, 120 members of the KPA’s 124th Division landed on the east coast of South Korea in Kyöngsang-buk and Kangwön provinces, in an unsuccessful plan to organize a guerilla insurgency. In April 1969, North Korea downed a US Navy EC-121M Warning Star reconnaissance plane over the Sea of Japan, killing all thirty-one Americans on board. The USS Pueblo and EC-121 incidents were widely celebrated in the North Korean press, which compared them to other international events allegedly proving the rapidly declining power of the United States. While the US had “suffered defeat after defeat” in Vietnam, and was “receiving severe blows also from the tenacious struggle of the heroic Cuban people,” the capture of the USS

²⁴⁰ “North Korean Intentions and Capabilities With Respect to South Korea,” US Special National Intelligence Estimate no. 14.2-67, 21 (September 1967), available at https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0001218147.pdf.

²⁴¹ Balázs Szalontai, “In the Shadow of Vietnam: A New Look at North Korea's Militant Strategy, 1962–1970,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 14, no. 4 (2012): 144.

Pueblo and the downing of the EC-121 spy plane had “once again dealt a blow to the American imperialist aggressors, and drove them deeper into the abyss.”²⁴²

The Korea-Cuba-Vietnam bloc

The steady deterioration of Sino-Cuban relations that began in late 1964 continued unabated in the second half of the 1960s. The tension surrounding the Tricontinental conference was followed by several harsh statements from Fidel during February and March of 1966, in which he accused China of “flagrant violation of the elementary norms of behaviour between socialist states.”²⁴³ *Renmin Ribao* responded with what were by then familiar accusations that Cuban leaders had become revisionists and the subservient pawns of Moscow.²⁴⁴ By the summer of 1967 all Chinese students and technicians had left the island, while Chinese embassy staff were reduced from sixty to twelve.²⁴⁵

The breakdown in Sino-Cuban relations did not, in fact, mean that Cuba now bowed before the CPSU, as Chinese leaders claimed. Cuban leaders were incensed that its Soviet allies signed trade agreements and offered economic assistance to the same Latin American governments it vowed to help overthrow. Nor was Moscow supportive of the Cuban government’s efforts to back guerilla movements throughout the region, a strategy it saw as adventurist and in conflict with the policy of peaceful coexistence. During 1967 Fidel openly

²⁴² Pak Yong-sok, “American imperialism is doomed,” *Kulloja*, no. 5 (January 1970), translated and reprinted in *Translations on North Korea* no. 150 (17 March 1970): 95.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁴⁵ “The Sino-Soviet split within the Communist Movement in Latin America,” 29-30.

criticized Moscow in harsh terms, condemning the leaders of many Latin American communist parties as bureaucrats and “pseudo-revolutionaries.”²⁴⁶

Cuba’s efforts to steer the Latin American left in a direction independent of both Moscow and Beijing culminated in the first conference of the Organización Latinoamericana de Solidaridad (Latin American Solidarity Organization, OLAS) in July-August 1967 in Havana. The OLAS was founded at the Tricontinental Conference the previous year by Latin America and Caribbean delegates, with a mission to “coordinate and stimulate the people’s struggle” in the region.²⁴⁷ Its first conference was attended by 163 delegates from twenty-seven Latin American and Caribbean countries, and one from the United States – the famous Trinidadian-American Black Power leader, Stokely Carmichael. A North Korean delegation was given observer status along with ten other socialist countries.²⁴⁸ Reflecting the divisions now prevailing in the Latin American communist movement, the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) was not invited, those of Brazil and Argentina boycotted the gathering, as did the region’s pro-Chinese and Trotskyist parties.²⁴⁹ In his address, Fidel castigated Soviet foreign policy towards Latin America. Claiming that “some socialist countries” had offered Colombia financial loans, Fidel remarked:

How can this be? This is absurd! Dollar loans to an oligarchic government that is repressing the guerrillas, that is persecuting and assassinating guerrillas! And the war is waged, among other things, with money; because the oligarchs have nothing else to wage war with except money with which to pay mercenary soldiers.

And such things seem absurd to us. And everything that involves financial and technical aid to any of those countries that are repressing the revolutionary movement, countries that are accomplices in the imperialist blockade against Cuba, we condemn [...] if

²⁴⁶ Roberto F. Lamberg, “La formación de la línea castrista desde la Conferencia Tricontinental,” *Foro Internacional*, 8, no. 3 (31) (Jan-Mar 1968): 278-270.

²⁴⁷ “Creation of the O.L.A.S.,” *Tricontinental Bulletin* (Havana) no. 1 (April 1966), 8-9.

²⁴⁸ *Primera Conferencia de la Organización Latinoamericana de Solidaridad* (Montevideo: Nativa Libros, 1967), 145.

²⁴⁹ K.S. Karol, *Guerillas in Power*, translated by Arnold Pomerans (New York: Hill & Wang, 1970), 378, fn 63.

internationalism exists, if solidarity is a word worthy of being uttered, the least that we can expect of any State of the socialist camp is that it will not lend financial nor technical aid to those governments.²⁵⁰

North Korea's own relationship with Beijing and Moscow followed in parallel. In May 1966 the KWP sent a letter to the Chōsen Sōren, the pro-DPRK Korean citizens organization in Japan, accusing the Chinese leadership of a host of offenses. These included dividing the anti-imperialist struggle, failing to adequately support Vietnam, bullying the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), falsely accusing Cuba of revisionism, and arrogantly assuming a leadership role in Latin America. During 1966, reports emerged that KWP members of Chinese ancestry were being purged from the party.²⁵¹ North Korea also recalled officers studying in Chinese military colleges, ended cultural exchanges between the two countries, and severely restricted the availability of news from China.²⁵²

While Sino-DPRK estrangement had begun in late 1964, it was cemented by the advent of the Cultural Revolution. A March 1967 report from the Soviet embassy in Pyongyang remarked that "leaders of the KWP speak of the so-called 'Great Cultural Revolution' as a 'great madness [*obaldenie*]', having nothing in common with either culture or a revolution."²⁵³ The extreme iconoclasm and anti-intellectualism of Mao's campaign clashed fundamentally with

²⁵⁰ Fidel Castro, "Discurso en la Clausura de la Primera Conferencia Organización Latinoamericana de Solidaridad (OLAS)," 10 August 1967, in *Primera Conferencia Organización Latinoamericana de Solidaridad* (Montevideo: Nativa Libros, 1967), 181-182.

²⁵¹ "Information on the Korean Workers' Party," October, 1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AQPPSH, MPP Korese, D 10, V. 1966. Translated by Enkel Daljani <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114405>.

²⁵² "Excerpts from a 30 December 1966 Memo of the Soviet Embassy to the DPRK (A. Borunkov) about Embassy Measures against Chinese Anti-Soviet Propaganda in the DPRK," December 30, 1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF, f. 0102, op. 22, p. 109, d. 22, pp. 50-56. Obtained by Sergey Radchenko and translated by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116692>.

²⁵³ "First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in North Korea, 'Korean-Chinese Relations in the Second Half of 1968,'" January 06, 1969, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, RGANI, fond 5, opis 61, delo 466, listy 1-14. Obtained by Sergey Radchenko and translated by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134218>.

KWP ideology, which embraced cultural traditionalism and upheld a central role for intellectuals in society.²⁵⁴ Moreover, in early 1967 Red Guards began attacking Kim Il Sung, painting him as a revisionist and a millionaire who lived like the emperors of old while the living standards of ordinary North Koreans lagged behind.²⁵⁵ At the beginning of 1969, the Soviet embassy in Pyongyang reported that trade between the two countries had sharply declined and that Beijing was obstructing North Korean aid shipments to Vietnam.²⁵⁶ Moreover, Soviet diplomats believed that the North Korean leadership genuinely feared “the possibility of direct subversive actions and provocations by the Chinese.”²⁵⁷ They quoted Kim as saying: “Mao Zedong hates us, the Chinese are malicious, and one can expect anything from them.”²⁵⁸ Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia claim that, in the same period, ethnic Koreans in China faced severe persecution. Some ten thousand residents of Yanbian, for example, were arrested on accusations of spying for North Korea between 1967 and 1970.²⁵⁹ In November 1968, the CIA correctly assessed that Kim Il Sung was “developing a moral alliance with Castro based on a common anti-Mao grievance and a common desire to ‘push’ the international revolution.”²⁶⁰

If these developments gave Moscow diplomats hope that North Korea was returning to the fold, such sentiments were quickly dispelled. In 1967 Kim declined a Soviet request to

²⁵⁴ “First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in North Korean Reports on Sino-Korean Relations in 1966,” December 02, 1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF, f. 0102, op. 22, p. 109, d. 22, pp. 38-49. Obtained by Sergey Radchenko and translated by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114591>.

²⁵⁵ Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong, Kim Il-Sung, and Sino-North Korean Relations, 1949-1976* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 182-185.

²⁵⁶ While North Korean shipments to North Vietnam which passed through Chinese territory were obstructed, there is debate as to whether or not this was an intentional move by the Chinese leadership, or whether it was simply a symptom of the administrative dysfunction of the Cultural Revolution era.

²⁵⁷ “First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in North Korea, ‘Korean-Chinese Relations in the Second Half of 1968’.”

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Shen and Xia, *A Misunderstood Friendship*, 184.

²⁶⁰ “Kim Il-Sung’s New Military Adventurism,” CIA Intelligence Report, ESAU XLI (26 November 1968), 9, available at <https://archive.org/details/ESAU-CIA/page/n1>.

contribute an article to *Pravda* for the upcoming anniversary of the October Revolution. Instead he authored an article for *Boletín Tricontinental*, the OSPAAAL journal.²⁶¹ “Let Us Intensify the Anti-Imperialist, Anti-US Struggle,” published in August of that year, put forth “a special standpoint that is opposed to [the position of] the majority of the parties of the international Communist movement.”²⁶² Kim’s essay summarized his concept of the anti-imperialist, anti-US united front, and served as the definitive North Korean statement on international affairs for the latter half of the 1960s. Kim placed the Korean people alongside the colonized nations of the Global South resisting Western colonialism: “The supreme task of the Korean people at this time is to liquidate the colonial system of US imperialism in south Korea, accomplish the national-liberation revolution and reunite the country.”²⁶³ Kim’s choice of *Boletín Tricontinental* over *Pravda* was a strong message to Moscow and Beijing as to where his political loyalties lay: OSPAAAL had become the flagship publication of the Third Worldist left tendency that openly flouted Soviet and Chinese authority. It was the platform for Che Guevara’s final message before his death in Bolivia, one which took both Moscow and Beijing to task:

North American imperialism is guilty of aggression; its crimes are immense and cover the whole world. We already know that, gentlemen! But also guilty are those who, when the time came for a resolution, vacillated in making Vietnam an inviolable part of the socialist camp, running, yes, the risks of a war on a global scale, but also forcing a decision upon the North American imperialists. And guilty are those who maintain a war of insults and snares started a good time ago by the representatives of the two greatest powers of the socialist camp.²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ “Report, Embassy of Hungary in the Soviet Union to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry,” November 25, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1967, 61. doboz, 5, 002126/3/1967. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Balazs Szalontai <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110624>

²⁶² “Report, Embassy of Hungary in the Soviet Union to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry,” November 25, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1967, 61. doboz, 5, 002126/3/1967. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Balazs Szalontai <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110624>.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ernesto Che Guevara, “Crear dos, tres, muchos Vietnam, es la consigna. Mensaje a la Tricontinental,” (April 1967), reprinted in Maria del Carmen Ariet (ed) *Lecturas para la reflexión 4: Solidaridad e Internacionalismo* (Habana: Centro de Estudios de Che Guevara, 2014).

By 1966 it had become clear that North Korea, Cuba, and North Vietnam shared fundamental interests that brought them together to constitute a new informal bloc within the international communist movement. All three had originally sympathized with or supported Beijing's anti-revisionist stance, but as circumstances changed had grown highly critical of it. They welcomed what they saw as positive developments in Soviet policy under Brezhnev, but remained wary of Soviet intentions and opposed to the doctrine of peaceful coexistence. As the three representatives of the Third World within the socialist camp, they wanted Moscow and Beijing to put aside their differences, step up their support for national liberation movements, and increase economic aid to poor countries attempting to break from neo-colonialism. They also resented the "great power chauvinism" of the two major socialist powers and sought a *modus vivendi* in which they could benefit from their much-needed economic and military aid without compromising their own sovereignty. For all three, the United States represented an ever-present military threat and the central obstacle to their national aspirations. In this, their destinies were intertwined: a US victory on any one front would free up economic and military resources to be deployed elsewhere. The opposite was also true. As Ch'oe Yonggŏn told a Cuban audience in November 1967: "The victory of the Cuban people constitutes precisely that of the Korean people, and if the US imperialist invaders are expelled from south Korea, so much more will the forces of Yankee imperialism be weakened, and will create a favorable phase for the Cuban Revolution and the acceleration of its triumph."²⁶⁵ This common predicament, and this common enemy, united the North Korean, Cuban, and North Vietnamese leaderships in the position that the struggle against US imperialism must take front and centre in the international communist movement. As a Polish journalist frequenting Havana during the 1960s, K.S. Karol, reflected:

²⁶⁵ *Visita a Cuba de la delegación Coreana*, 56.

“The history and political attitudes of each of these three countries were so different that it was difficult to lump them together under the label of the Third Communist Front. Their courageous stand had nonetheless earned them the allegiance of a broad spectrum of the revolutionary Left that was unwilling to follow blindly in the footsteps of either Peking or Moscow.”²⁶⁶ Karol argued that these parties’ bold willingness to criticize the two major socialist powers was tolerated because

these victims of American aggression gained so much moral prestige that the official leaders of the two Communist camps no longer dared criticize them, let alone exert economic or political pressure on them. Any socialist country that dared to speak ill of the Vietnamese would at once have been discredited by the entire Left. The Cubans and the Koreans, too, were untouchable, even though they were not just then fighting in the front lines.”²⁶⁷

The Hungarian ambassador to Cuba commented in January 1968 that Cuban foreign policy statements now spoke of Cuba, North Korea, and North Vietnam as a new “great triangle in world politics” and the “sole and real manifestations of armed revolution.”²⁶⁸ The CIA assessed in November of the same year that the three parties found unity in the conviction that “small countries can effectively roll back the US on every front, provided they pool their strength and do not depend on big countries to supply the motivation for their individual revolutions.”²⁶⁹ The New York City-based *Monthly Review* observed in 1969 that “these three maverick socialist states seem to be developing a kind of triangle of interrelationships. This is not to say that there are alliances among them or that they follow a similar road to socialism. Rather, the struggle of each to define itself independently of Peking or Moscow has given rise to a recognition of

²⁶⁶ Karol, *Guerillas in Power*, 294.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 295

²⁶⁸ “Report, Hungarian Embassy in Cuba to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry.”

²⁶⁹ “Kim Il-Sung’s New Military Adventurism,” vi.

common interests, realized in growing trade relations, cultural and technical exchanges, and the like.”²⁷⁰

It is hard to overstate the role occupied by Vietnam in the outward perspective of both North Korea and Cuba during the 1960s, and by extension, the solidarity between the three governments. For the North Korean leadership, Vietnam was the frontline of the heightening conflict between revolutionary forces in the Global South and US imperialism.²⁷¹ The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) was not merely a “bourgeois-nationalist” state challenging imperialist hegemony, but a nation governed by a fraternal Marxist-Leninist party, a member of the international socialist system. Previous US interventions to topple leftist governments in the Congo, Guatemala, Cuba, and British Guiana paled in comparison to the grand scale and sheer ferocity of Washington’s war against Vietnam. A victory for the DRV and the Việt Cộng would be a major blow to US overseas military interventionism in both real and symbolic terms. Conversely, the consolidation of US political-military hegemony in Indochina would be a great setback to the security of North Korea, China, and the socialist camp as a whole. This is what Kim Il Sung meant when he frequently claimed that “The US invasion of Viet Nam is not only an aggression against the people of Viet Nam, it is also an aggression against the socialist camp, a challenge to the national-liberation movement and a threat to peace in Asia and the world.”²⁷² Virtually every speech Kim Il Sung delivered in the period took time to emphasize the paramount importance of Vietnam, frequently placing it alongside Cuba as one of two frontlines of the anti-imperialist struggle. In August 1965 Kim told a visiting Chinese delegation “We are supporting Vietnam as if it were our own war. When Vietnam has a request,

²⁷⁰ Ben Page, “North Korea: sitting on its own chair,” *Monthly Review* 20, no. 8 (January 1969), 30-31.

²⁷¹ Kim Il Sung, “Hyŏn chŏngsewa uri tangŭi kwaŏp” [The Present Situation and the Tasks of Our Party], 5 October 1966, in Kim Il Sung, *Chŏnjip*, vol. 37 (Pyongyang: Korean Workers’ Party Publishing House, 2001), 238-239.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 239.

we will disrupt our own plans in order to try to meet their demands.”²⁷³ Between 1965 and 1968, Pyongyang provided North Vietnam with extensive economic aid, building materials, mining equipment, military hardware, and hosted thousands of Vietnamese students.²⁷⁴ Moreover eighty-seven North Korean air force pilots served in Vietnam between 1967 and 1968, fourteen of whom gave their lives,²⁷⁵ while an unknown number of personnel also operated clandestinely in the South.²⁷⁶

The Hungarian embassy in Havana commented in January 1968: “It is doubtlessly the issue of Vietnam that plays the greatest role in Cuban foreign policy. The Cuban leadership views it as a manifestation of its own policy...” and added that, “Apart from the Vietnamese question, it is Korea that plays the greatest role in Cuban foreign policy.”²⁷⁷ In practical terms, Cuban solidarity with Vietnam took the form of economic aid and brigades of doctors, engineers, and construction workers who joined the guerillas on the frontlines. These volunteers were

²⁷³ “Record of Conversation between Premier Kim and the Chinese Friendship Delegation,” August 20, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PRC FMA 106-01479-05, 46-51. Translated by Charles Kraus. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118795>.

²⁷⁴ For example, a 25 September 1965 cable from the Chinese embassy in Pyongyang refers to 2,000 tons, or approximately 80 train cars, of materials to be shipped in late September or early October, and to 52 train cars that had already been shipped. See “Cable from the Chinese Embassy in North Korea, ‘On the Transporting of North Korea’s Construction Material Aid for Vietnam,’” September 25, 1965, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PRC FMA 109-02845-01, 3. Translated by Charles Kraus. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118780>. Also, “A 7 May 1967 DVO Memo about Intergovernmental Relations between the DPRK and Romania, the DRV, and Cuba,” May 07, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF f. 0102, op. 23, p. 112, d. 24, pp. 39-42. Obtained for NKIDP by Sergey Radchenko and translated for NKIDP by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116701>.

²⁷⁵ Charles K. Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950–1990* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 147.

²⁷⁶ “Telegram from Pyongyang to Bucharest, No. 76.247,” July 06, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Romanian Foreign Ministry Archive. Obtained and translated by Eliza Gheorghe. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113927>

²⁷⁷ “Report, Hungarian Embassy in Cuba to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, 25 January 1968,” January 25, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Cuba, 1968, 59. doboz, 1, 001121/1968. Translated by Balázs Szalontai. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116665>.

responsible for impressive feats, especially given the war-time conditions, constructing roads, hospitals, hotels, and helping to build the Ho Chi Minh trail.²⁷⁸

Just weeks after the KWP's Second Party Conference of October 1966, Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticós and head of the armed forces Raúl Castro visited Pyongyang in what was the most high-profile Cuban delegation to North Korea to date, six days before Lyndon B. Johnson landed in Seoul to meet South Korean president Park Chung Hee. According to the Cuban press they were received at the Pyongyang International Airport by Kim Il Sung and 200,000 cheering citizens before being escorted by motorcade through streets lined with thousands more waiting to greet them. At a welcoming ceremony for the Cuban delegation, Ch'oe Yonggŏn proclaimed that "the Cuban and Korean people are comrades in arms and brothers that struggle on the same front against imperialism."²⁷⁹ A reoccurring theme of both the Cuban and North Korean speeches was that Vietnam was the crucial battlefield on which the conflict between the United States and the progressive forces of the world would be decided. Kim Il Sung, speaking at a banquet later that day, stated:

The world cannot live peacefully unless the imperialist aggression of the United States in Vietnam is defeated. Together the socialist camp, the international communist movement, the workers movement, the national liberation movement, and the democratic movement must unite their forces to positively support the just struggle for the national salvation of the Vietnamese people, and crush the aggression of the United States in Vietnam.²⁸⁰

In Raúl Castro's address to a massive gathering in Moranbong Stadium (today's Kim Il Sung Stadium) the following day, he remarked "Our people, like the Korean people, consider the struggle of the Vietnamese people as their own" and that both countries were "determined to send their volunteers to Vietnam to struggle shoulder to shoulder with the heroic Vietnamese

²⁷⁸ Robert Buzzanco, "Fidel Castro (1926–2016) and Global Solidarity," *The Sixties* 10, no. 2, (2017): 276.

²⁷⁹ "Mas de 200,000 personas recibieron en Pyongyang a la delegación cubana," *Granma* (Havana), 27 October 1966.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

people when the government of the Republic of Vietnam requests it.”²⁸¹ Raúl also took the opportunity to criticize the CPC, although not mentioning it by name:

...certain people while giving support to the Vietnamese people, purport to give instructions to the government and party of Vietnam to do this or that. We consider that the Vietnamese people have the right to judge by themselves what support they accept, and that they are capable of deciding for themselves what it is they need. The genuinely revolutionary position is to give unconditional support to the Vietnamese people in their struggle and at the same time, revolutionaries must struggle against imperialism by all methods in all parts of the world.²⁸²

According to the Soviet embassy’s report on the Cuban delegation’s visit, “both sides stressed in every way the complete consensus of opinion” on the international situation, and the Cubans agreed with the Korean position that “The most effective method of defending peace [...] is to launch an open struggle against US imperialism.”²⁸³ Raúl told Kim that “We are people of a small country that, as our Prime Minister Fidel Castro declared, is prepared to spill its blood in aid of the Vietnamese people. Equally, we would spill our blood for the Korean people if necessary.”²⁸⁴ Kim Il Sung responded in kind with a pledge to send seven hundred armed and equipped troops to Cuba in the event of a US invasion.²⁸⁵

Such hospitality was reciprocated in November 1967, which saw the most prominent North Korean delegation ever to visit Cuba. Headed by Ch'oe Yonggŏn, it included Vice-Premier and Minister of Foreign Relations Pak Sŏngch'ŏl, two Central Committee department directors, I Minsu and Kim Yunsŏn, and a KPA Major-General, Chŏng Ot'ae.²⁸⁶ Over the course of seven

²⁸¹ “Multitudinario homenaje en el estadio de Pyongyang a la delegación del Partido y el Gobierno de Cuba,” *Granma* (Havana), 28 October 1966.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ “From a 2 June 1967 Memo of the Soviet Embassy in the DPRK (1st Secretary V. Nemchinov) about Some New Factors in Korean-Cuban relations,” June 02, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF f. 0102, op. 23, p. 112, d. 24, pp. 53-57. Obtained by Sergey Radchenko and translated by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116706>

²⁸⁴ “Mas de 200,000 personas recibieron en Pyongyang.”

²⁸⁵ “From a 2 June 1967 Memo of the Soviet Embassy in the DPRK,” June 02, 1967.

²⁸⁶ *Visita a Cuba de la delegación Coreana.*

days they toured the island with Fidel and other top officials, including Raúl Roa, Osvaldo Dorticós, and Armando Hart. They visited the site of the Moncada Barracks attack, the prison cell on the Isla de la Juventud where Fidel was imprisoned in 1953-55, the historic home of José Martí, and the Rosafé Signet cattle farm, named after the Canadian-born celebrity bull, and a point of pride for Fidel in the 1960s.²⁸⁷ Highlighting their political consensus, the prevailing theme was how the two countries were bonded not just by their common enemy, but because both recognized the necessity of armed struggle and a global offensive against imperialism. Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticós hailed the PCC and the KWP as “two parties prepared to practise always, without vacillations, the principles of proletarian internationalism and of revolutionary solidarity.”²⁸⁸ Dorticós later told Ch'oe that “...like Cuba, your people and your party understand that the principal objective of a revolutionary movement is the widening and the development of the revolution everywhere.”²⁸⁹ Ch'oe, in return, praised “the example of comrade Che Guevara” and affirmed that Cuba was “a beacon of light that illuminates the path of struggle and of victory to the revolutionary peoples of Latin America;”²⁹⁰ moreover Cuba’s leadership had now “further extended the flames of anti-Yankee, anti-dictatorial struggle” to Bolivia, Venezuela, Colombia, and Guatemala. Both parties affirmed their mutual conviction that armed insurrection throughout the Global South could defeat imperialism. “In all parts of the

²⁸⁷ Improving the quantity and quality of beef and dairy in the Cuban diet was an important priority for the Cuban government in the 1960s, which invested heavily in cattle-breeding schemes and artificial insemination technology. Rosafé Signet was an award-winning Holstein Bull born in Brampton, Ontario, Canada, sold to the Cuban government in 1961 for around \$100,000. Signet allegedly produced 22,000 semen doses in 1962 alone. One of Rosafé’s descendants, Ubre Blanca, produced 109.5 litres of milk on a single a day in 1982, a new world record. In Cuba both Signet and Blanca have been immortalized as statues, featured on stamps, etcetera.

²⁸⁸ *Visita a Cuba de la delegación Coreana*, 14.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

world and on all fronts we must tie the feet and hands of the Yankee imperialists so that they cannot act at will, concentrating in it the arrow of attack with our combined strength.”²⁹¹

What the above highlights is how, during the 1960s, North Korea and Cuba became the rebels of the socialist camp, firmly asserting their independence, frequently under criticism, but always in solidarity with one another. As the controversial positions of the Cuban leadership faced censure from both Moscow and Beijing, Latin American communist parties as well as the region’s Trotskyist movement, North Korea remained Cuba’s steadfast ally, defending Fidel’s leadership and the Cuban Revolution as a model for Latin America. *Kulloja* frequently carried commending pieces on all dimensions of Cuban policy, and by the time of the KWP’s Second Party Conference Fidel’s speeches were being translated and published in North Korea.²⁹² In June 1967 the Soviet ambassador in Pyongyang commented that “In recent years (1966-67) the Korean leadership has strenuously demonstrated the existence of the close and especially confidential relations which have been established with the Cuban leadership, invariably stresses the correctness of F. Castro’s policy on all issues of domestic and foreign policy, and declares complete support for current Cuban policy.”²⁹³

Cuba reciprocated such political support, extolling North Korea as an exemplary model of proletarian internationalism and backing its demands for the reunification of the peninsula. As mentioned, in 1966 Cuba designated 25 June to 27 July each year a “month of solidarity with Korea,” in which highly-publicized events took place in high schools, college campuses,

²⁹¹ Ibid., 58.

²⁹² “Information on the Korean Workers’ Party,” October, 1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AQPPSH, MPP Korese, D 10, V. 1966. Translated by Enkel Daljani <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114405>

²⁹³ “From a 2 June 1967 Memo of the Soviet Embassy in the DPRK (1st Secretary V. Nemchinov) about Some New Factors in Korean-Cuban relations,” June 02, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF f. 0102, op. 23, p. 112, d. 24, pp. 53-57. Obtained by Sergey Radchenko and translated by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116706>.

factories and public spaces across the country. North Korea responded in turn with its own “Month of Solidarity with Cuba” during 14 July to 14 August, the date paying homage to the 1953 assault on the Moncada barracks led by Fidel. Addressing the twenty-first UN General Assembly in New York in October 1966, Cuban Foreign Minister Raúl Roa proclaimed:

In the distant Orient Yankee imperialism continues its policies of violence, intervention, oppression and exploitation. Maintaining the military occupation of South Korea, it has converted it into a virtual colony and a base of aggression against the Asian peoples, and at the same time obstructs the peaceful reunification of the arbitrarily divided Korean nation. Abusing its technical majority, the US government has again imposed on the General Assembly the misleading “Korean question,” which is a rotten term. While it is true that reunification is the most burning national aspiration, it is no less true that the means and methods to make it viable is a matter of the exclusive incumbency of the Korean people, and, therefore, a question radically alien to the United Nations. The only question about Korea it is up to it to discuss is the immediate withdrawal of the aggressive forces of imperialism that, masked with the flag of the United Nations, illegally occupies the southern territory of the country, assigning to the Organization the indecorum role of instrument of aggression against a peaceful nation.”²⁹⁴

While the twenty-first General Assembly affirmed the US-backed resolution 2224,²⁹⁵ which mandated UN forces remain in the south to “preserve peace and security,” Cuba sponsored its own resolution, calling for the immediate removal of all foreign troops from the peninsula, the dissolution of the UN Commission for the Rehabilitation and Reunification of Korea (UNCURK), and “the cessation of the UN’s interference in the internal matters of this country.”²⁹⁶ The Cuban government stated proudly that its resolution was based on memorandums on reunification the North Korean government released annually in response to the UN General Assemblies.²⁹⁷ These North Korean statements on unification were also published in the Cuban press.

²⁹⁴ Federico de Córdova, *Corea: unificación y solidaridad* (La Habana: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Instituto de Política Internacional, 1967), 24-25.

²⁹⁵ The resolution was affirmed on 19 December 1966, with 67 of 122 votes, versus 19 votes against and 32 abstentions.

²⁹⁶ De Córdova, *Corea: unificación y solidaridad*, 25.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

In 1967 Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Relations and the Institute for International Politics published *Corea: unificación y solidaridad*. Written by senior ministry official Federico de Córdova, it was the earliest contribution to what would become a sizable volume of left-wing Latin American literature on North Korea, a genre that flourished in the 1970s and 1980s. Unlike the more fawning material the genre was known for in subsequent decades, the bulk of Córdova's book was in fact an impressively comprehensive and detailed history of the issue of the division of the Korean peninsula from the Cairo, Moscow, and Geneva conferences to the resolutions passed in the UN General Assembly between 1950 and 1966. It endorsed what was then the North Korean position: that the division of the Korean peninsula was not an issue to be solved in the UN. As Córdova explained:

... the illegal discussion of the "Korean question" at the UN must be put to an end, all the illegal resolutions about said question, adopted under the pressure of the United States, must be annulled in order to discuss and decide the problems of withdrawing the foreign troops that occupy South Korea under the emblem of the "UN forces," and immediately dissolve the UN Commission for the Reconstruction of Korea [UNCURK], fabricated by the US in violation of the UN Charter itself.²⁹⁸

In addition to Córdova's book, in 1967 Cuba's newly-founded Instituto del Libro²⁹⁹ published a Spanish edition of Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett's *Again Korea?*, perhaps the most influential piece of pro-DPRK literature of the 1960s.

The OLAS Conference of July-August 1967 had adopted an official resolution on Korea, formally linking the North Korean program for reunification with the goals of the Latin American revolutionary movement. It called on "All the peoples of Latin America and all organizations to unleash a vast movement of active support and solidarity for the just cause of the Korean people in their struggle to expel the Yankee aggressors, liberate South Korea and

²⁹⁸ De Córdova, *Corea: unificación y solidaridad*, 28-29.

²⁹⁹ Today's Instituto Cubano del Libro (ICL).

independently reunify their homeland.”³⁰⁰ The resolution repeated the allegations of the resolution adopted a year earlier at the Tricontinental Conference, namely that Washington had converted South Korea into a “complete yankee colony,” a “nuclear missile base,” and a “fascist military dictatorship.” Moreover, the US was in clear violation of the armistice agreement, chiefly through its build up of military resources in the South and its “frequent military provocations” against the North.³⁰¹ Claiming such aggression had been escalating since Lyndon Johnson’s October 1966 meeting with Park Chung Hee, the resolution cited over sixty incidents of “armed attacks and gunfire” by US forces along the military demarcation line, and more than two-hundred violations of North Korean waters by US warships in the five months since the US president’s visit. In April 1967 alone, the resolution contended, more shots had been fired at North Korea than in the thirteen years since the armistice was signed. “This situation is similar to that of 1950” the document warned, “when yankee imperialism unleashed the war of aggression in Korea.”³⁰²

Cuban-DPRK economic cooperation in the latter half of the 1960s

The economic and technical assistance North Korea began providing Cuba in the early 1960s rose considerably in the second half of the decade. By 1968 Pyongyang had increased its annual sugar purchase from twenty thousand to one hundred thousand tons,³⁰³ while continuing to provide Cuba with a range of manufactured products including steel, machine tools, tractors

³⁰⁰ “Resolucion Sobre Corea,” in *Primera Conferencia de la Organización Latinoamericana de Solidaridad* (Montevideo: Nativa Libros, 1967), 97.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ “Information Report Sent by Károly Fendler to Deputy Foreign Minister Erdélyi, 'Vietnamese and Romanian Views about the Korean-Chinese Trade Relations and the Situation of the DPRK',” January 03, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1968, 57. doboz, 1, 00345/1968. Translated by Balázs Szalontai. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116685>.

and tractor parts, disc harrows, porcelain, fertilizer, freight cars, and building materials.³⁰⁴ North Korea also sent considerable numbers of experts and technicians to train Cuban workers and assist the upgrading of existing industries. This included Cubana de Acero, a major metalworks factory established in the late nineteenth century and employing some eight hundred workers, and the first state-owned factory in Cuba. Given the factory's history and the role it was given in the post-revolutionary mechanization of agriculture, it had both a heavy practical and symbolic importance. A long-term North Korean assistance project began in 1965 trained Cubans as machinists, welders, millwrights, and mechanical adjusters, and led to Cuba being able to domestically manufacture harrows, windrowers, and railway track, among other products, for the first time.³⁰⁵ When the delegation headed by Ch'oe Yonggŏn visited the factory in November 1967, Cuban Minister of Basic Industry Joel Domenech praised the "...selfless work of the group of Korean technicians who laboured here," claiming that "many of our best operators were trained thanks to this valuable support."³⁰⁶ Cubana de Acero and the Cuban-Korean Friendship textile machine factory in Pyongyang engaged annually in "socialist emulation" - a transnational variety of the Soviet-born tradition of collective competition between state enterprises - and remained a showcase site of DPRK-Cuba solidarity for years to come.

Other assistance projects primarily benefiting Cuban students were part of the KWP's close fraternal ties to the Young Communist League (UJC), such as a technical upgrade to José

³⁰⁴ See "Cuba's Expanding Merchant Marine," CIA Intelligence Memorandum, March 1971, CREST electronic database, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland; "DPRK, Cuba conclude 1964 trade protocol," Pyongyang KCNA International Service, 25 January 1964, translated and published in, *Daily Report: Foreign Radio Broadcasts* (Washington) 27 January 1964.

³⁰⁵ "Pantentizan su apoyo y solidaridad con la justa causa del pueblo coreano, los trabajadores de empresa de construcciones soldadas 'Cubana de Acerco,'" *Granma* (Havana) 2 July 1977.

³⁰⁶ *Visita a Cuba de la delegación Coreana*, 77.

Antonio Echeverría City University's Faculty of Technology,³⁰⁷ and the Poultry Genetic Centre of Cuban-Korean Friendship, a volunteer project devoted to raising egg production through scientific research and selective breeding. A major priority of the Cuban government during the 1960s was to remedy the shortage of skilled industrial workers, and North Korea was able to provide vital education and training. Some 1,600 young Cubans – the majority of whom were demobilized soldiers in their period of compulsory military service – were trained as machine tool operators by North Koreans.³⁰⁸ As mentioned, other Cuban students studied or undertook technical training programs in Pyongyang and Kaesong on North Korean scholarships during the decade. Cuban president Osvaldo Dorticós, speaking during the November 1967 visit by Ch'oe Yonggŏn, remarked:

today we can proclaim that the development of this collaboration, not only in the political order but also in the economic order, is an excellent demonstration of proletarian internationalism and revolutionary fraternity. And this collaboration is expressed not only in the growing commercial trade between both countries based on those principles rather than the mercantilist spirit, but also in the contribution of technical assistance that Korea made to our mechanical industry, to our machine building industry, with the presence in our country of over one hundred technicians and skilled workers that join with our workers working and teaching them in a path of technical improvement, in a human and revolutionary manner that is truly exemplary.³⁰⁹

Such economic cooperation was mirrored with the promotion of fraternal ties between parallel popular organizations in the two countries: Cuba's Committees to Support the Revolution (CSR) and North Korea's People's Committees, the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) and the Korean Democratic Women's Union (KDWU), the Central Union of Cuban Workers (CTC) and the Korean Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU), Cuba's Young Communist League (UJC) and the Korean Democratic Youth League (KDYL). Moreover, fraternal ties were

³⁰⁷ "Celebranse numerosas actividades en la Semana de Solidaridad con el pueblo coreano," *Granma* (Havana), 28 June 1967.

³⁰⁸ *Visita a Cuba de la delegación Coreana*, 78.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

established between numerous Cuban and North Korean factories, universities, and colleges, which would routinely exchange messages of solidarity, serve as sites for Cuban-Korean friendship events, and engage in socialist emulation.

While DPRK-Cuban relations flourished in the 1960s, North Korea found little room to expand state-to-state relations elsewhere in Latin America. In May 1963, Uruguay granted North Korea permission to open a trade office in Montevideo, only to force its closure three years later, claiming it was operating as an informal embassy.³¹⁰ Previously the trade office had failed to comply with a request from the Ministry of the Interior to provide records of their commercial activity, leading the Uruguayan's to conclude that "the North Koreans' only transaction since they arrived in 1964 was a small purchase of hides..."³¹¹ Phillip Agee, a CIA officer operating in Uruguay at the time, commented in his memoirs, "What the North Koreans were doing all this time is a mystery..."³¹²

Expanding diplomatic relations was not the priority of North Korean foreign policy towards Latin America in the 1960s, however. The North Korean leadership viewed most of the governments of the region as "fascist puppet states" of Washington's informal empire.³¹³ Like their Cuban allies, they did not seek closer relations with these governments, but rather to support the revolutionary movements aiming to topple them. The North Korean leadership clung

³¹⁰ "North Korea – Uruguay," Central Intelligence Bulletin, 23 May 1963, and "Expulsions of Communist Officials in 1968," CIA report, February 1969, CREST electronic database, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland.

³¹¹ Philip Agee, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1975), 404.

³¹² Ibid. Agee in fact speculated that North Korea's purpose in Uruguay was "most likely intelligence support for the Soviets." Agee's assumption reflected a line of thinking still common in Washington at the time that Pyongyang was merely a surrogate of Moscow. His memoirs also reveal the pressure Uruguay was under from the US to expel the North Koreans, and that the CIA was collaborating with its South Korean counterpart to monitor North Korean efforts to open such trade offices in other Latin American countries.

³¹³ "Repuestas a las Preguntas de Gabriel Molina, Jefe de Información del Periódico 'Hoy,' y de Otros Periodistas Cubanos," (6 July 1965), in Kim Il Sung, *Repuestas a las Preguntas de los Corresponsales Extranjeros*, (Pyongyang: Ediciones en Lenguas Extranjeras, 1974), 83.

to a vision of Latin America engulfed in the flames of revolution, a wave of insurrection that would dislodge the region from Washington's neo-colonial empire, just as the island of Cuba had already been. The following chapter examines how North Korea attempted to support this process, and in doing so forged relationships with armed revolutionary organizations across the continent.

Chapter Three

Solidarity with the Latin American Revolution

During the 1960s the North Korean leadership pledged its support for armed national liberation movements worldwide, and called upon the rest of the socialist camp to do the same. As early as 1964 the North Korean government was putting these words into action in Latin America, a region it believed had become a primary battleground in the struggle against US imperialism. Between 1964 and 1970 North Korea was connected to revolutionary movements in at least seven Latin American countries: Venezuela, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Brazil, Guatemala, and Mexico. The primary way in which the North Korean government was able to support Latin American guerrillas was with military training, although in some cases it provided financial resources and arms as well. The scale and form of support different organizations received varied widely in line with circumstances, logistical challenges, and political considerations. Generally speaking, there were clearly limits to what Pyongyang could offer Latin American guerrilla movements in tangible terms. In all countries except Mexico, its support was much less consequential than that of Cuba. Nor was North Korean support sufficient to counteract the objective conditions which ultimately ensured the defeat of these guerrilla movements. While the imminent continental revolution envisioned by North Korean leaders never materialized, they nevertheless proved themselves genuine and important allies of Latin American revolutionaries, and demonstrated their oft-expressed commitment to “proletarian internationalism” was not mere rhetoric.

The Cuban Revolution and the Latin American guerrilla movements

In the 1960s Latin America was a region characterized by widespread poverty, a brutal legacy of state terror, and an omnipresent US hegemony routinely enforced through military

power. The dominance of powerful *latifundistas* and an export sector bourgeoisie fostered underdevelopment and dependency, while extreme violence was the well-established elite response to mobilizations by workers, peasants, and young people. Efforts at popular reform frequently ended with the landing of US troops, which often installed strongmen rulers who brutalized their citizens with Washington's acquiescence. Between 1898 and 1959, the US government intervened in Latin America and the Caribbean some twenty times to consolidate regimes favorable to its interests or protect US economic assets. During the 1960s, in addition to the barrage of US efforts to strangle the Cuban Revolution in its infancy, Latin Americans witnessed a prolonged CIA destabilization campaign against the Premier of British Guiana, Cheddi Jagan, the Panamanian flag riots of January 1964,³¹⁴ a US-backed military coup in Brazil, and a massive US military intervention in the Dominican Republic. Virulent anti-American sentiment was widespread, as highlighted to the world when US Vice President Richard Nixon's motorcade was attacked by a mob on the streets of Caracas in May 1958. North Korean media from the era described a region of hunger, backwardness, and misery, where people suffered under "fascist puppet states,"³¹⁵ as part of the "colonial system of yankee imperialism in Latin America."³¹⁶ The Chilean communist, Eduardo Murillo Ugarte, who arrived in Pyongyang in 1960, recalls North Koreans who were surprised he owned quality shoes and

³¹⁴ In January 1964 twenty-one Panamanians and four US soldiers were killed in three days of rioting in the canal zone, sparked by a dispute over what national flags should fly in the zone and where. See Sheldon B. Liss, *The Canal: Aspects of United States-Panamanian relations* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), 108-109.

³¹⁵ "Repuestas a las Preguntas de Gabriel Molina, Jefe de Información del Periódico 'Hoy,' y de Otros Periodistas Cubanos," (6 July 1965), in Kim Il Sung, *Repuestas a las Preguntas de los Corresponsales Extranjeros*, (Pyongyang: Ediciones en Lenguas Extranjeras, 1974), 83.

³¹⁶ Kim Il Sung, "La Gran Causa Revolucionaria Antimperialista de Los Pueblos de Asia, Africa y America Latina es Invencible," *Tricontinental* no. 8 (October 1968), reprinted in Kim Il Sung, *El Movimiento de los No Alineados es una Poderosa Fuerza Revolucionaria Antiimperialista de nuestra Época* (Pyongyang: Ediciones en Lenguas Extranjeras, 1976), 82.

warm clothes, and were shocked even more by photos of car-filled streets and modern buildings in Santiago de Chile.³¹⁷

Against this backdrop, the fall of Fulgencio Batista to Fidel Castro's rebel army in 1959 inspired a generation of young Latin Americans with the idea that armed insurrection could sweep away traditional power structures and bring about radical social transformation. Postwar development resulted in major demographic changes that had a radicalizing effect on the political climate: the growth of the industrial proletariat, the further immiseration and displacement of the peasantry, sprawling urban slums, and a dramatic increase in the number of young people attending university. For this new generation of politicized youth in particular, the Cuban Revolution, with its vision of heroic guerrilla struggle, was a refreshing alternative to the established communist parties for which revolution seemed to only exist on the distant horizon. The Cuban leadership proclaimed that its triumph over the Batista dictatorship was only the beginning of a tide of revolution that would sweep the continent. Brands (2010) notes that the CIA itself assessed that "revolutions or attempts at revolution" were "definite possibilities" in twelve countries in Latin American in the 1960s.³¹⁸ Following the Peruvian insurrection of 1965, the editors of the influential New York-based *Monthly Review* felt confident asserting, "More than ever, the prospect looms up of a united Latin American Revolution fighting against imperialist domination and for a great federation of socialist states."³¹⁹ This confidence in the prospects for revolution in Latin America was shared by the North Korean leadership. Its position was that the Global South had become the primary terrain of revolutionary struggle on the world stage, and that a crucial element of this was a continental-wide national liberation

³¹⁷ Eduardo Murillo Ugarte, personal communication with the author, 4 April 2018.

³¹⁸ Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 40.

³¹⁹ Editors's introduction to Luis F. de la Puente Uceda, "The Peruvian Revolution: Concepts and Perspectives," *Monthly Review*, 17, no. 6 (November 1965): 12.

struggle unfolding on the doorsteps of the United States. “Thus Latin America, which used to be called the ‘quiet backyard’ of the American imperialist aggressors” read one 1968 *Kulloja* editorial, “is now being transformed into the continent of struggle and the continent of revolution, and the ruling system of American imperialism in this region is being shaken to its foundation.”³²⁰

As DPRK-Cuban relations expanded rapidly in the first half of the 1960s, so too did North Korea’s linkages with the multitude of Cuban-inspired guerrilla movements that emerged in the period. Such activity was enhanced in line with the more militant, Third Worldist foreign policy North Korea adopted in 1966, summarized in its demand for an “anti-imperialist, anti-US united front” that could “sever the limbs” of US imperialism in all corners of the globe. The North Korean leadership explicitly linked the new wave of Latin American guerrilla movements with its broader strategic vision of stretching US military resources to their maximum, as well as ending Cuba’s encirclement. In an October 1968 tribute to Che Guevara published in *Boletín Tricontinental*, Kim argued:

When the flames of revolution burn vigorously in the many countries of Latin America where US imperialism sets foot, so much more will the force of Yankee imperialism be dispersed and weakened, and it and its lackeys unable to escape the defeat of the maneuvers with which they attempt to suffocate Cuba through the concentration of their forces. Furthermore, if the revolution triumphs in some other Latin American countries, Cuba will be freed from the total siege of imperialism, a more favourable conjuncture for the revolutions of Cuba and Latin America will open up, and the world revolution will be further accelerated.³²¹

With the exception of the Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Action Movement, MAR) in Mexico, no Latin American guerrilla group relied exclusively on North

³²⁰ Ko Sung-il, “Revolutionary people of the world must support the revolutionary struggle of the Cuban people,” *Kulloja* no. 30 (April 1968), reprinted in *Translations on North Korea* no. 87 (July 1969): 114.

³²¹ Kim Il Sung, “La Gran Causa Revolucionaria Antimperialista,” 82.

Korea for external support. During the 1960s, the governments of Cuba, North Korea, China, North Vietnam, Albania, and Algeria, whatever their ideological divergences, all proclaimed their support for Latin American guerrilla movements. However, this did not mean that these parties' policies towards specific revolutionary groups were uniform, or that cooperation between them was guaranteed: China's estrangement from Cuba, North Korea, and North Vietnam in the mid-1960s complicated the situation considerably, as did Cuban-Algerian relations following Ahmed Ben Bella's overthrow in June 1965.³²² A 1971 CIA report noted that North Korea "both copied and competed with China in the training of guerrilla movements."³²³ By the end of the 1960s and continuing into the 1970s new actors from the Middle East, including Iraq, Libya, and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), became involved in the support network for Latin American guerrillas, although this history lies outside the scope of the present study. Therefore, North Korea's relationship with Latin American guerrillas cannot be fully understood without reference to other actors, principally Cuba, China, and North Vietnam. Moreover, in order to better understand these events and the agency of local, non-state political actors within them, this chapter examines in some depth the local historical and political context in which such activity occurred.

North Korean support for Latin American revolutionaries was coordinated first and foremost with Cuba. Following the Tricontinental Conference of 1966, *Radio Habana* announced that the Cuban government and its allies would cooperate to establish training schools

³²² On 19 June 1965, Algerian president Ben Bella was overthrown in a military coup led by his Minister of Defence, Houari Boumédiène. Ben Bella had been a close ally of Fidel and Che, and shared their enthusiasm for supporting armed national liberation movements throughout the Global South. Fidel condemned the coup and those responsible for it, leading to a temporary freeze in Cuban-Algerian relations. Piero Gleijeses, "Cuba's First Venture in Africa: Algeria, 1961-1965," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28, no. 1 (Feb 1996): 159-195.

³²³ "North Korean Policy Toward the Non-Communist World: Objectives, Results, and Prospects," Memorandum of the CIA Office National Estimates, 16 December 1971, 16, CREST electronic database, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland.

for revolutionaries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, and identified Cuba and North Korea as the location for the first two.³²⁴ Historians Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia state that documents found in the archives of the South Korean Foreign Ministry confirm that a “Centre for the Training and Political Instruction of Foreign Guerrillas” was established in North Korea in 1966.³²⁵ It was in Havana that Latin American revolutionaries commonly made contact with North Korean officials, obtained falsified travel documents and secured transportation to Pyongyang. For security reasons, these journeys often involved tortuous itineraries with multiple transfer points. In March 1967 Kim stated that the KWP “supported only those Latin American revolutionary movements which the Cubans also agreed with and which they supported.”³²⁶ While North Korea certainly respected Cuba’s leadership role in the Latin American revolution, this relationship did not preclude it from acting independently in its support of guerrillas groups, as shall be discussed.

Obtaining specific details about North Korean support for Latin American revolutionaries during the Cold War era is an inherently challenging task for historians, due to the clandestine nature of such activity. Nevertheless, using existing sources, the most important of which are declassified US intelligence reports and the testimonies of former guerrillas, it is possible to construct a useful outline. The remainder of this chapter examines the theatres of revolution in Latin America in the 1960s in which significant evidence of North Korean involvement exist.

³²⁴ “The Sino-Soviet split within the Communist Movement in Latin America,” CIA Intelligence Report, ESAU XXVIII (15 June 1967), available at <https://archive.org/details/ESAU-CIA/page/n1>.

³²⁵ Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong, Kim Il-Sung, and Sino-North Korean Relations, 1949-1976* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 226.

³²⁶ “Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry,” March 09, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1967, 61. doboz, 1, 002130/1967. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Balázs Szalontai <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114578>

Venezuela

In January 1958 Venezuelan dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1914-2001) was overthrown in a popular uprising, leading to elections that brought Rómulo Betancourt (1908-81) and the social-democratic Acción Democrática (Democratic Action, AD) to power the following year. Despite the reformist pretensions of the Betancourt government, its failure to adequately address the country's burgeoning social crisis meant that Cuba's call to arms continued to resonate with substantial sections of the left. Venezuela in the late 1950s and early 1960s was shaken by riots, street-fighting, strikes, unrest within the military, and growing guerrilla activity. These were days in which a young Ilich Ramírez Sánchez (to become better known as Carlos the Jackal) got his first taste of revolutionary violence. The largely uncoordinated and chaotic insurgency of 1958-62 graduated to a more coherent and centralized strategy of armed struggle when the Partido Comunista de Venezuela (Communist Party of Venezuela, PCV) launched the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (Armed Forces of National Liberation, FALN) in December 1962. The FALN was a guerrilla front whose fighters mostly drew from the PCV and the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Left Movement, MIR). The latter group was founded in April 1960 by radical youth inspired by the Cuban Revolution, who had deserted or been expelled from the AD. The ranks of the FALN were further strengthened by a contingent of radical officers within the Venezuelan military. Established in conjunction with a civilian-political front, the Front de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Front, FLN), the movement operated under the acronym FLN-FALN and grew into Latin America's largest insurgency of the era. Although US intelligence reports regarding the group's troop strength vary

and often confess uncertainty, one source estimated a high point of 600-1000 urban guerrillas and 400 more in the rural stronghold of Falcón by late 1963.³²⁷

The PCV, among the largest communist parties in Latin America, was distinguished by its embrace of armed struggle and its neutral stance in the Sino-Soviet split. As a result it had strong ties to the anti-revisionist communist parties of Asia, as well as to Algeria's Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) since the late 1950s. Top party leaders were received by Mao Zedong in Beijing in 1959. Following the launch of the FALN in December 1962, politburo member Hector Rodríguez Bauza led a delegation to Beijing and Pyongyang, via Prague and Moscow, to solicit support for the new offensive. Unlike other accounts by leftist visitors from the decade, Rodríguez's assessment of North Korea's progress since the end of the war was less romantic, noting that indoor heating was virtually non-existent during the harsh winter.³²⁸ Nevertheless his delegation was treated graciously by their hosts, and, in response to their request for military support they were promised two hundred rifles, to be delivered via the PCV operative Luben Petkoff,³²⁹ stationed in Bulgaria.³³⁰ US intelligence reported that China also hosted three guerrilla warfare training courses for PCV militants between 1959 and 1963.³³¹

³²⁷ "Castro-Communist Insurgency in Venezuela: A Study of Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency Operations and Techniques in Venezuela, 1960-1964," Georgetown Research Project, Atlantic Research Project, March 19 1970, 97.

³²⁸ Hector Rodríguez Bauza, *Ida y Vuelta de la Utopía* (Caracas: Editorial Punto, 2015), 288.

³²⁹ Luben Petkoff (1933-99) was an enigmatic figure of the Venezuelan left closely involved in the FLN-FALN's international network. Later in life he utilized these connections to launch a successful business career, and over the years was the target of accusations of involvement with US intelligence and drug-trafficking. His brother, Teodoro Petkoff, was also a senior PCV member and one of the founders of the Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Towards Socialism, MAS) in January 1971, which played a central role in the Venezuelan-DPRK solidarity movement of the 1970s and 1980s. The Petkoff brothers were second generation Bulgarian-Venezuelans, which may partly explain why, according to Jordan Baev, the FALN provides a rare case of Bulgarian government support for Latin American guerrillas. See Jordan Baev, "Bulgarian Military and Humanitarian Aid to Third World Countries: 1955-75," in Philip E. Muehlenbeck and Natalia Telepneva (eds), *Warsaw Pact Intervention in the Third World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 316-317.

³³⁰ Rodríguez, *Ida y Vuelta*, 299.

³³¹ "The Sino-Soviet split within the Communist Movement in Latin America," 101.

Following a Central Committee plenum in April 1964, the party's Secretary of International Relations, Eduardo Gallegos Mancera, was sent abroad to solicit further support for the guerrilla campaign, a process that led to meetings with not only Kim Il Sung, but also Ahmed Ben Bella, Mao Zedong, and Ho Chi Minh as well.³³² Details as to what kind of commitment Gallegos received from Kim in Pyongyang are unclear, although he recalled that Kim "treated me very fraternally,"³³³ adding, "we [the PCV] were supported by the Cuban, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese communist parties. So we gave them a lot of importance and consideration. There's things I can't talk about, but I had to consult with those parties."³³⁴ By contrast, US intelligence reported that when Gallegos stopped in Moscow he received only a "chilly reception."³³⁵

A series of defeats and setbacks throughout 1962-64, however, caused many in the PCV to question the ongoing viability of armed struggle. As the party returned to its traditional focus on mass organizing, a dissident faction led by guerrilla commander Douglas Bravo and supported by Cuba founded the Partido de la Revolución Venezolana (Venezuelan Revolutionary Party, PRV) in April 1966, replacing the PCV as the political nucleus of the FLN-FALN. With this rupture, gathering international support for the guerrilla struggle went to former army captain Elías Manuitt Camero, operating primarily from Havana. Manuitt secured a commitment of arms from Kim Il Sung to be transported via Cuba, which are likely the same ones captured by the Venezuelan authorities in May 1967. That month, Venezuelan troops attacked a group of

³³² "Eduardo Gallegos Mancera: ¡Comunista Ejemplar!," *Tribuna Popular* (Caracas), 21 May 2015.

³³³ Agustín Blanco Muñoz, *¡Comunista por siempre!: habla Eduardo Gallegos Mancera*, (Caracas: Catedra Pío Tamayo, 2009), 526-529.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 528-529.

³³⁵ "Foreign and Domestic Influences on the Venezuelan Communist Party, 1958-mid-1965," CIA Intelligence Report, (6 December 1965), 36, available at https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0001444580.pdf.

FALN guerrillas who had sailed from Cuba to Machurucuto, seventy miles east of Caracas. Two Cubans were killed and two were captured, along with a cache of North Korean arms.³³⁶

The changing contours of the FLN-FALN's international support network provide insight into how politics and personalities complicated the North Korean vision of a united front against imperialism. While China provided guerrilla warfare training to PCV militants in the early 1960s, US intelligence assessed that financial support was not forthcoming. As the FLN-FALN under Douglas Bravo vowed to carry on the guerrilla struggle in 1966, its leaders complained of "many problems" with the Chinese, indicating that assistance was offered only on the condition that the Venezuelans publicly endorse their anti-Soviet stance, something they were unwilling to do.³³⁷ Likewise, an MIR delegation to Beijing the same year was encouraged to maintain the armed struggle, but was declined material support.³³⁸ Undoubtedly, the FLN-FALN's close ties to Cuba affected the attitude of Chinese leaders, who, by this time, had denounced the Cuban leadership as revisionists and pawns of Moscow. Former guerrilla Francisco Prado claims that animosity between Fidel and Houari Boumédiène in the later half of the 1960s disrupted a shipment of arms from North Vietnam that needed to pass through Algeria.³³⁹ While Cuba had been the most important supporter of the FLN-FALN both before and after its break with the PCV – the CIA estimated some four hundred Venezuelan guerrillas were trained in Cuba by the end of 1964³⁴⁰ – problems developed in this relationship as well. By 1967 there was sharp tension between Bravo's forces and its Cuban military advisors over matters of strategy and

³³⁶ Michael Ratner and Michael Steven Smith (eds), *El Che Guevara y la FBI* (Mexico City, Siglo Vientiuno Editores, 2000), 330.

³³⁷ "The Sino-Soviet split within the Communist Movement in Latin America," 101.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Alberto Garrido, *Guerrilla y conspiración militar en Venezuela* (Caracas: Fondo Editorial Nacional, 1999), 85-87.

³⁴⁰ "Foreign and Domestic Influences on the Venezuelan Communist Party, 1958-mid-1965," 31-32.

Cuba's perceived "paternalism,"³⁴¹ exacerbated by increasingly apparent ideological differences. Cuban material support declined, and all Cuban military advisors were recalled in August 1969. Bravo accused Fidel of betraying the Venezuelan revolution.³⁴²

But as Cuban support evaporated, the FALN was able to continue to rely on North Korea. The relationship solidified with a visit to Pyongyang by PRV leaders Douglas Bravo, Argelia Melet, and Diego Salazar Luongo.³⁴³ According to Michael Radu and Vladimir Tismaneanu, scholars connected to the US foreign policy establishment, FALN fighters undertook military training in North Korea, received arms from North Korea and North Vietnam, and the organization was one of the few to have permanent representation in Pyongyang during the 1960s.³⁴⁴ The Seoul-based publication *Vantage Point*, which often sourced information from South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS), claimed in 1978 that the FLN-FALN had received 50,000 dollars in financing from Pyongyang.³⁴⁵

The FLN-FALN's close relationship with North Korea might, in part, be explained by the degree of ideological consensus between the PRV and the KWP. PRV leaders had become deeply critical of Soviet socialism, especially after the invasion of Czechoslovakia in October 1968, developing a theory that both superpowers represented two sides of Western-industrial imperialism.³⁴⁶ Rejecting Leninist, Maoist, and Cuban revolutionary strategy as unsuited to Venezuelan conditions, the PRV developed its own theory of the "civil-military alliance"

³⁴¹ Garrido, *Guerrilla y conspiración*, 90.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 91-92.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁴⁴ Michael Radu and Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Latin American Revolutionaries: Groups, Goals, Methods*, (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1990), 363.

³⁴⁵ "DPRK Assists Terrorists Groups," *Vantage Point* 1, no. 6 (October 1978): 18.

³⁴⁶ Douglas Bravo and Argelia Melet, *La Otra Crisis: Otra Historia, Otra Camino* (Caracas: OriJinal Editores, 1991), 55-59,

(alianza cívico-militar)³⁴⁷ and the “combined insurrection” (insurrección combinada) as the basis of its guerrilla struggle. At the heart of the PRV project was an effort to “nationalize guerrilla thought,”³⁴⁸ to create a uniquely Venezuelan revolutionary praxis in synch with the beliefs and aspirations of the broad masses. What they termed “Marxismo-Leninismo-Bolivarianismo” drew on symbols of the country’s indigenous and African heritage, claimed lineage to Venezuela’s national heroes like Simón Bolívar (1783-1830), Simón Rodríguez (1769-1854) and Ezequiel Zamora (1817-60), and articulated the revolution as part of a broader historical struggle of Venezuelan patriots against foreign domination. The clear parallels here to Chuch’e Sasang suggest North Korea bore some influence on such ideas, and it is probably not a coincidence that the Venezuelan DPRK-solidarity movement of the 1970s and 1980s was led by veterans of the 1960s insurgency. These efforts to find a “third way” led some former FALN leaders to some interesting ideological detours in later years, blending Marxism and Venezuelan nationalism with anarchism, primitivism, and Christianity, and baring some influence on the Bolivarian Revolution launched in 1999.

The Venezuelan insurgency of the 1960s was one of the bloodiest in Latin America. FALN operations frequently targeted US representatives and investments: guerrillas bombed the US embassy in Caracas, sabotaged oil pipelines and other property of US multinationals, and in October 1963, kidnapped US Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Michael Smolen. The state responded with a brutal counter-insurgency campaign backed by massive US assistance, with Venezuela receiving more economic and military aid per capita during the 1960s than any other country in Latin America.³⁴⁹ Following a series of defeats and the failure of a broader uprising

³⁴⁷ The concept of the “civil-military alliance” had older roots in the PCV of the late 1950s.

³⁴⁸ Alberto Garrido, *Guerrilla y Revolución Bolivariana: documentos* (Caracas: Ediciones del Autor, 2003), 13-14.

³⁴⁹ Hal Brands, “Reform, democratization, and counter-insurgency: evaluating the US experience in Cold War-era Latin America,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 22, no. 2 (2011): 296.

among the population to materialize, many guerrillas accepted President Rafael Caldera's offer of an amnesty in 1969. While some groups vowed to carry on the fight, prospects for a revolution in Venezuela in the immediate future appeared to end with the 1960s.

Colombia

When news of Batista's overthrow reached Colombia, the country was in the early days of what Kenneth F. Johnson called an "untried experiment in controlled democracy,"³⁵⁰ the Frente Nacional of 1958–74. The pact between the Liberal and Conservative parties to rotate power for four presidential terms was an effort to move beyond the decade-long civil war known as La Violencia, triggered by the assassination of reformist presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in April 1948. A young Fidel Castro, in fact, participated in the riots that exploded in Bogota when the news of Gaitán's assassination reached the airwaves. For the left, the Frente Nacional amounted to a dictatorship in which power was simply shared between two factions of the oligarchy. While Colombia would eventually become the site of the longest guerrilla insurgency in Latin America, the first group to heed Cuba's call to armed struggle was the Movimiento Obrero Estudiantil Campesino 7 de Enero (Worker-Student-Peasant Movement January 7, MOEC). The organization, which the CIA estimated had some 1,500 members at its peak in 1962,³⁵¹ was born in Bogota at the beginning of 1959 in a series of violent street protests against the city's decision to raise public transit fees. Its founding members were mostly radical university students galvanized by the Cuban Revolution, who viewed the country's established communist party as docile and bureaucratic. MOEC endorsed the Chinese stance against Soviet

³⁵⁰ Kenneth F. Johnson, "Political Radicalism in Colombia: Electoral Dynamics of 1962 and 1964," *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 7, no. 1 (Jan 1965): 17.

³⁵¹ "Foreign and Domestic Influences on the Colombian Communist Party, 1957-August 1966," CIA intelligence report, March 1967, 14, CREST electronic database, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland.

“revisionism,” and believed that the martyred Gaitán, who had attacked the oligarchy in the language of national pride and moral rejuvenation, could serve as the symbolic foundation of a distinctly Colombian revolutionary movement.

Inspired by the Cuban example and under pressure from state security forces, MOEC soon resolved to transition to a clandestine organization and prepare for armed insurrection. Their plan included forging links with the armed bandits who had fought in La Violencia, while also absorbing dissident elements of the Partido Comunista Colombiano (Colombian Communist Party, PCC) frustrated with their party’s commitment to legal struggle. While such efforts strengthened MOEC’s numbers and brought in much needed military experience, it also added to the group’s lack of ideological cohesion.³⁵²

In 1959 MOEC leader Antonio Larrota visited Cuba, where he met Che Guevara and secured an important source of financial support and military training. However, following Larrota’s death in May 1961, a series of failed attempts to launch *focos* in Antioquia, Vichada, Tolima, and Valle del Cauca, and the persistence of sharp divisions within the party, the Cubans re-evaluated MOEC’s long-term viability. By 1964 Havana had shifted its support to two other newly formed Colombian guerrilla groups, the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army, ELN) and the PCC-aligned Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC).³⁵³

Faced with the withdrawal of Cuban support, MOEC leader Eduardo Aristizábal approached the Chinese embassy in Havana for support, while another senior member, William

³⁵² Ricardo Franco Mendoza, *El MOEC 7 de Enero: Origen de la Guerrilla Revolucionaria en Colombia* (PhD diss., Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2012), 95-96.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 147-148.

Ospina, had consultations with officials at the Chinese and North Korean embassies in Paris.³⁵⁴ In 1964 MOEC members began visiting North Korea to take military training courses, and two years later the CIA estimated that approximately 150 of them had received training in either North Korea, North Vietnam, or China.³⁵⁵ Such outside support, however, soon became a source of controversy within the organization. According to former guerrillas, disputes erupted over the management of funds received from Cuba, North Korea and China, and allegations of embezzlement led to bitter in-fighting.³⁵⁶ As a result, in 1965 MOEC leader Francisco Mosquera successfully pushed a resolution that the party cease accepting financial aid from foreign governments, on the grounds that it had a corrupting influence on the leadership, and that “any revolutionary movement or party had to sustain itself through its own efforts or the support of the masses, and not depend on external agents, in order to guarantee its political independence.”³⁵⁷ Ironically, by adhering to this central tenet of North Korean revolutionary theory, MOEC chose to reject the support of North Korea. The culminative impact of these financial scandals and internal conflicts, combined with the murder and incarceration of much of the leadership by Colombian security forces, brought about MOEC’s effective dissolution at its Third Congress in October 1965. Mosquera and other former members went on to form the Movimiento Obrero Independiente y Revolucionario (Independent Revolutionary Labour Movement, MOIR) in 1969, which maintained ties with North Korea in subsequent decades.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 156-157

³⁵⁵ “Banditry and Insurgency in Colombia,” CIA Central Intelligence Weekly Special Report, 22 July 1966, 5, CREST electronic database, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland.

³⁵⁶ Franco Mendoza, *El MOEC 7 de Enero*, 157-158.

³⁵⁷ José Abelardo Díaz Jaramillo, “Del liberalismo al maoísmo: encuentros y desencuentros políticos en Francisco Mosquera Sánchez, 1958-1969,” *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura*, 38, no.1 (Jan/June 2011): 167.

The Dominican Republic

Five months following the fall of Batista, three boats carrying some 150 rebels landed on the northern coast of the Dominican Republic near San Felipe de Puerto Plata. The expeditionary force, consisting mostly of Dominicans who had been living in exile in Cuba, was joined by another contingent of sixty rebels dropped by plane in Constanza several days earlier.³⁵⁸ Cuban soldiers as well as young revolutionaries from across Latin America were amongst them. Although the Dominican army successfully repelled the invasion, it would not be the last Cuban effort to support revolution within the territory of its Caribbean neighbor. The country's debased military strongman, Rafael Trujillo,³⁵⁹ was a key ally of Fulgencio Batista, providing him arms during the revolution and sanctuary once he was driven out. Fidel, as a member of the Legión del Caribe,³⁶⁰ had been involved in anti-Trujillo activities as far back as the Cayo Confites expedition of 1947, an earlier failed scheme to invade the Dominican Republic from Cuba and overthrow the regime by armed force.

Prospects for change in the Dominican Republic altered on 30 May 1961, when Trujillo's thirty-year reign came to an abrupt end in a hail of bullets. Long supported by the United States, the reckless and defiant Trujillo had become a liability, and his assassins were aided by the CIA.³⁶¹ With Trujillo dead, power transferred to an interim council. The well-known novelist and opposition leader, Juan Emilio Bosch Gaviño (1909-2001), returned from exile in Cuba and led

³⁵⁸ Jonathan C. Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 65-67.

³⁵⁹ The thirty year reign of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molin is one of the darkest chapters in Latin American history. Trujillo personally ordered the widespread kidnapping, torture, and murder of his political opponents and personal enemies with apparent sadism, and orchestrated the massacre of an estimated 20,000-30,000 Haitian migrants in October 1937, known as "kout kouto-a" in Haiti and "the Parsley Massacre" in English sources.

³⁶⁰ The Caribbean Legion was a loose network of Latin American revolutionaries active in 1946-50, dedicated to overthrowing the region's dictators, like Rafael Trujillo.

³⁶¹ Stephen G. Rabe, "Eisenhower and the Overthrow of Rafael Trujillo," *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 6, no. 1 (Jan 1986): 38-41.

the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (Dominican Revolutionary Party, PRD) in the national elections of February 1963. Although capturing nearly sixty percent of the vote, Bosch's drafting of a new constitution and attempts to implement progressive reforms met opposition from the country's elites, who branded him a communist.³⁶² Seven months into his term Bosch was overthrown in a US-backed military coup, and again went into exile.

As Dominican democracy had proved illusory, dissenting factions within the military and elements of the PRD plotted to seize power by force. On 24 April 1965 a group of reformist officers staged their own coup, demanding the return of Bosch and the 1963 constitution. As rightist generals coordinating with the US embassy mobilized to resist, the rebel officers distributed arms and Molotov cocktails to the people of Santo Domingo. What began as a coup quickly transformed into a popular uprising, remembered today as the Dominican Civil War. President Lyndon B. Johnson deployed 23,000 troops to help the rightist military forces wrest control of Santo Domingo from the rebels, resulting in over four months of urban warfare that claimed some three thousand lives.³⁶³ When much of the rebellion's moderate leadership abandoned the rebellion as fighting escalated and the US intervened, defence of the capital shifted in large part to the radical left. One month into the uprising the CIA estimated there were about one thousand mostly teenaged guerrillas fighting in communist-led commando units.³⁶⁴

The importance that Pyongyang attributed to the Dominican uprising of 1965 is revealed by the strong attention it received in the North Korean press. Interviewed by Cuban journalist Gabriel Molina in July, Kim Il Sung described ongoing events as an "armed insurrection of the

³⁶² José A Moreno, *Barrios in Arms: Revolution in Santo Domingo* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970), 17-22.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 190.

³⁶⁴ "The Communist Role in the Dominican Rebel Movement, 16-27 May," CIA intelligence memorandum, 27 May 1965, 5, CREST electronic database, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland.

people to overthrow the military dictatorial power and achieve the liberty and democratization of the country,” while condemning the “blatant aggression” and “brutal intervention” of the United States.³⁶⁵ In fact, North Korea, alongside Cuba, China, and North Vietnam, took measures to aid two different revolutionary groups that played a major role in the 1965 uprising.

The Movimiento Popular Dominicano (Dominican Peoples’ Movement, MPD) was a pro-Chinese Communist Party originally established in February 1956 in Havana, in large part by militants expelled from their country’s main communist party, the Partido Socialista Popular (People’s Socialist Party, PSP).³⁶⁶ The Movimiento Revolucionario 14 de Junio (June 14 Revolutionary Movement, 1J4), also founded by exiles in Havana, was a broader-based left-nationalist coalition, including a strong PSP contingent, born of the failed invasion of 1959. Both groups had engaged in short-lived Cuban-style guerrilla insurrections following the September 1963 military coup. Based in Havana during the Trujillo reign, members of both organizations had also participated in the struggle against Batista. As a result they were deeply influenced by the Cuban model of revolution, and benefited from financial support, arms, and training under Fidel’s government.³⁶⁷

During 1964 both the MPD and 1J4 organized delegations to various socialist countries, including North Korea, China, North Vietnam, Albania, and the Soviet Union, to solicit support for an insurrection. Some of these contacts had been established earlier in August 1962, when the Federación Dominicana de Estudiantes (Dominican Federation of Students, FED) sent a

³⁶⁵ “Repuestas a las preguntas de Gabriel Molina, jefe de información del periódico ‘Hoy,’ y de otros periodistas cubanos,” in *Kim Il Sung, Repuestas a las preguntas de los corresponsales extranjeros* (Pyongyang: Ediciones en lenguas extranjeras, 1974), 82.

³⁶⁶ Renamed the Partido Comunista Dominicano (Dominican Communist Party, DCP) in 1965.

³⁶⁷ Cayetano A Rodríguez del Prado, *Notas Autobiográficas: Recuerdos de la Legión Olvidada* (Santo Domingo: Editora Búho, 2008), 295-297; “Communism in the Dominican Republic,” CIA report, 19 July 1965, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00472A000700050009-8.pdf>; “The Sino-Soviet split within the Communist Movement in Latin America,” 164-165.

delegation, including members of the MPD and PSP, to the seventh congress of the International Union of Students (IUS) in Leningrad.³⁶⁸ In the summer of 1964 MPD leaders Cayetano Rodríguez del Prado and Illander Selig approached the Chinese embassy in Paris, which facilitated their travel to Beijing in July with a complex itinerary that included Karachi, Bombay, Calcutta, Dhaka, and Bangkok. In Beijing they were granted an audience with Mao Zedong, who, like all the Chinese officials they met with, stressed the struggle against the revisionism of the Khrushchev-led CPSU.³⁶⁹

Despite the warm welcome the MPD delegation received, US intelligence reports from the time believed Chinese leaders showed clear preference for the 1J4 because of the latter's considerably larger following and combat experience.³⁷⁰ A 1J4 delegation to Beijing the same year was promised "unlimited support" by Mao, while North Korea and North Vietnam offered military training.³⁷¹ On their return journey the delegation was given twenty thousand dollars from the Chinese embassy in Paris.³⁷² The testimonies of former members confirm that there were numerous groups of 1J4 fighters trained in China and North Vietnam between 1964 and 1967,³⁷³ some of whom, in turn, acted as instructors at the military academy established by 1J4 within Santo Domingo's rebel-held zone, the Academia 24 de Abril.³⁷⁴ Regardless of how the Chinese leadership may have viewed the two Dominican revolutionary groups, once the uprising

³⁶⁸ Cayetano A Rodríguez del Prado, *Notas Autobiográficas: Recuerdos de la Legión Olvidada* (Santo Domingo: Editora Búho, 2008), 184.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.

³⁷⁰ "The Sino-Soviet split within the Communist Movement in Latin America," 165.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.* It is unclear if these offers to the 1J4 in Beijing were communicated through the Chinese or by representatives of the North Korean and North Vietnamese governments directly.

³⁷² *Ibid.*

³⁷³ Fidelio Despradel, *Fidelio: Memorias De Un Revolucionario*, Tomo II, (Archivo General de la Nación: Santo Domingo, 2015); Rafael Pérez Modesto, *Vivencias de un guerrillero: testimonio de un combatiente del frente "Juan de Dios Ventura Simó,"* 1st edition (Santo Domingo: Búho, 2008), 92-93; Tony Raful, *La Revolución de Abril de 1965* (Santo Domingo: Editorial Santo Domingo, 1985).

³⁷⁴ Guaroa Ubiñas Renville, *Un joven en la guerra de abril* (Santo Domingo: Editora Manatí, 2003), 158-159.

erupted in April 1965 it provided financial support, typically delivered via China's Parisian embassy, as well as military training, to both organizations.³⁷⁵ The CIA estimated that Chinese financial support for 1J4 during 1965 amounted to 137,000 dollars.³⁷⁶

External support for the MPD and 1J4 was complicated by the steady deterioration of Cuban-Sino relations during 1965-66. A 1967 CIA intelligence report describes a veritable soap opera in which Cuba and China fought over the allegiance of the MPD and 1J4, at times tactically withholding funding and inadvertently encouraging factionalism in both.³⁷⁷ In a July 1965 letter that was picked up by the international press and caused the Cuban leadership considerable embarrassment, MPD leader Máximo López Molina criticized Fidel for not doing more to support the Dominican rebels.³⁷⁸ However the letter was not supported by other MPD leaders, leading the party to fracture along pro-Cuban and pro-Chinese lines. In his memoirs, Cayetano Rodríguez relates the pressure the MPD was under from both Cuba and China as it attempted to maintain good relations with both parties. In Havana for the Tricontinental Conference in January 1966, Rodríguez found Fidel furious over López's comments, only to fly on to Beijing where Chou En-lai grilled him on the question of Cuba and Fidel's criticisms of the Chinese leadership.³⁷⁹

1J4's efforts to solicit support from the socialist camp led to a major internal schism in December 1965. That month leader Luis Genao Espaillat called on the party to expunge the communists in its ranks, reflecting the long-simmering tensions between Marxist-Leninists and left-wing nationalists that would formally split the organization in the years ahead. Genao had

³⁷⁵ "The Sino-Soviet split within the Communist Movement in Latin America," 165.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 168-71.

³⁷⁸ Cayetano A Rodríguez del Prado, *Notas Autobiográficas*, 295-297.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 308.

been in charge of soliciting financial support from socialist governments in 1964, and now claimed that, in his travels, which included North Korea, China, North Vietnam, Albania, and the Soviet Union, he had been awakened to the grim reality of life in these countries. Socialism was a “complete failure,” in which people toiled under an “ugly dictatorship.” Genao was denounced by the rest of the 1J4 leadership as a CIA agent, expelled from the party, and, in November 1967, hospitalized after a failed assassination attempt.³⁸⁰

In the aftermath of the 1965 uprising, with some groups rejecting the ceasefire and vowing to continue the struggle, North Korean connections continued to surface. During Albanian Prime Minister Mehmet Shehu’s 1966 visit to North Korea, the governments of the two countries issued a joint-statement pledging support and “active solidarity” with the Dominican Republic.³⁸¹ In January 1967, four MPD members were arrested at Punta Caucedo International Airport³⁸² as they attempted to fly to Cuba via Paris. Police claimed the party was carrying documents addressed to the communist parties of North Korea, Cuba, China, and Vietnam.³⁸³ One faction of the MPD, known as *Los Palmeros*, took to the countryside to launch a guerrilla war against the Balaguer government in the late 1960s. In a letter explaining the move, leader Amaury Germán Aristy said the decision was reached “after a long process of discussion, study,

³⁸⁰ See Carlos Martinez, “Ex-Dominican Red Describes Castro Role and Fund-Raising,” *Washington Post*, 12 May 1968; “Communists Dominate Dominican Party,” (17 January 1966), CIA Bi-weekly propaganda guidance, CREST electronic database, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland.

³⁸¹ “Albanian-Korean Joint Declaration,” 1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AQPPSH, MPP Korese, V. 1966, D 9. Translated by Enkel Daljani.
<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114408>.

³⁸² Today’s Las Américas International Airport.

³⁸³ Alejandro Paulino Ramos, “Desaparición de Henry Segarra Santos en los doce años de Balaguer,” *Acento*, 18 (November 2016), available at <https://acento.com.do/2016/cultura/8402371-desaparicion-henry-segarra-santos-los-doce-anos-balaguer>.

convincing and exchange of experiences” with their Cuban, Vietnamese, and Korean comrades.³⁸⁴

By this time, however, the prospects for revolution in the Dominican Republic had severely diminished. While a peace settlement and an interim government was established by the beginning of September 1965, the radical left emerged from the aborted revolution severely weakened. Internal conflicts drove the MPD to break into three factions,³⁸⁵ while the 1J4 coalition dissolved in 1968.³⁸⁶ In new elections held in July 1966, during which PRD activists were harassed and murdered by security forces, Bosch lost to the US-backed Joaquín Balaguer (1906-2002), a man who had previously served as Trujillo’s president and vice-president. Balaguer went on to unleash a wave of repression against his opposition. The military, police and right-wing death squads such as the infamous *La Banda*, were responsible for some 3000 murders and “disappearances” from 1966 to 1978,³⁸⁷ with most of the MPD leadership among the fallen.

In the aftermath of these years of tragedy and defeat, in October and November 1969, Juan Bosch traveled to Pyongyang at the invitation of Kim Il Sung. Also visiting China, North Vietnam, and Cambodia on his trip, Bosch claimed that the purpose of his journey was to see the reality of these societies with his own eyes. As he and his country had been the target of so many lies and slander in the Western press since he was elected president in 1963, he no longer

³⁸⁴ Despradel, *Fidelio: Memorias De Un Revolucionario*, 166-167.

³⁸⁵ Caonabo Jorge Tavárez, the leader of a MPD faction known as Voz Proletaria (Proletarian Voice), visited China in 1967 in search of continued support. Upon his return he was accused of being a CIA agent, and executed by former comrades in January 1969.

³⁸⁶ “Prospects for Stability in the Dominican Republic over the Next Year or So,” CIA National Intelligence Estimate No. 86.2-67 (20 April 1967): 7, CREST electronic database, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland.

³⁸⁷ Ernesto Sagás and Orlando Inoa (eds), *The Dominican People: A Documentary History* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers), 243; Ivelaw L Griffith, Betty N. Sedoc-Dahlberg (eds) *Democracy And Human Rights In The Caribbean* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

accepted at face value anything he read about life in the socialist bloc. At the Pyongyang guesthouse where he stayed Bosch was visited by Kim, who brought lunch which he served “with the naturalness with which you would treat a brother.”³⁸⁸ Bosch remembered Kim as “dressed simply in the characteristic of the socialist leaders of Asia: a simple suit, pants and black jacket, cloth cap, that in Santo Domingo a peasant wouldn’t wear out of fear of looking poor.”³⁸⁹ From his Pyongyang guesthouse, where images of atrocities committed by US soldiers during the Korean War brewed with his own bitter experiences of the decade, Bosch wrote a passionate denunciation of the United States government and the United Nations. The repugnant hypocrisy of the West, wrote Bosch, lie in how, in their crusade against the spectre of communism, they conveniently forgot their own revolutionary past. Western democracy and prosperity was forged in the fire of revolutions and civil wars. Yet now that those nations had crossed that bridge, they denied the right of the underdeveloped world to follow suit, to pursue its own hazardous journey towards modernity.³⁹⁰

We can only speculate if the friendship between Kim Il Sung and Juan Bosch explains the former’s enduring commitment to the Dominican Republic. According to US intelligence, up until Kim’s death in 1994 North Korea continued to support several left-wing organizations in the country, including the MPD, PSP, and the new party founded by Bosch in 1973, the Partido de la Liberación Dominicana (Dominican Liberation Party, PLD), as well as the left electoral coalition of the 1980s, Bloque Socialista (Socialist Bloc). What lasting influence North Korea had on Bosch’s political thought is addressed in Chapter Four.

³⁸⁸ Juan Bosch, *Viajes a las Antípodas*, first edition (Santo Domingo: Editoria Alfa y Omega, 1978) 49.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 16-20.

Peru

Since the 1920s the Peruvian left was distinguished by the role of the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (American People's Revolutionary Alliance, APRA), which occupied the political space typically held by communist parties in other Latin American countries. A uniquely Peruvian political phenomenon, APRA began with an essentially left-wing and nationalist platform that channeled popular resentment to US domination of the economy, advocating land reform and nationalization. However it was also characterized by an ideological flexibility corresponding to the stratagems of its charismatic leader, Víctor Haya de la Torre (1895-1979).³⁹¹ In the 1950s APRA's hold over its traditional base was threatened by the growing popularity of reformist leader Fernando Belaúnde (1912-2002) and his centre-left Acción Popular (AP) party. Although Haya de la Torre was elected president in June 1962, he failed to secure the one-third of the vote required by Peru's constitution, and was disposed in a military coup a month later. When Belaúnde won new elections in June 1963, Haya de la Torre made an anti-Belaúnde pact with the right-wing Unión Nacional Odriísta (Odriíst National Union, UNO). Through their combined majority in parliament and the senate, the APRA-UNO alliance was able to block the president's progressive legislation.³⁹²

Belaúnde's failure to implement meaningful reforms, APRA's shift to the right, and the influence of the Cuban Revolution resulted in an outflux of the party's younger members in search of a more radical project. The militant peasant union movement led by the Trotskyist Hugo Blanco in the late 1950s and early 1960s in La Convención province appeared to demonstrate the revolutionary potential of the peasantry. In 1962 two significant armed

³⁹¹ George D.E. Philip, *The Rise and Fall of the Peruvian Military Radicals, 1968-1976* (London: Athlone Press, 1978).

³⁹² Odriísta refers to the party's founder, Major-General Manuel Arturo Odría Amoretti (1896-1974).

movements inspired by the overthrow of Batista emerged in Peru: the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Left Movement, MIR) led by Luis de la Puente Uceda, and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army, ELN) led by Héctor Béjar, both of which benefited from training, arms, and financial support from the Cuban government.

The MIR was formed by the former *apristas* expelled from the party in 1959, and developed a platform that blended elements of foquismo and Maoism, leading to disagreements between them and their Cuban patrons. While adopting aspects of Mao's concepts of "new democracy," and "people's war," the MIR strategy envisioned a guerrilla war waged from the Andean mountains. De la Puente argued that while the subjective conditions for revolution were not yet apparent in Peru, "the beginning of the insurrectional process will be the triggering factor leading to their development in ways which no one can now foresee."³⁹³ Although different sources at the time gave wildly differing figures as to MIR strength in the 1960s, it likely commanded no more than around one hundred armed fighters at its peak.³⁹⁴ The ELN, on the other hand, was formed mostly by young former members of the Partido Comunista Peruano (Peruvian Communist Party, PCP), united by "a certain disdain for 'politics' in the narrow sense, and suspicion of any type of party organization."³⁹⁵ In contrast to the vanguardism of the MIR, the ELN sought to build a broad, grassroots insurrectionary movement that would appeal to the widest possible sector of the population.

³⁹³ Luis F. de la Puente Uceda, "The Peruvian Revolution: Concepts and Perspectives," *Monthly Review* 17, no. 6 (November 1965): 21.

³⁹⁴ Excerpt from Michael F. Brown and Eduardo Fernandez, *War of Shadows*, reprinted in *MRTA: History, Politics and Communiques* (Chicago: The Autonomous Zone, 1997), 11.

³⁹⁵ Héctor Béjar, *Peru 1965: Notes on a Guerrilla Experience* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 61.

Disagreements between the MIR and their Cuban advisors over issues of organization and strategy led the ELN to emerge as the favoured group.³⁹⁶ Cuba even attempted to forestall the MIR guerrillas' return to Peru in the hope that the ELN would spearhead the insurrection.³⁹⁷ Cuba's waning support for MIR motivated its leadership to seek alternate sources of support, establishing relations with the communist parties of China, North Korea, and Vietnam via their Havana embassies.³⁹⁸ In October 1963 De la Puente led a delegation to Pyongyang, where a group of MIR militants had already been undergoing military training. De la Puente and his comrades remained in Asia for two months, moving on to China and North Vietnam, and held meetings with Kim Il Sung, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, and Võ Nguyên Giáp.³⁹⁹ Although all three governments pledged their support for the MIR, US intelligence reports and the testimonies of former guerrillas concur that the lion's share of financial support came from China. About twenty MIR militants received military training in North Korea, where the use of firearms and wilderness survival was combined with courses in political theory.⁴⁰⁰ According to Jan Lust (2013), relying on oral testimonies of former guerrillas, each trainee was permitted to leave with a firearm, which they stitched into the linings of their jackets. Another thirty-fourty MIR militants

³⁹⁶ "The Sino-Soviet split within the Communist Movement in Latin America," 135; Jan Lust, *Lucha Revolucionaria: Perú, 1958-1967* (Barcelona: RBA Libros, 2013), 278-279. While multiple US intelligence documents from the time refer to Cuba's preference for the ELN over the MIR, former MIR guerrilla Ricardo Gadea, interviewed in 2016, paints a different picture. He claims that the MIR "opened relations of a quite diverse manner in the socialist and communist camp, and established a good relationship with China, a good relationship with Vietnam, a good relationship with Korea, without abandoning our original relationship with Cuba." See Luis Rodríguez Pastor, "Entrevista a Ricardo Gadea: Es una obligación rendir nuestro homenaje a De la Puente y Lobatón para que la izquierda pueda recuperar su capacidad revolucionaria," *Resbalosa y Fuga*, 7 January 2016, available at <https://resbalosayfuga.lamula.pe/2016/01/07/entrevista-a-ricardo-gadea-es-una-obligacion-rendir-nuestro-homenaje-a-de-la-puente-y-lobaton-para-que-la-izquierda-pueda-recuperar-su-capacidad-revolucionaria/luchitopastor>.

³⁹⁷ Lust, *Lucha Revolucionaria*, 278-279.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 280.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 280-281; Luis Rodríguez Pastor, "Entrevista a Ricardo Gadea."

⁴⁰⁰ Lust, *Lucha Revolucionaria*, 282-286; "The Sino-Soviet split within the Communist Movement in Latin America," 134.

received military training in China, and five in Vietnam.⁴⁰¹ MIR's international relations were handled by a committee in Paris, which also acted as kind of Ministry of Information, issuing press releases and arranging media interviews. Typically, militants reached Asia by first travelling to Argentina, flying onwards to Paris or Geneva, and, once the proper arrangements had been made, continuing to their final destinations via Marseilles, Zurich, or Prague.⁴⁰² As Sino-Soviet relations reached a low-point in the early-mid 1960s militants had to avoid the Soviet Union as a transit point, and De la Puente was convinced Moscow shared information concerning their travels to Asia with the United States government.⁴⁰³

In June 1965 the MIR commenced its insurrection with an attack on a mining centre near the town of Satipo in the Central Highlands.⁴⁰⁴ The MIR commanded three fronts, one in Piura province near the border with Ecuador, another in the Central highlands near Huancayo, and a third in La Convención that was also the site of its National Revolutionary Command.⁴⁰⁵ The ELN, meanwhile, operated in the Ayacucho region in the south-central Andes, where its activity focused on community outreach and armed actions against the much-hated landowners. As additional guerrilla attacks on rural and urban targets followed over the next two months, Belaúnde felt compelled to respond with force. He suspended the constitution and gave free-reign to the military, which unleashed a brutal counter-insurgency operation. In contrast to the Cuban experience, Peruvian guerrillas faced a highly professional military with advanced training in counter-insurgency. In many cases the guerrillas, generally urbanites who could not speak the indigenous Quechua dialects of the highlands, failed to gain the support of local

⁴⁰¹ Lust, *Lucha Revolucionaria*, 282-286.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 285-288.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 285-286.

⁴⁰⁴ Richard Walter, *Peru and the United States, 1960-1975* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 69-70.

⁴⁰⁵ MRTA: *History, Politics and Communiques*, 11-12.

peasants. Throughout the final months of 1965 the Peruvian military overwhelmed the four main guerrilla zones and effectively exterminated both the MIR and ELN. Peasants suspected of supporting the guerrillas were tortured and executed. An estimated 8,000 civilians were killed in the counter-insurgency, and twice that many were displaced.⁴⁰⁶

Brazil

In September 1961, João Goulart (1918-76) of the left-wing Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (Brazilian Labour Party, PTB) became Brazil's twenty-fourth president following the sudden resignation of his conservative rival, Jânio Quadros (1917-92). Goulart faced a country in crisis: massive disparities in income, land ownership and education, a highly dependent economy plagued by inflation, archaic labour laws, and growing political violence. Although initially hampered by a restrictive political system engineered by his opponents, a January 1963 national plebiscite restored his presidential powers, giving new potential to his reformist ambitions. Goulart gained the hostility of both the Brazilian right and the United States government as he pursued nationalist economic policies, defied US-led efforts to isolate Cuba, welcomed delegations from socialist countries, and attempted to bypass an obstructionist congress. In the Brazilian countryside, the militant *ligas camponêsas* (peasant leagues) led by Francisco Julião and Clodomir Santos de Moraes had become a powerful force and received financial support from both Cuba and China.⁴⁰⁷ As Goulart's policies proved increasingly unacceptable to Washington, the Johnson administration conspired with opposition forces to stage a military coup, which toppled Goulart's government in March-April 1964.

⁴⁰⁶ Walter, *Peru and the United States*, 71.

⁴⁰⁷ Jonathan C. Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 289-291.

The new regime immediately unleashed a wave of repression against the left.⁴⁰⁸ “Operação Limpeza” (Operation Clean-up) targeted not only communist organizations but student and Catholic groups, labour unions, the peasant leagues, and suspected leftists within the military. While the government did not maintain statistics, Thomas Skidmore (1989) estimates between ten and fifty thousand Brazilians were arrested in the early days of the coup. Brutal torture methods were widely used during the interrogation of prisoners. Additionally, the regime formally suspended the constitutional rights of 441 Brazilian politicians, civil servants, labour organizers, military officers, and academics, effectively purging state institutions and nullifying any avenue for legal opposition.⁴⁰⁹ The generals also sounded the alarm on alleged foreign communist activity in the country. Immediately after seizing power the government outlawed the Brazil-Korea Friendship Society and arrested nine Chinese nationals who were charged with subversion and espionage.⁴¹⁰ Not surprisingly, in the aftermath of the 1964 coup many on Brazil’s left concluded that clandestine armed struggle was the only realistic path forward. Cuba immediately took efforts to support the newly emerging wave of insurgency, and Brazilian militants belonging to a host of different factions travelled to Havana to receive guerrilla warfare training.

North Korea had long-standing ties to the Partido Comunista Brasileiro (Brazilian Communist Party, PCB), stemming from the latter’s role in opposing its country’s participation in the Korean War. In March 1962 *Rodong Sinmun* celebrated the party’s fortieth anniversary, praising how it had “unswervingly led the masses,” earning their “deep respect and trust” and

⁴⁰⁸ Thomas E. Skidmore, *The Politics of Military Rule in Brazil, 1966-85* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 24.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

⁴¹⁰ The Sino-Soviet split within the Communist Movement in Latin America,” 159, fn.

“brought to a new high the anti-US struggle.”⁴¹¹ The editorial also recognized the “great support and encouragement extended by the Brazilian Communist Party and working people to the Korean people during the Korean war through an active struggle against the aggression of US imperialism in Korea and its atrocities, and against the dispatch of troops to Korea by the Brazilian government.”⁴¹² However, given North Korea’s close ties to China and firm anti-revisionist stance during 1962-64, Pyongyang had to simultaneously recognize the rival, pro-Chinese Partido Comunista do Brasil (Communist Party of Brazil, PCdoB) established in January 1962.⁴¹³ In May 1963 PCdoB leaders from Sao Paulo visited North Korea and Albania⁴¹⁴ and upon their return established the Brazil-Korea Friendship Society.⁴¹⁵ While the Soviet-aligned PCB resisted calls for armed struggle and the PCdoB relied primarily on China for support, North Korea aided two newly formed revolutionary organizations that claimed loyalty to neither party: the Ação Libertadora Nacional (National Liberation Action, ALN) and Vanguarda Popular Revolucionária (People’s Revolutionary Vanguard, VPR).

The ALN, led by the famous Brazilian communist Carlos Marighella, was founded in 1967 by former PCB members who broke with the party following the OLAS conference in Havana in July-August of that year.⁴¹⁶ Like the ELN in Peru, the ALN adopted the position that the traditional concept of the Marxist-Leninist vanguard party was unsuited for Brazilian conditions. Rather, a non-sectarian guerrilla movement would spearhead the revolution, and the

⁴¹¹ “Paper Marks Brazilian CP Anniversary,” KCNA in English 25 March 1962, *Daily Report: Foreign Radio Broadcasts*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Washington) 26 March 1962.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ The Sino-Soviet split within the Communist Movement in Latin America,” 158.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 158-159.

⁴¹⁵ Valter Pomar, *Comunistas do Brasil Interpretações sobre a cisão de 1962* (MA thesis, Universidade de São Paulo, 2000), 198; Manwoo Lee, “North Korea and Latin America,” in Jae Kyu Park, Byung Chul Koh, Taw-Hwan Kwak (eds) *The Foreign Relations of North Korea: New Perspectives* (1987): 420.

⁴¹⁶ Skidmore, *The Politics of Military Rule in Brazil*, 86.

future vanguard would emerge organically during the course of the struggle.⁴¹⁷ The ALN developed a strategy heavily focused on urban guerrilla warfare, in which clandestine combat units operating in Brazil's major urban centres would strike at the nerve centres of political and economic power. While the state could encircle and concentrate its forces on a single rebel army, a vast network of small, autonomous armed cells in the large and dense cities would prove agile and resilient against counter-insurgency. An intense campaign of armed actions and expropriations would amass money and arms while tying down the military in the urban zones, thus giving oxygen to the rural insurgency which would gradually develop a "revolutionary army for national liberation" capable of seizing power.⁴¹⁸ Generally regarded as the largest and most successful of the Brazilian guerrilla groups, the ALN, at its peak, commanded some two-hundred fighters.⁴¹⁹

Sometime in 1969 ALN members Joaquim Câmara Ferreira and Aloysio Ferreira Filho approached the North Korean embassy in Paris to solicit support for their guerrilla campaign.⁴²⁰ Relations between the ALN and the North Korean government were also facilitated through Havana, and in November 1970 ALN leader Ricardo Zarattini was invited to Pyongyang on the occasion of the KWP's fifth party congress.⁴²¹ During his visit Zarattini was asked by his North Korean hosts to deliver a speech, but was annoyed by their insistence he include effusive praise of President Kim. "It was tremendous idolatry," he told a Brazilian journalist decades later.⁴²²

⁴¹⁷ Jean Rodrigues Sales, "A Ação Libertadora Nacional, a revolução cubana e a luta armada no Brasil," *Tempo*, 14, no. 27 (2009): 211.

⁴¹⁸ Carlos Marighella, "Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla" (1969), available at the Marxist Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marighella-carlos/1969/06/minimanual-urban-guerrilla/index.htm>.

⁴¹⁹ Radu and Tismaneanu, *Latin American Revolutionaries*, 22.

⁴²⁰ Marcelo Godoy, "ALN ganhou dólares e deu rolex a Kim Il-sung," *O Estado de S. Paulo* (São Paulo) online, 12 September 2009, available at <https://politica.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,aln-ganhou-dolares-e-deu-rolex-a-kim-il-sung,433927>.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Ibid.

The former guerrilla, Carlos Eugênio Paz, claims that the North Korean government shipped fifty thousand US dollars to ALN contacts in Sao Paulo in 1971, intended to help the group establish a successful rural front.⁴²³ The ALN showed their gratitude by sending Kim Il Sung a letter of thanks and a gold Rolex watch after they robbed a São Paulo jewelry store.⁴²⁴ A plan was also agreed upon in which fourteen ALN militants stationed in Havana would undergo military training in North Korea, while an additional ten would do the same in North Vietnam. However the ALN militants selected to go rejected the plan, convinced they needed to return immediately to Brazil to resume the struggle.⁴²⁵

The origins of the VPR, by contrast, lie in the Organização Revolucionária Marxista - Política Operária (Marxist Revolutionary Organization – Workers’ Politics, POLOP), an independent socialist party formed in 1961 by activists in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Minas Gerais influenced by Trotskyism and the ideas of Rosa Luxembourg. Following the military coup of 1964, dissident factions explored the adaptability of the Cuban foquista strategy to Brazil. POLOP leader Ernesto Martins (an alias of Eric Sachs), for example, attempted to bridge traditional workplace-based tactics with foquismo, proposing a strategy in which militant labour action in the cities could act in tandem with rural-based guerrillas.⁴²⁶ One Cuban-influenced dissident faction of POLOP established links with radicalized soldiers within the Brazilian military to form the VPR in December 1968. Again, its political line was a kind of compromise between traditional Leninism and the Cuban vision outlined in the OLAS conference of 1967. It held that capitalism had reached a level of development in Brazil that meant the revolution

⁴²³ Carlos Eugênio Paz, *Nas Trilhas da ALN* (Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 1997), 127.

⁴²⁴ Godoy, “ALN ganhou dólares e deu rolex a Kim Il-sung.”

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Jacob Gorender, *Combate nas Trevas - A Esquerda Brasileira: das ilusões perdidas a luta armada section* (São Paulo: Editora Atica, 1998).

would be proletarian-socialist in character, and rejected the Third Worldist concept of a “national liberation” struggle mandating a broad “patriotic” alliance across class lines. However it concurred that the Cuban Revolution had proven the central role of a rural-based guerrilla insurgency under Latin American conditions. At its peak the VPN consisted of approximately two-hundred militants, about fifty of whom were full-time guerrillas.⁴²⁷

In the early 1970s, a group of VPN exiles based in Santiago de Chile sought and secured a commitment of support from the North Korean embassy in Havana. Nine members travelled to Pyongyang via Canada, Morocco and Moscow for a three-month training course.⁴²⁸ In a training camp outside of Pyongyang, the Brazilians were trained by Spanish-speaking KPA officers in guerrilla warfare tactics including the use of automatic rifles and explosives as well as field medicine. Trainees also attended political education classes which included watching North Korean films translated into Spanish by course instructors. The North Korean government also provided the VPN with some degree of financial support.⁴²⁹

The urban guerrillas of the ALN, VPN and several other factions distinguished themselves through a series of dramatic military operations, including direct attacks on the Brazilian army, the assassination of US Army Captain Charles Chandler – executed for his war crimes in Vietnam, according to the VPN – and the kidnapping of the US ambassador to Brazil, Charles Elbrick. Yet, by 1971, most of the leaders of these groups were dead – killed in battle or tortured to death in prison – and the organizations they led fatally debilitated. Neither the ALN nor the VPN succeeded in making major headway towards their longer-term objective of building the rural front that they themselves maintained was essential. Brazilian guerrillas

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Godoy, “Coreia treina guerrilha brasileira.”

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

underestimated the power of the regime's highly efficient, technologically sophisticated security apparatus and spy network, and its now notorious predilection for the most horrific methods of torture. Nor did the guerrillas' daring campaign of bank robberies, assassinations, bombings, and kidnappings spark a broader uprising among the population, an outcome upon which their strategy was predicated. When the VPN militants trained in North Korea returned to Santiago de Chile in 1972, the group's network within Brazil had been largely decimated, while its membership in exile was torn into three competing factions. Subsequently, the original plan of infiltrating back into Brazil to launch a new phase of the guerrilla insurgency evaporated.⁴³⁰

Guatemala

Che Guevara once described Guatemala as "the first Latin American nation to raise its voice fearlessly against colonialism, and to express the cherished desires of its peasant masses, through a deep and courageous agrarian reform."⁴³¹ In June 1944 Guatemalan dictator Jorge Ubico (1878-1946) resigned in the face of a general strike and massive anti-government protests. His provisional replacement, Federico Ponce (1889-1956), was toppled in a popular uprising in October. This led the way to the landside election victory of Juan José Arévalo (1904-90) in March 1945. Guided by a philosophy he called he called "socialismo espiritual" (spiritual

⁴³⁰ While the ALN and VPN were defeated during 1969-1971, the Maoist PCdoB carried out its own plans for an armed insurrection that could topple the military regime. Between 1964 and 1966 select party members travelled to China to undertake training courses in guerrilla warfare. During 1966-67 these future combatants began quietly settling in the Araguaia river region in the southeast of Pará state, a process accelerated in 1969 as the state's counter-insurgency efforts in the cities intensified. The PCdoB rejected the foquismo of Brazil's other guerrilla groups, and instead attempted to adapt Maoist revolutionary strategy to Brazilian conditions. The party would establish a liberated zone in the impoverished, rural northeast, building a people's army as it won over the local peasants, in preparation for a "protracted people's war." As Brazil was still a "semi-feudal" country, the revolution would not be proletarian-socialist in character, but anti-imperialist and democratic, mandating a broad united front led by the Marxist-Leninist vanguard. However this initial phase of solidifying a foundation from which to launch the people's war was cut short when the Brazilian authorities learned of the incipient guerrilla bases in 1972. With some seventy-two fighters divided into three fronts, the Araguaia guerrillas resisted the Brazilian military's siege operation for two years, but by March 1974 had been virtually eliminated.

⁴³¹ Che Guevara, "Speech to the First Latin American Youth Congress," 28 July 1960, available at the Marxist Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1960/07/28.htm>.

socialism), Arévalo undertook a program of popular reforms, a process continued and radicalized under his successor, Jacobo Árbenz. Citing the threat of communist infiltration in the Western hemisphere, the United States government conspired with domestic opposition to invade the country from Honduras and Nicaragua in June 1954 with a mercenary force trained and funded by the CIA. American planes bombed the capital and napalmed a British vessel loaded with Guatemalan coffee and cotton. With Árbenz's forced resignation, Colonel Castillo Armas (1914-57) was installed as president, unleashing a wave of repression against the left and setting about dismantling the reforms of the previous ten years.⁴³²

Che was in Guatemala City during the invasion, an experience that would have a deep impact on his evolving political perspective. The lesson Guatemala provided for all revolutionaries, Che said, was the need to “decapitate with one strike those who held power, as well as the henchmen serving them.”⁴³³ The historical memory of the gains made during 1944-54, combined with the example of the Cuban Revolution, would animate the political visions of a new Guatemalan resistance in the 1960s⁴³⁴. In November 1960, dissident military officers staged an uprising against incumbent president Miguel Ydígoras (1895-1982). Although unsuccessful, survivors of the failed insurrection regrouped, with Cuban support and some one hundred fighters, to launch the Movimiento Revolucionario 13 de Noviembre (November 13 Revolutionary Movement, MR-13) in February 1962. The guerrillas gained the support of Guatemala's main communist party, the Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo (Guatemalan Labour Party, PGT) and during 1962 other groups joined the call to arms. Radical university students from the University of San Carlos formed the Movimiento Revolucionario 12 de Abril (April 12

⁴³² Susanne Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and US Power* (Boulder, San Francisco, & Oxford: Westview Press, 1991), 64-65.

⁴³³ Guevara, “Speech to the First Latin American Youth Congress.”

⁴³⁴ Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala*, 66-66.

Revolutionary Movement, MR-12), while militants from the PGT's youth wing formed the Movimiento Revolucionario 20 de Octubre (October 20 Revolutionary Movement, MR-20). By the end of the year these groups had joined forces in a united guerrilla front, the Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (Rebel Armed Forces, FAR) under the political guidance of the PGT.

FAR's military leadership was headed by former army lieutenant Antonio Yon Sosa and former sub-lieutenant Luis Turcios Lima, who drew inspiration from the Cuban and Vietnamese models of rural guerrilla warfare.⁴³⁵ While attempting to fortify a liberated zone in the northeastern departments of Izabal and Zacapa, they raided police and military bases, kidnapped and assassinated government officials, US military advisors, and other prominent foreigners, and funded themselves through bank robberies. However, FAR's potential was undercut early on by internal divisions. By late 1964 the guerrillas had become increasingly critical of the PGT's leadership, which saw FAR as the armed wing of the party and playing an essentially auxiliary role to a broad civilian movement. These tensions nurtured the influence of the Mexican Trotskyist group, the Partido Obrero Revolucionario-Trotskista (Revolutionary Worker Party-Trotskyite, PRO-T), members of which had joined FAR.⁴³⁶ The PRO-T adhered to the Posadista tendency that rejected both Soviet revisionism and Cuban foquismo and adopted a pro-Chinese position following the Sino-Soviet split.⁴³⁷ A new Trotskyist-Posadista tendency under Yon Sosa refuted the idea that Guatemalan conditions called for a broad alliance of all "patriotic" sectors in favour of a more classic Leninist conception of socialist revolution led by a worker-peasant

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 67.

⁴³⁶ Carlos A. Abarca, "Guatemala: El Movimiento Revolucionario 13 de Noviembre," 2 November 2018, available at <https://www.lahaine.org/mundo.php/guatemala-el-movimiento-revolucionario-13>.

⁴³⁷ The Posadistas were named after their leader, the Argentine J. Posadas (an alias of Homero Rómulo Cristalli Frasnell, 1912-81). The Posadistas began as the Latin American Bureau of the Fourth International. When that organization broke into four rival factions in 1966-63, Posadismo became the dominant Trotskyist tendency in Latin America. See Robert J. Alexander, *Trotskyism in Latin America* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Publications, 1973).

alliance.⁴³⁸ This would not be primarily a military struggle, however: the guerrillas would play a largely social and political role, solidifying a base of support in the countryside in preparation for a mass civilian uprising. The MR-13 was split between Yon Sosa's Trotskyist-Posadista tendency and those led by Turcios who maintained an adherence to the Cuban model. Turcios was able to demand significant concessions from the PGT, leading to the formation of a second FAR in March 1965 that excluded Yon Sosa's MR-13, and was directed by a joint political-military command committed to guerrilla war. However tensions between guerrillas and the communist old guard persisted, leading the second FAR to formally break with the PGT in January 1968. This facilitated a temporary reincorporation of Yon Sosa's MR-13 into the guerrilla front, the former having since expelled its Trotskyist-Posadista faction over misuse of funds. The alliance was short-lived, however, as ongoing internal differences were exacerbated by the pressures of the state's counter-insurgency campaign.

In early 1968, in the midst of these ongoing factional struggles, FAR commander César Montes (an alias of Julio César Macías) led a delegation to North Vietnam and North Korea. As mentioned in Chapter One, the KWP had previously established linkages to the PGT during the 1950s, and North Korean officials had likely met Jacobo Árbenz in Cuba. Montes' trip was arranged through the North Korean embassy in Havana, visiting Hanoi first via Beijing and Moscow.⁴³⁹ In Pyongyang Montes had several meetings with members of the Political Bureau of the KWP's Central Committee, who "did not hesitate for a single moment to offer their solid support to the Guatemalan guerrillas."⁴⁴⁰ The North Korean government was willing to provide

⁴³⁸ David A. Crain, "Guatemalan Revolutionaries and Havana's Ideological Offensive of 1966-1968," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 17, no. 2 (May, 1975): 183.

⁴³⁹ Julio César Macías, *La Guerrilla fue mi camino: Epitafio para César Montes* (Guatemala: Editorial Piedra Santa, 2008), 184.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 207.

economic support and “all the arms they needed,” which they assured they could have delivered to Guatemala.⁴⁴¹ However, such support was conditional on the FAR resolving their internal divisions and proving their readiness for the tasks ahead. “The Korean message had no subterfuge, it was plain and frank” recalled Montes: FAR must first “consolidate internally” and achieve “support and influence at a national level.”⁴⁴² It was advised the Guatemalan revolutionary movement heed the lessons of Korea’s anti-Japanese struggle: “They had to be based in their own forces, think with their own head, and perform with Ch’öllima speed.”⁴⁴³ As a result, Montes left Pyongyang, “carrying grand promises but not one cent, one bullet, or one rifle.”⁴⁴⁴ However, a small group of FAR guerrillas remained in the country to undertake military training courses before returning to Guatemala.⁴⁴⁵

Montes’ visit to Pyongyang, however, came during the final days of the FAR. In fact, its prospects for victory had been seriously in doubt since 1966, when Commander Turcios was killed in a car accident, the PGT backed away from armed struggle, and the guerrillas suffered major losses in combat. A US military mission headed by Colonel John D. Weber (assassinated by FAR in January 1968), coupled with a massive influx of US military hardware, played a central role in the state’s vicious counter-insurgency campaign. These operations claimed some 8,000 civilian casualties as the Guatemalan army brutally punished rural communities seen as sympathetic to the guerrillas. By 1976 the number of civilians killed or disappeared had risen to 20,000.⁴⁴⁶ It is possible that North Korean knowledge of the FAR’s dim outlook influenced

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 208.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala*, 68; William Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*, second impression (London: Zed Books, 2004), 232.

Pyongyang's decision to withhold major support. The Guatemalan government declared victory by the end of the 1968, although remnants of the FAR held out into the 1970s.⁴⁴⁷

Mexico

While obtaining thorough details regarding North Korean support for Latin American guerrillas is generally challenging, scholars have access to considerably more data in the case of Mexico's Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Action Movement, MAR). In February and March 1971 a series of police raids captured nineteen members of the groups in Xalapa, Acapulco, Pachuca, and Mexico City. Documents seized and interrogations of captives resulting from these raids and subsequent crackdowns during the 1970s revealed many details of the group's relationship with North Korea. Moreover, Mexican scholarly interest in the group has resulted in a robust body of literature based on documents available in the Mexican General National Archive and interviews with former members.⁴⁴⁸ This perhaps makes MAR the most helpful case study available regarding North Korean support for Latin American revolutionaries.

MAR was founded during 1965-66 in Moscow by a small group of Mexican scholarship students studying at the Patrice Lumumba People's Friendship University.⁴⁴⁹ Like other young Latin American radicals of the era they had become disillusioned with the Soviet Union, but

⁴⁴⁷ Abarca, "Guatemala: El Movimiento Revolucionario 13 de Noviembre."

⁴⁴⁸ Fernando Pineda Ochoa, *En las profundidades del MAR: El oro no llegó de Moscú* (Ciudad de México: Plaza y Valdez, 2003); Verónica Oikión and María Eugenia García (eds), *Movimientos armados en México, siglo XX*, vol. 2, (Zamora: Colegio de Michoacán-CIESAS, 2006); Enrique Condés Lara, *Represión y rebelión en México*, Vol. III (México: Benemérita Universidad de Puebla Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2009); Veronica Oikion Solano, "In the Vanguard of the Revolution: the Revolutionary Action Movement and the Armed Struggle," in Fernand Calderon and Adela Cedillo (eds) *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico: Revolutionary Struggles and the Dirty War, 1964-1982* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Carlos Fernando López de la Torre, "Miguel Nazar Haro y la guerra sucia en México," *Revista Gafía*, 10, no. 1 (January-June 2013): 56-72; Alejandro Peñaloza Torres, "Recordar tras la derrota. Memoria de ex militantes armados en las décadas de 1960 y 1970 en México," *Historia, Voces y Memoria*, no. 9 (2016): 61-73.

⁴⁴⁹ Alejandro Peñaloza Torres, "Recordar tras la derrota. Memoria de ex militantes armados en las décadas de 1960 y 1970 en México" *Historia, Voces y Memoria*, no. 9 (2016).

found inspiration in the Cuban Revolution and Vietnam's war of national liberation. As the group expanded in subsequent years, most recruits were middle-class university students and young professionals radicalized by the Tlatelolco massacre of October 1968, in which security forces opened fire on students in Mexico City, killing hundreds. Many had a past in the youth arm of the Partido Comunista Mexicano (Communist Party of Mexico, PCM). The largest block came from the states of Michoacán and Chihuahua, and approximately one fifth of the members were women.⁴⁵⁰

An initial bid for Cuban support was unsuccessful. Mexico, along with Canada, was one of two countries in the Western hemisphere that maintained bilateral relations with the island, despite US pressure. The Cuban government highly valued such support and therefore maintained a policy of withholding aid to armed groups within the country (similarly, in December 1970 Cuba gave refuge, but denied military training to members of the Québécois sovereigntist group, the Front de Libération du Québec). Overtures to the governments of North Vietnam and Algeria were also unsuccessful. The support of the Chinese government was not pursued because "they aimed to convert us, first, into disseminators of the *Peking Review* and Mao Zedong thought" in the words of one former guerrilla.⁴⁵¹ The Cubans, however, offered to introduce MAR members to officials of the North Korean embassy in Moscow, who, following a series of discussions, agreed to provide the organization with military training.

Between early 1969 and mid 1970, a total of fifty-three MAR members traveled to North Korea for periods of six to twelve months. In the circuitous route devised, they flew first to West Berlin, then passed into East Berlin where the local North Korean embassy held their passports

⁴⁵⁰ Fernando Pineda Ochoa, *En las Profundidades del Mar: el Oro no Llegó de Moscú* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdes, 2003), 50-51.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

and provided them with North Korean ones; from there they continued by Aeroflot or train to Moscow, before a final flight to Pyongyang.⁴⁵² In North Korea, their training included political theory in which they studied Chuch'e Sasang, the anti-Japanese struggle, the Korean War, and were made well aware of the KWP's disagreements with the Soviet and Chinese communist parties (one trainee recalled "it was impossible to be pro-Soviet and receive military training in North Korea."⁴⁵³) Their training also stressed morality and constant personal improvement: "to be better day by day, understanding the qualities of simplicity, honesty, *compañerismo*, respect for the workers, the marginalized and oppressed, and at the same time to understand the necessity to hate all forms of injustice."⁴⁵⁴ According to former MAR member Fernando Pineda Ochoa, he and his comrades were encouraged to adapt from the North Korean experience only that which was useful, but focus on understanding Mexican society and how to best build a popular movement.⁴⁵⁵ Regardless, North Korean political theory had an impact on the Mexican trainees, and triggered the first major schism within with the group.⁴⁵⁶ MAR members were united around the foquista idea that guerrilla warfare launched by a small group could ignite a broader social revolution. However divisions arose between those who maintained that the revolution would be proletarian-socialist in character and led by the urban working class, and those who accepted the KWP thesis that in underdeveloped countries such as Mexico, the immediate task was a "democratic, anti-imperialist, anti-feudal" revolution fought by a broad

⁴⁵² "Attorney General's Statement," *El Dia* (Mexico City) 16 March 1971.

⁴⁵³ Veronica Oikion Solano, "In the Vanguard of the Revolution: the Revolutionary Action Movement and the Armed Struggle," in Fernand Calderon and Adela Cedillo (eds) *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico: Revolutionary Struggles and the Dirty War, 1964-1982* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 75-76.

⁴⁵⁴ Pineda Ochoa, *En las Profundidades del Mar*, 49.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Oikion Solano, "In the Vanguard of the Revolution," 63.

patriotic front. Moreover, the experience of MAR members in North Korea also stimulated rifts within the group over issues of discipline, hierarchy, and internal party democracy.

Military training included hand-to-hand combat derived from judo and karate techniques, the use of handguns, AK-10s, rocket launchers, and grenades, training in explosives, communication, and field medicine, and guerrilla warfare tactics practiced through field exercises. Trainees were housed in barracks in a training camp outside of Pyongyang, followed a harsh daily regiment and were expected to obey their instructors unquestioningly. MAR also received some twenty thousand dollars from North Korea, but these payments primarily served to fund the travel of members between Mexico and Pyongyang. Beyond this the group depended on “revolutionary expropriations,” such as bank robberies, for its financial resources. Nor was North Korea able to provide arms, which were instead purchased on the black market with the illegal funds obtained from expropriations. On at least one occasion North Korean agents visited the clandestine training camps MAR established in rural Mexico in the early 1970s, and apparently were not impressed.⁴⁵⁷

The discovery of MAR’s North Korean links following the February 1971 arrests was a major media story inside and outside of Mexico. Having followed similar allegations of North Korean support for leftist insurgents in Sri Lanka, and the Blue House raid of January 1968, it drew international attention to Pyongyang and its alleged role in “exporting terrorism.” Because of the connection to the People’s Friendship University, Moscow ultimately took much of the blame, and five diplomats of the Soviet embassy in Mexico were expelled from the country. The events were widely cited in western media as proof of the popular Cold War narrative that

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 76, fn 39.

despite its rhetoric of “peaceful existence,” Moscow was intent on fermenting subversion throughout the world, and that smaller countries like North Korea were merely convenient surrogates. Moreover, allegations that Soviet scholarships were a vehicle for young extremists to receive terrorist training became a common theme in Latin American anti-communist discourse throughout the 1970s.

Evaluating North Korean support for Latin American guerrillas

What conclusions can be made from the information available on North Korean support for Latin American revolutionaries? Pyongyang was clearly limited in the extent to which it was willing or able to provide arms and financing. This should not be surprising considering its domestic economic challenges at the time and the immense logistical and security challenges of such activity. Shipping weapons was particularly difficult, as highlighted in May 1967 when three Cuban agents were killed attempting to transport guerrillas and North Korean arms to the Venezuelan coast.⁴⁵⁸ From the North Korean perspective, however, these limitations to what it could provide were likely not conceded as a failure to match words with action. However limited its resources may have been, it vowed to support armed struggle in Latin America, and it did so. Moreover, in the latter half of the 1960s North Korea and Cuba consistently praised each other’s commitment to the anti-imperialist struggle, while demanding the rest of the socialist camp match their efforts proportionally. The implication here is that the Soviet Union, the Eastern Bloc and China, given their greater economic resources, could be rightfully expected to provide the lion’s share of such assistance. From the North Korean perspective they were leading by

⁴⁵⁸ Ratner and Smith, *El Che Guevara y la FBI*, 330.

example, alongside Cuba and North Vietnam, in contrast to the “right and left opportunism” of its Soviet and Chinese allies.

Overall, Pyongyang’s greatest support to Latin American revolutionaries came in the form of military training. In May 1971 *The Economist* reported that North Korea operated a dozen facilities within its borders where foreign revolutionaries received such experience, including some 1,300 Latin Americans since 1966.⁴⁵⁹ Similar estimates have been put forth by some South Korean sources. Shen and Xia (2018) cite documents found in the archives of the South Korean Foreign Ministry that claim North Korea trained more than five thousand guerrillas from around the world between 1966 and 1976, although it is unclear what proportion were believed to be from Latin America.⁴⁶⁰ The figures provided by *The Economist*, however, are improbable. An overview of the data referenced in this chapter would support a figure of 300-500 Latin American militants trained in North Korea during the 1960s. Those sources that offer figures between one and two thousand seem to be derived from an estimate of how many Latin American leftists visited North Korea in the period, regardless of whether they were there to receive guerrilla training or not.

In addition to such specific data, numerous questions remain regarding North Korean support for Latin American guerrillas. What was the process in which tasks and responsibilities were shared and delegated between North Korea and the other state actors it collaborated with, namely Cuba, China, and North Vietnam? What deliberative process lay behind each North Korean government decision to provide or withhold support, and as to what kind of support would or would not be offered? What considerations weighed most heavily on such decision-

⁴⁵⁹ Interestingly, a copy of the article can be found amongst a collection of declassified CIA documents deposited in the US National Archives.

⁴⁶⁰ Shen and Xia, *A Misunderstood Friendship*, 226-227.

making? Did North Korean leaders see the guerrilla movements it backed as viable, long-term revolutionary projects – in others words, capable of seizing power - or were they satisfied to merely pour gasoline on the flames of unrest? Scholars will have to await a day when the contents of the relevant North Korean and Cuban state archives become accessible in order to answer such questions.

The history of North Korea's support for Latin American guerrillas counters the frequent claim that Pyongyang's efforts at Third World solidarity primarily served domestic propaganda purposes. North Korea's training, funding, and arming of revolutionary groups in the Global South was a carefully guarded state secret. Beyond the government's vague statements of support for unspecified national liberation struggles, most North Koreans were not aware their government engaged in such activity. The North Korean leadership received no public credit or financial compensation for their solidarity with Latin American guerrillas. What historians will continue to debate, however, is the extent to which North Korean decision-makers were motivated either by sincere internationalist convictions, or their own geo-political objectives on the Korean peninsula.

Kim Il Sung's vision of the "anti-imperialist, anti-US united front" was that armed struggle throughout the Global South could drag down the US behemoth in a kind of death by a thousand cuts. Disparate guerrilla groups in different countries could each act to "sever one arm, one leg, or one ear, one tooth," stretching US forces to the breaking point and preventing them from concentrating in any one front, a strategy synonymous with Che's call for "two, three, many Vietnams." At the peak of the Latin American insurgency in the latter half of the 1960s, North Korean leaders could reasonably conclude that they were witnessing their strategy succeed. In the conceptual framework of a national liberation struggle against US imperialism

and solidarity with Vietnam, Latin American guerrillas frequently targeted both symbols and concrete manifestations of US power. They kidnapped and assassinated US diplomats, businessmen, and military officials, bombed US embassies, retail giants, and oil pipelines, and encouraged the masses to understand their daily hardship as symptom of their position as colonial subjects of empire. The US government was forced to become directly involved, particularly in the Dominican Republic and Guatemala, and divert massive financial and military resources to the region. US military assistance nearly tripled between 1959 and 1966, and amounted to over 300 million dollars over the course of the 1960s.⁴⁶¹ Moreover, such assistance expanded dramatically beyond traditional aims of providing funding and hardware for territorial defence, to extensive training of local security agencies in internal counter-insurgency, and the deployment of US military advisors to participate directly in counter-insurgency operations. Such a massive diversion of military resources proved to be within the limits of what Washington could ultimately accommodate. It did not stretch US power to the breaking point, but it did funnel hundreds of millions of dollars into ruthless counter-insurgency operations initiated by local elites terrified by the prospect of the Cuban Revolution repeating itself on their own soil.

By the end of the 1960s almost all of the Latin American guerrilla movements that had emerged over the course of the decade had been defeated or fatally debilitated. This greatly undermined the political position that the Cuban and North Korean leaderships had hitherto championed: that the conditions for revolution in Latin America were ripe, that armed struggle was the only way forward, and that the Cuban model could be replicated throughout the region.

⁴⁶¹ John M. Baines, "U.S. Military Assistance to Latin America: An Assessment," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 14, no. 4 (Nov 1972): 475.

Moreover, many of the common factors that contributed to the defeat of the varied guerrilla projects – namely the failure of rural *focos* to trigger mass uprisings, and the overwhelming power of US-backed counter-insurgency efforts – appeared to confirm what the Marxist critics of Cuban “adventurism” had argued all along. The military defeat of the guerrillas, therefore, was also an ideological blow and a political loss for the Cuban-North Korean alliance. It was inevitable then that these two leaderships would be forced to reevaluate their foreign policy strategies as a result. The failure of the Cuban-inspired guerrilla movements of the 1960s was a key factor in the shift in Cuban and North Korean foreign policy, and by extension, the relationship between the two governments, in the early 1970s.

Chapter Four

North Korea as a Model of Development

In the previous chapters we have seen how the growth of DPRK-Cuban relations during the 1960s rested on a shared belief that the central task of the international communist movement must be the defeat of US imperialism. Armed national liberation movements throughout the Global South, it was believed, would occupy the preeminent role in this struggle. The following two chapters explore more deeply the ideological dimensions of Pyongyang's growing engagement with Latin America. In doing so it elucidates how intellectuals and revolutionaries, both within Cuba and elsewhere in the region, engaged with the North Korean model. These encounters reflected, in part, the declining prestige of the Soviet Union and the old communist parties in the 1960s, as upstart currents and heterodox thinking flourished, and many young leftists sought alternative models in the Global South. This chapter focuses on the two central ways in which North Korea's unique form of socialism had a tangible impact on leftist discourse in Cuba and Latin America. First, as a strategy of non-capitalist economic development for the Global South that provided an alternative to reigning Soviet orthodoxy. And secondly, as a model of leadership and governance that purported to have achieved a genuine symbiosis between the needs and interests of the citizenry and those of the state. In the process, North Korea and Cuba became the two principal defenders of voluntarist economic policies within the socialist world, in resistance to the dominant trend towards liberalization and decentralization.

North Korea as Third World leader

The idea that North Korea was a beacon for the exploited and oppressed peoples of the world became part of the state's official narrative with the end of the Korean War. "The heroic

struggle of the Korean people against US imperialism has become the banner and model of the oppressed people all over the world in their national-liberation struggle,” Kim Il Sung told KPA veterans in October 1953, three months after the government signed the armistice.⁴⁶² He went on to tell these soldiers they could feel proud knowing they had inspired the anti-colonial movements now taking place in British Malaya, Indonesia, and Vietnam. This narrative was initially part of the government’s broader message directed at a domestic audience: the three years of horrific war the people of North Korea had just endured was not in vain. However with the advent of the leadership’s second, heightened phase of Third Worldism (1966-70), it began to take playing a leadership role internationally quite seriously. KWP literature emphasized that North Korea’s defeat of the United States in the Korean War had set in motion the global decolonization process. Typical was a June 1966 *Kulloja* editorial that argued

The Korean War exerted great influence on the anti-imperialist national liberation struggle of colonial and dependent nations [...] In 1953, while war was being fiercely waged in Korea, the Cuban revolutionaries flew the banner of their struggle. In 1954 the Algerian patriots started their armed struggle. Moreover, over thirty countries won their independence after the Korean War.”⁴⁶³

Another *Kulloja* editorial from November 1968 claimed that, “By defeating the American imperialist aggressors, the ringleaders of modern imperialism, for the first time in history,” the Korean people had, “opened up an epoch-making turning-point in the anti-imperialist anti-American struggle of the world’s revolutionary peoples.”⁴⁶⁴ While the idea that the KPA, aided by Chinese volunteers, were the victors of the Korean War is given short shrift in most of the world, North Koreans base this interpretation on the fact that the US was forced to abandon its

⁴⁶² Kim Il Sung, “On a Historic Victory in the Fatherland Liberation War and the Tasks of the People’s Army” (23 October 1953), in Kim Il Sung, *Works*, vol. 8 (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1981), 116.

⁴⁶³ Kim Sun-il, “The Korean War and the Decline of US imperialism,” *Kulloja* no. 6 (June 10 1966), reprinted in *Translations on North Korea* No. 11 (19 September 1966): 61-62.

⁴⁶⁴ Hyon Myong-jun, “A New strategy for anti-imperialist anti-American struggle described,” *Kulloja* no. 11 (15 November 1968) reprinted in *Translations on North Korea* no. 108 (3 February 1969): 104-105.

invasion of the North and its intentions of regime-change in Pyongyang. In the words of Kim Il Sung, “It is true that we failed to wipe out the enemy and we have not yet reunified the country. However, we defeated the huge armed forces of US imperialism, the ringleader of world imperialism, and its fifteen satellite countries, and forced them to sign the Armistice Agreement as we demanded. This is a great victory for us.”⁴⁶⁵ It is a creative interpretation, but hardly less so than the narrative most Americans are familiar with: that the war was a “United Nations police action,” necessary to prevent one country – evil, communist, and controlled by Moscow – from taking over another one, free and democratic. On the other hand, the narrative that nationalist revolutionaries in Cuba, Algeria, or elsewhere were inspired by the Korean People’s Army was purely nationalist mythmaking.

By 1967, articles and speeches outlining the priorities of the newly independent countries, and claims that Kim Il Sung’s victories in the struggle against Japanese colonial rule provided crucial lessons for the contemporary struggle against imperialism, became regular features of the party press. Central to this narrative was that Kim was a preeminent revolutionary theoretician whose example and ideas were inspiring people throughout the Global South. “Kim actually believes himself to be the chief proponent and strategist of the anti-US struggle” assessed the CIA in November 1968.⁴⁶⁶ As expressed in a January 1968 *Kulloja* editorial:

The line for the anti-imperialist, anti-American struggle is the “correct line that the people of the world must adopt,” as our foreign friends also should recognize [...] the broad people of Asia, Africa and Latin America have expressed uniform admiration for the immense theoretical and practical significance of the line for the anti-imperialist anti-American struggle advocated by Kim Il Sung and are seeking in it the future road of their struggle.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁵ Kim Il Sung, “On a Historic Victory in the Fatherland Liberation War,” 117.

⁴⁶⁶ “Kim Il-Sung’s New Military Adventurism,” CIA Intelligence Report, ESAU XLI (26 November 1968), vi, available at <https://archive.org/details/ESAU-CIA/page/n1>.

⁴⁶⁷ Hyon Kwon-il, “Unity in the anti-imperialist and anti-American struggle is demanded by the Tri-continental people,” *Kulloja*, no. 1 (20 January 1968), reprinted in *Translations on North Korea* no. 81 (30 April 1968): 102.

This heightened emphasis on the Global South and North Korea's leadership role within it followed Kim's further consolidation of power within the party during 1966-67, and emerged in tandem within other shifts in the KWP line: namely, the growing importance attributed to Chuch'e Sasang and the elevation of Kim's personality cult to new heights. The interconnectedness of these developments did not go unrecognized within the socialist camp. A February 1968 report prepared by the Czechoslovakian Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted:

Especially in the last year, the personality cult of Kim Il Sung reached unprecedented magnitude. Attributes attached to his name often run several lines. Kim Il Sung is credited with all successes and victories past and present without regard to historical facts. Even his parents and grandparents are becoming the objects of celebrations. [North] Korean propaganda places an equal sign between Kim Il Sung and Korea, while Korea is presented as an example for other countries. The intensification of Kim Il Sung's personality cult is inseparable from two other issues, namely, the importance of the DPRK example for the struggling nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and the embellishment of Kim Il Sung's role in the context of the international communist and workers' movement.⁴⁶⁸

If the KWP attributed all its accomplishments and political stances to the brilliance of Kim Il Sung, the foundation of these positions was Chuch'e Sasang,⁴⁶⁹ an ethos defined as the rejection of "flunkeyism" (fetishizing things foreign), "servilism" (kowtowing to bigger countries) and "dogmatism" (blind adherence to past interpretations of Marxism).⁴⁷⁰ In contrast to such erroneous traits, Chuch'e Sasang demanded that Marxism-Leninism be creatively adapted to each society's unique history and characteristics, and that each revolutionary movement develop its own path, solve its own problems, and strive for independence and self-sufficiency in

⁴⁶⁸ "Information about the Situation in Korea," February 04, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Czech Foreign Ministry Archives. Translated by Adolf Kotlik. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114572>.

⁴⁶⁹ Traditionally translated in the English literature as the Juche Idea or Chuche Idea, and in the Spanish literature as la Idea Zuche. Chuch'e has no exact equivalent in English, but the standard approximation traditionally used has been "self-reliance."

⁴⁷⁰ Kim Il Sung, "Materialicemos Mas Cabalmente el Espíritu Revolucionario de Soberanía, Independencia y Autodefensa en Todos los Dominós de la Actividad del Estado" (December 1967) in *El Movimiento de los No Alineados es una Poderosa Fuerza Revolucionaria Antiimperialista de nuestra Época* (Pyongyang: Ediciones en Lenguas Extranjeras, 1976), 10-12.

all fields. The implicit message of national pride, self-reliance, and challenging Eurocentric orthodoxies reverberated with the anti-colonial sentiment of the Third World left. The KWP itself linked the concept's development to Korea's own history of anti-colonial struggle, as well as its experience with "great power chauvinism" within the international communist movement. "Maintaining independence was posed for us as a most acute and vital problem because of our country's situation, conditions, because of the particular nature of our historical development, and because of the complexity and severity of our revolution" a 1969 *Kulloja* editorial explained.⁴⁷¹ However, in the 1960s the KWP had not yet elevated Chuch'e Sasang to the level of a body of theory in its own right, as it would the following decade. Analyses of North Korea at the time, therefore, tended not to focus on the theme of Chuch'e, but rather on North Korea's practical achievements in socialist construction, and the lessons to be learned from the guerrilla struggle against Japanese colonial rule.

North Korea's efforts towards greater international influence in the latter half of the 1960s culminated in the extravagant "International Conference on the Tasks of Journalists of the Whole World in Their Fight Against the Aggression of US Imperialism," which attracted hundreds of journalists from across the globe to Pyongyang in September 1969. Kim's speech at the conference, which was published as a booklet in various languages, repeated the radical Third Worldist themes he had promulgated since 1966: the Global South as the primary terrain of revolutionary struggle with Vietnam and Cuba constituting the frontlines, the duty of the socialist camp to support national liberation struggles internationally, the transition from traditional colonialism to neo-colonialism, and the primary task of defeating US imperialism.

⁴⁷¹ "Independence and Proletarian Internationalism" *Kulloja* no. 7 (1 July 1969), in *Translations on North Korea*, Joint Publications Research Service, no. 127 (9 Sept 1969): 10.

The peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, Kim proclaimed, “having cast off the abominable colonial yoke, have become the protagonists of a new history, and are reaching brilliant victories in their cause of defeating the old system of imperialism and colonialism and creating a new life.”⁴⁷² The speech was quite distinct in two respects. First, Kim asserted that the Western proletariat was susceptible to “racist and national chauvinist ideas” which impeded its duty to struggle in solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the Global South. Related to the point, he followed Lenin in asserting that the wealth extracted from the Third World created a reactionary “labour aristocracy” in the advanced nations, thereby dividing and weakening the revolutionary potential of the working class.⁴⁷³ Although Kim was not willing to dismiss the white workers of Europe and North America altogether, as some elements of the New Left and the Black Power movement had done, his comments implied that in a global context this force had been eclipsed by the oppressed peoples of the Global South as the primary revolutionary subject.

Secondly, Kim delivered a flattering statement on the role of journalists in society and an emphatic reflection on the danger and persecution they faced around the world. While this in itself was not remarkable, more interesting is how Kim applied his belief in the predominance of subjective factors in historical change to the role of the journalists there before him. As the oppressed masses could not be relied upon to become revolutionary spontaneously, politically committed journalists stood to play a crucial vanguard role, helping to cultivate such consciousness:

⁴⁷² Kim Il Sung, “Que los Periodistas Progresistas de los Cinco Continentes Condenen Severamente al Imperialismo Norteamericano Sosteniendo en Alto la Pluma de la Revolución,” (18 September 1969) in *El Movimiento de los No Alineados es una Poderosa Fuerza Revolucionaria Antiimperialista de nuestra Época* (Pyongyang: Ediciones en Lenguas Extranjeras, 1976): 95-96.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 100-101.

As everyone knows, it is the popular masses who create and develop history. Nevertheless, in no way does this mean that the popular masses are able to join the revolutionary struggle spontaneously. Only when the popular masses gain revolutionary consciousness and consecrate themselves in body and spirit to the bloody struggle to undermine the superstructure of the old society can they join the true thick of the revolution and be a powerful driving force of the development of society and the dignified creators of the new society [...] It is those progressive personalities that represent the interests of the popular masses who inject the revolutionary consciousness and awaken them with advanced ideas.⁴⁷⁴

While some might interpret this rhetoric as mere hyperbole, subsequent aspects of the North Korean government's foreign policy suggest it took the implications of such an analysis quite seriously. For the remainder of Kim's life, Pyongyang allocated substantial resources to influencing world opinion. It purchased content in daily newspapers around the world (including, most famously, the *New York Times*), funded an international solidarity movement, diffused a massive quantity of print literature in foreign languages, courted journalists, academics, and writers, frequently hosted foreign delegations, and made Pyongyang the location of numerous international conferences. While many governments have engaged in similar activity historically, North Korea acquired a reputation for an exceptional zealotry in this regard. This suggests that, just as the KWP leadership saw transforming the minds and hearts of its citizens as the key to its goals domestically, it also believed that a dedicated campaign to shape foreign opinion could yield tangible results in its international objectives.

It is also worth noting that the Soviet ambassador to Pyongyang at the time saw the conference as an attempt to "counterbalance" Moscow's International Conference of Communist and Worker's Parties held three months earlier, and to promote "its own concepts of the anti-imperialist, particularly 'anti-American', struggle."⁴⁷⁵ At the time the Moscow conference was

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 103.

⁴⁷⁵ "Soviet Ambassador to North Korea, 'The Main Directions of the Domestic and Foreign Policy of the KWP CC and DPRK Government and the Situation in Korea'," November 18, 1969, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, RGANI, fond 5, opis 61, delo 462, listy 246-264. Obtained by Sergey

widely seen as an effort to affirm Soviet hegemony within the international communist movement in the wake of the Sino-Soviet split and the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Albanian parties declined to participate. In this context, North Korea's own conference was, in part, a continuation of its efforts since 1966 to promote an alternative agenda for the international communist movement, in partnership with Cuba and Vietnam. The greatest significance of the September 1969 journalists conference was, however, that it was the birthplace of the international North Korea solidarity movement. Many of the delegates in attendance went on to become the founders and leaders of the friendship societies, solidarity committees, and Chuch'e study groups that blossomed in the 1970s.

North Korea, Cuba, and Marxist economic theory

During the 1960s the spread in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc of what was frequently termed "market socialism" spurred a wide-ranging debate within the international communist movement. Pioneered by Yugoslavia in the 1950s, market socialism referred to limited decentralization in economic decision-making and the employment of certain elements of capitalist economics to stimulate growth and improve efficiency. In the words of the American Marxian economist Paul Sweezy, "the system of centralized administrative planning entered a period of crisis during the 1950s and 1960s. In seeking a way out, the countries of Eastern Europe, led by Yugoslavia, turned increasingly to the methods of capitalism."⁴⁷⁶ Raising questions such as moral versus material incentives for workers, consciousness, the "New Man" and the role of education and culture, central planning versus enterprise autonomy, and the relevance of class struggle after the revolution, the debate was, in essence, about the transition from capitalism to

Radchenko and translated by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134264>.

⁴⁷⁶ Paul M. Sweezy, "Towards a Program of Studies on the Transition to Socialism," in Paul M. Sweezy, Charles Bettelheim, *On the Transition to Socialism*, Second edition (New York and London: Monthly Review, 1971), 129.

socialism. These questions became more pertinent as evidence arose of serious economic problems and social unrest in the Eastern bloc and as the Third Worldist tendency within the international left increased the interest in alternative models of socialist development in the Global South.

These questions arose in Cuba in the early 1960s as competing tendencies within the new government struggled to establish a coherent development strategy, and serious economic problems resulting from the US embargo, the mass exodus of professional strata, and the shockwaves of radical economic restructuring arose. In what became known as the “Great Economic Debate,” Che Guevara led the struggle against the advocates of prevailing Soviet economic wisdom (i.e. market socialism), associated with the French Marxist and economic advisor to the Cuban government, Charles Bettelheim (1913-2006). Bettelheim contended that as a society in transition, Cuba was still characterized by class contradiction, multiple forms of property (private, cooperative, state) and decentralized and diverse production processes. These economic realities meant that traditional capitalist mechanisms could not be immediately discarded and attempts to institute total socialist planning were premature. Moreover, “the New Man” – a central focus of the Cuban leadership in the 1960s - could not be simply willed into being with the help of education and mobilization, because consciousness reflected human beings’ place within the material conditions of society. Therefore, this camp favoured the legal independence of state enterprises, market mechanisms to ensure efficiency, and material incentives for workers, with the goal of building up the productive forces that would make further progress towards socialism possible. Policy could not be, in the words of Bettelheim, “...determined arbitrarily, in the name of this or that moral outlook, or of this or that idealistic

conception of socialist society, but rather on the basis of the level of the development of the productive forces.”⁴⁷⁷

Che’s vision, by contrast, was more evocative of the voluntarist current within twentieth century Marxism which posited subjective factors – consciousness, will, leadership – over material resources as more essential to the project of socialist construction. His arguments demonstrated a greater concern with the creation of the “New Man:” stimulating the development of socialist values and attitudes among the masses that would serve as the foundation for the new society in the making. His primary contention was that relying on aspects of traditional capitalist economics retarded the development of socialist consciousness and risked the restoration of capitalism:

Pursuing the chimera of achieving socialism with the aid of the blunted weapons left to us by capitalism (the commodity as the economic cell, profitability, individual material interest as levers, etcetera.) it is possible to come to a blind alley. And the arrival there comes about after covering a long distance where there are many crossroads and where it is difficult to realize just where the wrong turn was taken. Meanwhile, the adapted economic base has undermined the development of consciousness. To build communism, a new man must be created simultaneously with the material base.⁴⁷⁸

To this end Che and his supporters favoured mobilizing workers by appealing to their revolutionary enthusiasm, combined with an array of efforts to raise consciousness on a mass scale. Moreover they defended the feasibility of total socialist planning in Cuba’s then-current stage of development. While Bettelheim maintained the necessity for a limited private sector, pointing to the local agricultural markets that continued to play an important role in the Soviet and Chinese food distribution systems, Che was eager to forcibly stamp out the last vestiges of

⁴⁷⁷ Charles Bettelheim, “On Socialist Planning and the Level of Development of the Productive Forces,” in Bertram Silverman (ed), *Man and Socialism in Cuba: the Great Debate* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 55.

⁴⁷⁸ Ernesto Che Guevara, “Man and Socialism in Cuba,” in Bertram Silverman (ed), *Man and Socialism in Cuba: the Great Debate* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 342-343.

commodity exchange in Cuba, and move to the complete centralized distribution of goods and services. To those who accused Che of placing the cart before the horse, he replied that the Cuban Revolution itself demonstrated that the seemingly-impossible can be achieved through determination, ingenuity, and will.

While such ideas frustrated Soviet advisors, the Cuban leadership had an ardent supporter and a model from which to learn in North Korea. The Great Economic Debate took place primarily between 1963 and 1965, the same period in which North Korea and Cuba cemented a new alliance based on their mutual frustrations with the Soviet Union and China. An emerging ideological consensus between the two parties was displayed in North Korean contributions to Cuban journals like *Pensamiento Crítico*, *Cuba Socialista*, and *Boletín Tricontinental*, as well as the bulletin of North Korea's Havana embassy and countless articles on Cuba in *Kulloja* and other North Korean publications. North Korea influenced that section of the Cuban leadership that favoured voluntarist strategies of economic development, against the counsel of their Soviet and Eastern European allies. In addition to the constant praise of North Korea and Kim Il Sung in Cuban media during the 1960s, Che, if we recall, said that of all the socialist countries he visited, North Korea "was one of the most extraordinary. Perhaps the one that impressed us most of all."⁴⁷⁹ In explaining this admiration on Cuban television in February 1961, his account focused on North Korea's remarkable pace of social and economic development. According to Che, Korea was once among the most backward countries in the world, and endured a horrific US aerial bombardment that left it "without a single factory standing, without a single house standing, without even livestock."⁴⁸⁰ Yet just seven years later it could boast "a national

⁴⁷⁹ "Esta revolución se ha hecho para todo el mundo: Guevara," *Revolución*, 7 February 1961 (Havana).

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

literature and culture, a national order, and practically unlimited cultural development.”⁴⁸¹ There was universal basic education, and the complete mechanization of agriculture had solved what remained Cuba’s biggest challenge: the shortage of agricultural labour. A technologically-advanced industrial sector produced sophisticated machinery for export to other countries. While acknowledging the role of the “generous and wide-ranging” Soviet aid in Korea’s post-war reconstruction, Che added: “But what impressed us the most was the spirit of the people [...] it is truly an example of a country that thanks to an extraordinary system and extraordinary leaders, like the Marshall Kim Il Sung, has been able to emerge from the greatest tragedies to become an industrialized country today.”⁴⁸² To Che, the North Korea model provided a tested solution to the plague of underdevelopment, proving that subjective factors - consciousness, ideology, leadership – were the keys to modernization and prosperity in the Global South.

In his 1967 book on North Korea, *Corea: unificación y solidaridad*, senior ministry official Federico de Córdova testified to the Korean people’s “extraordinary faith in their own power, in the justness of their cause, and in the success of their plans for reconstruction.”⁴⁸³ Emerging from the war “without a single ton of steel, or cement, or fertilizer,”⁴⁸⁴ the Korean people united and mobilized to rebuild their country with astonishing speed. Once again, the key factor here was not capital, technology, or natural resources, but rather the subjective qualities of the Korean people. “The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea rose from the debris of the war because the Korean people undertook their tasks of reconstruction with the same spirit that enabled them to emerge victorious in the Great Fatherland Liberation War.”⁴⁸⁵ Validating North

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Federico de Córdova, *Corea: unificación y solidaridad* (La Habana: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Instituto de Política Internacional, 1967), 4.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 20.

Korea's reliance on mass mobilization appealing to patriotic sentiment, Córdova wrote that it was thanks to the Ch'öllima Movement that "the productive forces, by all indexes, took a grand leap and laid the base for a solid, national, independent economy," allowing Korea's transformation from "the backward, agrarian, colonial status of yesterday, into an industrial-agricultural state."⁴⁸⁶

In fact, the Great Economic Debate in Cuba mirrored a two-year struggle within the KWP over post-war development strategy following the end of the Korean War, discussed in Chapter One.⁴⁸⁷ In that debate, Kim Il Sung triumphed over his rivals who, inspired by trends in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries, called for the priority to be given to consumer goods and agriculture as the fastest course to raising living standards. Kim and his allies, by contrast, championed the development of heavy industry with a focus on regaining military strength, reversing colonial-era imbalances in the economy and escaping dependency on foreign assistance. As the Kim leadership consolidated its hold over the party during 1956, North Korean development strategy emphasized mass mobilization appealing to people's patriotism, the fundamental task of installing socialist consciousness in the masses through education and culture, and "working-classing" the rural population. In a socialist society, Kim maintained, the degree of "revolutionary zeal" amongst the workforce was the primary determinant in economic development.⁴⁸⁸ Mass mobilization was orchestrated through the Ch'öllima Movement launched in 1956 and named after a mythological winged horse of Korean folklore, which extolled citizens

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ James F. Person, *Solidarity and Self-Reliance: The Antinomies of North Korean Foreign Policy and Juche Thought, 1953-1967* (PhD diss., George Washington University, 2001).

⁴⁸⁸ Kim Il Sung, *On Some Theoretical Problems of the Socialist Economy* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1969), 3.

to work harder and sacrifice as the key to a rapid exodus from underdevelopment to socialist modernity.

Kim Il Sung also intervened directly in the on-going debate over market socialism as it confronted the Cuban leadership in the 1960s. In his April 1965 speech in Jakarta, Kim explained how North Korea has been transformed from a “backward, colonial, semi-feudal society ruled by Japanese imperialism”⁴⁸⁹ into a “socialist industrial-agricultural state with the solid foundation of an independent national economy.”⁴⁹⁰ This was achieved “by relying on the high revolutionary enthusiasm and limitless creativity of our people,” harnessed through mass mobilization campaigns.⁴⁹¹ North Korea’s remarkable progress proved, Kim argued, that there were serious limits to what could be achieved through economic science, technology, and material incentives alone. The fundamental task was to “elevate the political and ideological consciousness of the working people.”⁴⁹²

These ideas were developed in more depth in his 1969 essay, *On Some Theoretical Problems of the Socialist Economy*, one of his major treatises of the decade. In this text Kim, like Che, argued that an undeveloped society in transition to socialism could indeed discard market mechanisms and proceed to total central planning. Kim also affirmed the need to rely on moral rather than material incentives, and attacked the move towards market socialism taking place in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries without mentioning the offenders by name. He called out the “sophistry brought forth by some people to justify the fact that their technical

⁴⁸⁹ Kim Il Sung, “Chosŏnminjujuŭiinmin'gonghwagugesŏi sahoejuŭigŏnsŏlgwa namjosŏn hyŏngmyŏnge taehayŏ” [On Socialist Construction in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the South Korean Revolution] 14 April 1965, in Kim Il Sung, *Chŏnjip*, vol. 35 (Pyongyang: Korean Workers’ Party Publishing House, 2001), 139.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 147.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 173.

⁴⁹² Ibid., 175.

progress is slow and their economy stagnant because they, talking about ‘liberalization’ and ‘democratic development,’ did not educate their working people and, as a result, the latter are ideologically so slackened as to fiddle about and loaf on the job.”⁴⁹³ Kim condemned such economic reforms as a “right deviation” and warned that if socialist countries “foster individual selfishness among the people, and try to make the people move merely with money, we cannot call forth their collective heroism and heuristic initiative and, accordingly, we cannot successfully carry out the tasks either of technical revolution or economic reconstruction.”⁴⁹⁴ In explaining how North Korea surpassed the already ambitious goals of the 1967 economic plan, Kim claimed that, “This is to be ascribed to the fact that our Party intensified the ideological revolution among the working people, thereby arousing their conscious enthusiasm and waging a resolute struggle against pacifism, conservatism and all sorts of old ideas that hampered our forward movement.”⁴⁹⁵ Kim concluded: “All this shows that we can go develop the economy as fast as we want, no matter how big its scale is, if we, by conducting political work well in accordance with the line set fourth by our Party, enhance the political consciousness of the masses, arouse their revolutionary zeal and constantly improve techniques.”⁴⁹⁶

The appeal of the North Korean model to the Cuban leadership must be understood in the context of a broader Marxist discourse taking place in Latin America and internationally in the 1960s. The turbulent decade and the advent of the New Left saw a proliferation of fresh Marxist thinking un beholden to Soviet orthodoxy, and largely focused on the revolutionary upsurges taking place within the Global South. A particularly relevant example is *Monthly Review*, the influential Marxist journal founded in New York City in 1949 associated with the economists

⁴⁹³ Kim Il Sung, *On Some Theoretical Problems of the Socialist Economy*, 10.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

Paul Sweezy, Leo Huberman, and Paul Baran. Sweezy and Huberman made several trips to Cuba during the 1960s, meeting with the leaders of the revolution, the result of which were their books *Cuba: Anatomy of a Revolution* (1960) and *Socialism in Cuba* (1969). *Monthly Review* published essays by some of Latin America's most prominent political figures and intellectuals, including both Fidel and Che, Cheddi Jagan, Luis de la Puente Uceda, Carlos Fuentes, Eduardo Galeano, and Adolfo Gilly. The journal's influence was such that Ned O'Gorman, studying Latin America for the US State Department in the 1960s, reported that Sweezy and Huberman were two of the "Americans I hear most spoken of in South America," alongside Edgar Allen Poe, Walt Whitman and John F. Kennedy.⁴⁹⁷

The position of *Monthly Review* during the 1960s was that the Soviet Union had witnessed the ascendancy of a new type of state-bureaucratic bourgeoisie, under which centralized planning had become increasingly authoritarian and disconnected from workers' interests.⁴⁹⁸ Because such a system was inherently crisis prone, and this ruling stratum could not conceive of solutions which would threaten their entrenched privilege (i.e. deepening the democratic and egalitarian content of the revolution), the turn to "market socialism" was its only remaining survival strategy. Unless the proletariat could mobilize and counter this trajectory, the eventual outcome would be the restoration of capitalism.

The flipside to disillusionment with the Soviet Union in the 1960s was an impulse to identify promising alternatives in the younger and more radical socialist experiments taking place in the Global South: Cuba, China, North Korea, Vietnam, Algeria. The idea that North

⁴⁹⁷ Quoted in Robert W. McChesney, "The Monthly Review Story," *MR Online*, 6 May 2007, available at <https://mronline.org/2007/05/06/the-monthly-review-story-1949-1984>.

⁴⁹⁸ Paul M. Sweezy and Charles Bettelheim, *On the Transition to Socialism*, Second edition (New York and London: Monthly Review, 1971), 29-30.

Korea was a small, colonized, “semi-feudal” country that emerged from the destruction of the Korean War to undergo a miraculous process of rapid industrialization gained it considerable international attention during the 1960s. *Monthly Review* became an outlet for admiring analyses of North Korean socialism written by foreign visitors to the country. Consistently, such pieces repeated the narrative that the remarkable transformations taking place there were not primarily the result of foreign assistance, capital, technology, or natural resources, but rather the values and attitudes of the Korean people, harnessed through correct leadership and ideology. As the prominent University of Cambridge economist Joan Robinson wrote in *Monthly Review* following her October 1964 visit to Pyongyang and Hamhung, “All the economic miracles of the postwar world are put in the shade by these achievements.”⁴⁹⁹ Of course, visitors to North Korea like Che and Robinson reached such conclusions through casual observations, discussions with North Korean leaders and officials, and on itineraries purposefully selected by their hosts, rather than empirical research. Today much more is known outside of North Korea regarding the massive reconstruction assistance provided by the socialist bloc after the Korean War; we also know that the impressive feats in industry and infrastructure were not equalled by the improvements in, for example, food consumption and consumer spending.⁵⁰⁰ Nevertheless, North Korea’s economic growth and industrialization in the years following the Korean War was indeed remarkable, and would not have been possible without massive public enthusiasm and the legitimacy Kim Il Sung and the KWP enjoyed among the broad population.⁵⁰¹ Especially from

⁴⁹⁹ Joan Robinson, “Korean Miracle,” *Monthly Review* 16, no.9 (January 1965): 542.

⁵⁰⁰ The Woodrow Wilson Center’s Digital Archive, for example, which collects documents from the foreign affairs archives of former socialist states, is replete with reports in which North Korean officials and their foreign counterparts speak frankly of such economic challenges. In particular, such documents often reveal how the strong priority the North Korean government placed on developing heavy industry and the military hampered the production of food and consumer goods.

⁵⁰¹ Charles K. Armstrong, “The Destruction and Reconstruction of North Korea, 1950 – 1960,” *Asia-Pacific Journal* 7, issue 0 (16 March 2009).

the perspective of visitors from the developing world, the somewhat austere lives most North Koreans lived during the 1960s did not make the achievements in such areas as housing, education, and healthcare any less admirable, nor did it diminish the power of Pyongyang as a symbol of socialist modernity, with its tall, modern buildings and wide, paved boulevards.

Ultimately Che and his supporters in the Great Economic Debate prevailed, and their position would guide Cuban economic policy until the early 1970s.⁵⁰² Quasi-military work brigades, not unlike North Korea's Ch'öllima Riders, were used for massive infrastructure projects, clearing land, digging reservoirs, building roads, etcetera. Demands on citizens to contribute volunteer labour became routine, and in the countryside entire villages were mobilized into month-long agricultural production campaigns on local farms. The Military Units to Aid Production (UMAPs) sought to "re-educate" undesirable elements – largely dissidents, religious minorities, drop-outs, and homosexuals – through forced labour. Trade unions largely lost their relevance as the leadership declared that their interests and those of the state were identical; now their role was to ensure workers met ambitious production targets handed down by the party. Unions were in effect superseded by the Advanced Workers Movement, which aimed to cultivate a vanguard of exemplary labour heroes distinguished by their exceptional work performance.⁵⁰³ In the "Revolutionary Offensive" of 1968, the Cuban government moved to eliminate even the smallest remaining vestiges of capitalism, going as far as to forcibly shut down hotdog stands and hairdressers – a campaign that was praised in the pages of *Kulloja*. The principle of voluntary labour was enshrined in the resolution of the 1968 Cultural Congress of Havana, an

⁵⁰² Leo Huberman and Paul M. Sweezy, *Socialism in Cuba* (New York and London: Monthly Review, 1969), 146-153.

⁵⁰³ Linda Fuller, *Work and Democracy in Socialist Cuba* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 42-43.

important episode of DPRK-Cuban solidarity examined in the following chapter. The resolution affirmed the necessity of:

The incorporation of the people into the massive mobilization of nonremunerative voluntary work, the incorporation of the people into the massive mobilizations for unpaid voluntary work, because in liberated societies work has not only a profound meaning of social construction and national transformation in which the important thing is not remuneration, but also the fulfillment of social needs, and, too, because man in transforming reality, transforms himself and develops a new consciousness.”⁵⁰⁴

Within the international communist movement North Korea and Cuba came to serve as the primary defenders of the voluntarist tradition of socialist development, in resistance to the dominant trend towards market socialism. While both Cuba and North Korea were accused of Stalinism, nationalism, and subjectivism from their allies within the socialist camp, their model of socialism gained them much admiration from radicals in the Global South and the New Left.

North Korea, democracy, and leadership

When Latin American intellectuals and revolutionaries confronted the North Korean development model, they inevitably had to come to grips with the omnipresence of Kim Il Sung’s persona, and its implications for questions of power, democracy, and leadership within the context of socialist construction. Kim and his support base within the KWP had resisted the course of “de-Stalinization” in the socialist camp initiated by Khrushchev in 1956, denying the existence of a personality cult in North Korea while simultaneously proceeding to consolidate and elevate it in the years that followed. During the 1960s Kim’s stature within the party and society at large reached unprecedented heights, to become one of the most distinguishing features of North Korean political culture. As previously argued, this process was intertwined with Kim’s consolidation of power within the party, the foreign policy reorientation towards the

⁵⁰⁴ “Final Resolution of Commission II,” in *Cultural Congress of Havana: Meeting of Intellectuals from all the World on Problems of Asia, Africa and Latin America* (Havana: Instituto del Libro, 1968).

Global South, and the growing emphasis on Chuch'e as the party's ideological foundation. An August 1967 report from the East German ambassador in Pyongyang noted that since the KWP's October 1966 Party Conference, Kim's personality cult had grown to "grotesque" proportions. The historic role of Kim and the Manchurian guerrillas was "elevated to a legendary level" with "an emphasis on Kim Il Sung's continuous leadership role since this period and his proven infallibility." Moreover, Kim was being presented as "an international leader due to his permanent leadership in conjunction with the victory against the Japanese imperialists and the United States, the strongest imperialist power; as well as through his success in the economic development of a former dependent colony," in a narrative that was "directed especially towards the national liberation movement."⁵⁰⁵

The Third Worldist tendency within the international left during the 1960s was, in part, a rejection of the Stalinist tradition, and shaped by the perception that Soviet socialism had become bureaucratized, state-capitalist, and imperialistic, criticisms reinforced by the 1956 invasion of Hungary and the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. Ironically, however, the same political tendency could be remarkably regressive when it came to the issue of leadership -- regressive from the standpoint that bottom-up democracy and the rejection of personality cults are hallmarks of a progressive socialist politics. It was, perhaps, the same contradiction once identified by Bertram Silverman in the political thought of Che Guevara, where romantic idealism sat side by side with a defence of total central economic planning and compulsory labour.⁵⁰⁶ The editors of *Monthly Review* argued in August 1966 that, while personality cults

⁵⁰⁵ "Information about Some New Aspects on Korean Workers' Party Positions concerning Issues of Domestic and Foreign Policy," August 18, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PolA AA, MfAA, C 153/75. Translated for NKIDP by Bernd Schaefer. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111828>.

⁵⁰⁶ Preface to Bertram Silverman (ed), *Man and Socialism in Cuba: the Great Debate* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), ix.

were, in general, a retrogression, “it is necessary to recognize that under certain circumstances the personality cult can play an important positive role and may even be crucial for the survival of a revolutionary regime threatened by powerful internal and external class enemies.”⁵⁰⁷ While the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) had embraced collective leadership since the death of Joséf Stalin in March 1953, both North Korea and Cuba defended a concept of the maximum leader who embodied the will of the masses, thereby making formal democratic institutions unnecessary. Within the international left many of the same voices who believed the Soviet Union had betrayed Marx’s humanist and democratic vision were able to see in North Korea a system of government that, while not democratic in the Western-liberal sense, was something natural, justified, noble, and perhaps most pertinent of all, corresponding to the interests and aspirations of the Korean people.

Juan Emilio Bosch Gaviño (1909-2001), the renowned novelist and first democratically elected president of the Dominican Republic, visited North Korea during October and November 1969, as discussed in Chapter Three. His visit came at a time of political soul-searching following the tragedy and defeats of the previous six years: his overthrow by a US-backed military coup in September 1963, the subsequent uprising and US military occupation of 1965, his electoral defeat to US-backed right-wing forces in July 1966, and the wave of violent repression against the left that followed. Like other visitors to North Korea during the 1960s, Bosch was awe-struck by the rapid industrialization and rise in living standards that had taken place since the war. He was convinced that North Korea was almost entirely self-sufficient, producing ninety-eight percent of what it consumed. Moreover, he reported, the state provided modern, electrified homes for the entire population, there was free universal healthcare, literacy

⁵⁰⁷ “The Strategy of Armed Struggle,” *Monthly Review* 18, no. 4 (September 1966): 2.

had been abolished, and one fourth of the population was enrolled in educational institutions of some kind. Bosch speculated that North Korea's progress surpassed that of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), commonly believed to be the best performing economy of the socialist camp. While North Korea had indeed made impressive progress in industry and living standards since the end of the war, Bosch's impression obscures the serious economic difficulties North Korea was contending with at the time. For example, shortages in electricity production, severely affecting industrial output and exports, were a major problem for the North Korean economy in the period.⁵⁰⁸

In Pyongyang, Bosch tried to make sense of the colossal importance imbued in the personhood of Kim Il Sung. Bosch was not a communist – in fact, the communists North Korea supported in his country during the 1960s condemned him as a petit-bourgeois reformist.⁵⁰⁹ He had dedicated his life to the struggle against dictatorship and for the spread of representative democracy in the Dominican Republic and throughout Latin America. He was instrumental in the drafting of two national constitutions in his life - the Cuban constitution of 1940 and the Dominican constitution of 1963 - and was considered part of the same generation of famous Latin American liberal statesmen as Rómulo Betancourt, Juan José Arévalo, and Carlos Prío Socarrás. And yet, he could find nothing to criticize in the system of government he observed in

⁵⁰⁸ For example, see "A Conversation with the 1st Secretary of the Embassy of the USSR in the DPRK, Comrade Zvetkov, and Comrade Jarck.," July 29, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MfAA, G-A 320; translated by Karen Riechert <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113698>; "Far East Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'The Domestic Situation and the Foreign Policy of the Korean People's Democratic Republic'," March 28, 1969, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, RGANI, fond 5, opis 61, delo 466, listy 71-81. Obtained by Sergey Radchenko and translated by Gary Goldberg. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134226>; "Record of Conversation between N. G. Sudarikov and Kim Il, a member of the political Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea and chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of North Korea," December 02, 1969, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, RGANI, fond 5, opis 61, delo 463, listy 267-272. Obtained by Sergey Radchenko and translated by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134266>.

⁵⁰⁹ José A Moreno, *Barrios in Arms: Revolution in Santo Domingo* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press: 1970), 122.

North Korea. “The unity between leader and country is a phenomenon rare in human history” Bosch reflected, “and thanks to the power of Kim Il Sung it goes beyond the political field and reaches a quality not easily appreciated; it is not a power that rests in authority, in terror, in the charisma of the leader, in the goods that he distributes. None of those things. It is something more profound.” Bosch struggled to find words to adequately describe what he saw as a genuine symbiosis between mass and leader, suggesting that perhaps it lay outside Western modes of understanding. Ultimately, he settled upon the statement, “For the Korean people, Korea and Kim are one and the same thing.”⁵¹⁰

In fact, Bosch’s reflections on leadership and power in North Korea reflected an ongoing radicalization of his political thinking triggered by the events of 1963-66. A few months before arriving in Pyongyang, Bosch penned an essay entitled “Dictadura con Respaldo Popular” (Dictatorship with Popular Support), intended to serve as the ideological platform for a rejuvenated PRD, and first published in its entirety in 1971. In contrast to “so-called representative democracy, the political system of bourgeois society that has been failing in Latin America for over a century and a half,” Bosch advocated “a new type of State” necessary for the victory of the masses over the oligarchy and “pentagonismo,”⁵¹¹ a term he coined for what he saw as the latest phase of imperialism. Echoing the KWP’s emphasis on national independence and the danger posed by negative outside influences, the starting point for the Dictadura con Respaldo Popular was to be “affirming the full independence of the country, and therefore, taking the measures that are necessary to cut off all foreign influence that is exercised over institutions, enterprises or persons, regardless of where it comes from or what is its ideology.”⁵¹²

⁵¹⁰ Juan Bosch, *Viajes a las Antípodas*, first edition, (Santo Domingo: Editoria Alfa y Omega, 1978), 48-49.

⁵¹¹ Juan Bosch, *Dictadura con Respaldo Popular* (May 1969), 116, available at http://www.salacela.net/pdf/22_23/articulo3.pdf.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 117.

Such a government would reflect the will of the masses by including representatives from an array of political, social, sectoral, and religious organizations elected by their members; it would be led by those who understood their legitimacy rest first and foremost on the support of the people.

When at the time of decision-making a group of leaders act believing that the people desire what they themselves desire, an act of supplantation of the masses by the leaders is carried out; this means that a group of leaders are considered superior to the people, more intelligent and more capable than the people. The supplantation of the people for those who lead or aspire to lead is always paid for with the abandonment of the masses, since the masses know better than anyone what they want and what they need, and they ended up turning their backs on those who take themselves for their representatives without respecting their right to express themselves, without having gained, with genuinely popular conduct, the right to represent them.⁵¹³

Bosch's thesis of the *Dictadura con Respaldo Popular* became a seminal text of Dominican leftist discourse, and guided his subsequent political career: his abandonment of the PRD and founding of the Partido de la Liberación Dominicana (Dominican Liberation Party, PLD) in 1973, and a total of five unsuccessful presidential bids between 1978 and 1994. According to declassified US intelligence reports, Bosch's political ambitions received support from the North Korean government until at least the late 1980s, as did other elements of the Dominican left.⁵¹⁴

Another example of how the issues of leadership and democracy in North Korea were interpreted by Latin American leftists comes from José Francisco Aguilar Bulgarelli, the prominent Costa Rican writer, activist and politician who first visited Pyongyang for the

⁵¹³ Ibid., 122-123.

⁵¹⁴ Ironically, the PLD has dominated Dominican politics only since Bosch's retirement, winning all but one national elections since 1996, albeit with a moderate program with little resemblance to Bosch's founding vision. As current PLD president Danilo Medina has been accused of undemocratic maneuvers, some critics have placed renewed attention on Bosch's dictatorship thesis. As the journalist Ubi Rivas wrote in 2015, "Today, the thesis of *La Dictadura con Respaldo Popular* is a reality, but not with the guidelines outlined by Bosch; devoid of Bosch's dream of a more just and egalitarian society, what remains is only the dangerous and antidemocratic project of a single party."

September 1969 international journalist's conference. Aguilar went on to become one of the preeminent figures of the international North Korea solidarity movement, co-founding and serving as Deputy Director-General of the Tokyo-based International Institute for the Study of the Chuch'e Idea, which was established in 1979. Having grown disillusioned with the Soviet Union and fearing Cuba was drifting in the same direction, in Pyongyang Aguilar discovered a "paradise" and "the only truly socialist country in the world." Having remained a self-described "solider for Kim Il Sung" to the present day, he recently reflected that the late president's leadership was based on "a very Eastern type of thought" that "has nothing to do with leadership as we understand it in Latin America." He explained:

I do not remember who was trying to say that Kim Il Sung was a god. No. For Koreans he was a man. And Kim Il Sung died and someone else took his place, right? But at that time, he was the representative of the people. The one who bore the representation of that people [...] the ideas of Korea, of the Chuch'e era, can not be applied elsewhere. What can be applied is the principle."⁵¹⁵

It is notable that Aguilar, a man who devoted much of his life to the promulgation of Chuch'e Sasang internationally, would distinguish between the transmissibility of the body of thought in its totality versus its "principle." Chuch'e is not a strictly national concept, he argues, rather it is a "una filosofía de vida" (philosophy of life) that can be applied by anyone, anywhere.⁵¹⁶ Yet by its very nature – affirming the centrality of independence, self-reliance, and praxis creatively developed in accordance with a society's unique conditions - the application of Chuch'e in any society would result in distinct outcomes. While Chuch'e Sasang provides principles of immense value to any revolutionary movement, the "paradise" that existed in North Korea owed to specific historical conditions, cultural characteristics, and modes of thinking

⁵¹⁵ José Francsico Aguilar Bulgarelli, personal communication with the author, 27 June 2016.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

unique to that society. And if the incredible power and importance vested in one man may be impossible or undesirable in another society's road to socialism, in North Korea it was in accordance with the values and aspirations of the people.

The common theme running through such accounts and the many others by European and North American leftists who visited Pyongyang in the 1960s, is that contemporary Western liberal frameworks were unequipped to understand North Korean political culture and the role of Kim Il Sung within it. The character of the North Korean state not only reflected unique historical conditions – the experience of Japanese colonialism, the rapid transition from feudalism and backwardness to socialist modernity - but culturally-specific epistemologies of nationhood, the individual, and authority. Bosch, Aguilar, and other visitors to North Korea in the 1960s were reasonable to assert that North Korean conceptions of freedom, just government, and the national interest might be radically different from those dominant in the West. However, such narratives by outsiders, arguably, involved a process of exoticizing North Korea as well, invoking old tropes of “Oriental despotism” and constructing Koreans as alien beings with psychological and emotional needs radically different from other peoples. Moreover, we know today that Kim's leadership did not enjoy the total consensus of support that visitors like Bosch and Aguilar believed existed. While North Korea never experienced anything approaching the scale of Stalin's purges or the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Kim's power was consolidated partly through a series of purges against dissenting factions within the KWP leadership. Much of the details of these purges, and of state repression of perceived internal enemies more broadly, remains inaccessible to scholars. Like any society, North Korea surely contended with not only division and factionalism within the KWP, but subversion, everyday resistance, juvenile delinquency, anti-social behaviour, and nonconformity of various kinds within the broad

population. On the other hand, Kim's high esteem among the North Korean people is also difficult to dispute, and the somewhat rose-tinted perspectives of foreign visitors like Bosch and Aguilar were sincere efforts to make sense of a functional model of leadership and a societal dynamic so completely alien to what they knew.

The idea of North Korea as a form of benevolent and popular dictatorship inadvertently offered justification to the Cuban leadership's own claims as to an organic rapport between Fidel and the masses that transcended the need for formal democratic procedures, and can be correctly seen as part of the ideological consensus between the two leaderships. As aptly portrayed by the Jamaican journalist Andrew Salkey at the time, during the 1960s mass public rallies where Fidel interacted with rapturous crowds were held as evidence of a symbiotic relationship between the pronouncements of the leader and the thoughts and emotions of the people. Che claimed that,

In the big public meetings, one can observe something like the dialogue of two tuning forks whose vibrations summon forth new vibrations each in the other. Fidel and the mass begin to vibrate in a dialogue of growing intensity that reaches its culminating point in an abrupt ending crowned by our victorious battle cry.

What is hard to understand for anyone who has not lived the revolutionary experience is that close dialectical unity which exists between the individual and the mass, as a whole composed of individuals, is in turn interrelated with the leader.⁵¹⁷

It is no coincidence, then, that in the frequent exchange of fraternal praise between the two ruling parties, specific references to the singular role played by Fidel Castro and Kim Il Sung were routine. An indirect product of Korean-Cuban bilateral relations was that both parties served to defend one another's government systems in the face of accusations of "Stalinism," "personality cult," and "dictatorship" from other sections of the international left.

⁵¹⁷ Ernesto Che Guevara, "Man and Socialism in Cuba," 340.

North Korea and the 1970 Cuban Sugar Harvest

Cuban and North Korean consensus on development policy was given its fullest expression in the former's famous campaign to harvest ten million tons of sugar in 1970. As the decade came to a close, the Cuban leadership initiated the most ambitious economic project in the nation's history, a massive labour mobilization projected to reap about three million tons more sugar than had ever been achieved in a single harvest season (*zafra*). Attempting to take advantage of high sugar prices on the international market, such a feat was intended to serve as the springboard for a major development programme. The Cuban state orchestrated all the resources at its disposal towards what Luis Martínez-Fernández described as "a single-focus national obsession."⁵¹⁸ All able-bodied Cubans were implored to volunteer their arms in the cane fields in what was presented as a monumental turning point in the nation's history, the passageway to a new era of modernity and prosperity. An estimated 1.2 million people, or 14.5 percent of the population, participated in the 1970 *zafra*, the majority of whom were not professional cane cutters but soldiers and volunteers.⁵¹⁹

The ambitious scheme gained the enthusiasm of the North Korean leadership, and became the stage of possibly the most symbolic project of Cuban-Korean solidarity of the era. In January 1970 a 103-member North Korean work brigade arrived in Havana, introduced to the Cuban public as *Los Jinetes de Chullima* – the *Ch'öllima Riders*. Composed of seventy-five cane cutters and twenty-eight tractor operators, the young men, all between the ages of twenty-four and twenty-five, declared their intention to harvest three million *arrobas* (or 37,500 tons) of cane in six months. Their exploits in the cane fields of Habana and Oriente provinces were given

⁵¹⁸ Luis Martínez-Fernández, *Revolutionary Cuba: A History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 113.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

extensive coverage in the Cuban press, and an air of mystery surrounded these foreign labour heroes, some of whom who could cut 750 arrobas, or about 8.5 tons, of cane in a single day (in 1960s Cuba it was held that an average cane-cutter was capable of cutting 200 arrobas a day).⁵²⁰ Interviewed for *Granma*, the North Koreans explained to a curious public that their brigade was organized along military lines with all members living and working collectively. They rose at four o'clock each morning, working from five to ten with a ten-minute rest each hour. Breaking for the mid-day sun, they returned to the fields from three in the afternoon until seven in the evening, and occupied their spare time with study, cultural activities, and rest. "For us, it has been exciting to wage this battle and participate together with our Cuban comrades in a struggle of such economic importance" one Ch'öllima Rider, I Yongsik, explained. "We have been energetically carrying out the instructions of Comrade Kim Il Sung in our modest help towards the sugar harvest of our Cuban brothers." Asked if they were homesick, Yongsik replied that "Naturally, we feel nostalgic for our homeland and our families" but that "studying the stories and recollections of the anti-Japanese guerrillas, who had to prevail over obstacles and difficulties so great, has been very helpful to strengthen consciousness and to improve our work." Moreover, their warm Cuban hosts had "made us feel like we had a new family."⁵²¹ According to the Cuban press, the Ch'öllima Riders reached their goal of three million arrobas early on 6 June 1970, after a final heroic push where they cut cane through the night under the shadows of tractor headlights.

⁵²⁰ Fidel Castro, "Discurso pronunciado por el Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz, Primer Secretario del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba y Primer Ministro del Gobierno Revolucionario, en el acto para dar inicio a la etapa masiva de la zafra de los 10 millones de toneladas," (27 October 1969), available at <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1969/esp/f271069e.html>.

⁵²¹ Rodríguez Calderón, "Con la trimillionaria 'Jinetes de Chullima:' Banderas en el Canaveral," *Granma* (Havana), 10 July 1970.

It is insightful to compare North Korea's contribution to the 1970 zafra with the notorious episode of Khrushchev's cane-cutting machines from several years earlier, related by the Polish journalist K.S. Karol. In June 1963 Fidel claimed that Nikita Khrushchev himself, a man with "an extraordinary intimacy with agricultural questions," had spearheaded the development of a new machine that could both cut and reap sugarcane, holding the promise of making this particularly back-breaking form of physical labour a thing of the past. "Next day, every Cuban paper proudly announced that, thanks to Soviet cane-cutting machines, Cuba was about to be delivered, once and for all, from her annual nightmare."⁵²² One thousand such machines were delivered to Cuba. However it soon became apparent that their Soviet designers were unfamiliar with the delicate specificities of sugarcane and the Cuban environment. Karol could remark with sarcasm: "Nikita Khrushchev's brilliant invention is nothing but a subject for bitter jokes in Cuba."⁵²³

Comparing the two episodes helps us understand why, during the 1960s, some Cuban leaders had a level of admiration for, and a fealty towards, North Korea they did not share with their Soviet ally, despite the fact that the latter was a far greater source of economic, technical, and military assistance. While the Soviets sent advanced machines that did not work, North Korea sent young men – young men who laboured ferociously with the determination of soldiers at war, quickly adapted to and excelled at their tasks, and were grateful simply for the honour of taking part in such a project. It symbolized Cuban leaders' conviction that the triumph of socialism depended primarily on subjective rather than objective factors, and the power of idealism, commitment, and will over rationality, pragmatism, and expertise. Los Jinetes de

⁵²² K.S. Karol, *Guerrillas in Power*, translated by Arnold Pomerans (New York: Hill & Wang, 1970), 412.

⁵²³ Ibid.

Chullima embodied the “New Man” the Cuban Revolution vowed to bring into being, defined in the resolution of the 1968 Cultural Congress of Havana: “technically capable, physically apt, morally and spiritually rich. A man who harmoniously embodies in himself the best of society: a man capable of all selflessness and of all heroism: a man, in short, who expresses the highest revolutionary and radical determination to permanently transform society and the human condition.”⁵²⁴

The high aspirations of Cuban voluntarism were not met with the 1970 sugar harvest, however. It was, rather, a resounding failure, and an embarrassment for the Cuban leadership which had ignored many warnings as to the plan’s severe flaws.⁵²⁵ Faced with a shortage of skilled cane-cutters, the mobilization relied heavily on inexperienced volunteers, soldiers, and prison labour. The success of the plan was premised on the prior mechanization of the harvesting process, but this crucial stage fell far below its targets. Inadequate planning and logistical problems meant the different stages of production were ill-coordinated, ensuring much sugarcane was wasted as a result of not being processed in time. Moreover, following years of austerity, there was a deficit of the self-sacrificing spirit that had characterized the early years of the revolution, and low productivity and absenteeism were prevalent. Not only did the 1970 *zafra* fail to meet its goals – estimates range from 7.5 to 8.5 tons harvested - it caused major disruptions in the economy as central planners funneled all possible resources into the mobilization.

⁵²⁴ *Cultural Congress of Havana: Meeting of Intellectuals from all the World on Problems of Asia, Africa and Latin America*,” (Havana: Instituto del Libro, 1968).

⁵²⁵ Luis Martínez-Fernández, *Revolutionary Cuba: A History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 117-121.

It is difficult not to see something ominous in the fact that in Cuba the 1960s ended with the attempted ten million ton sugar harvest. Its striking failure was one of several developments, both domestic and international, that motivated the Cuban leadership to move away from the idealism and radicalism of the 1960s, with major repercussions for DPRK-Cuba relations. From this angle, North Korea's participation in the 1970 zafta represented both the pinnacle of solidarity between the two countries and the beginning of its decline. Nevertheless, the debate over material versus moral incentives and central planning versus enterprise autonomy continued to resurface in Cuba until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the radical economic restructuring that followed. Moreover, the idea of North Korea as socialist economic miracle would continue to hold significant currency within the international left, and was a central theme of the DPRK-solidarity movement in Latin America that blossomed in the 1970s.

Another side of Pyongyang

As this chapter demonstrates, North Korean bore a high degree of prestige within the international left in the latter half of the 1960s. However, unforeseen events held the potential to disrupt the image Pyongyang presented to the outside world. In September 1967, two Latin American communists living and working in Pyongyang as Spanish translators, Ali Lameda and Eduardo Murillo Ugarte, were arrested. Lameda, a prominent Venezuelan author and poet, was held for twelve months without trial, during which time he was subjected to brutal interrogations. He was eventually tried and accused of being a spy and saboteur for the CIA, and sentenced to twenty years imprisonment with forced labour in a prison near Sariwŏn. This was all the more remarkable because Lameda was a foreign guest of some prestige: he was well-known in communist diplomatic and cultural circles, he had met Kim Il Sung, and North Korea's

Department of Foreign Publications had held a dinner in his honour just three days before his arrest.⁵²⁶

After enduring six years of solitary confinement, he was released in May 1974, allegedly in part due to the intervention of Romanian president Nicolae Ceaușescu, who knew Lameda personally.⁵²⁷ Following his imprisonment, Lameda offered some rough figures on incarceration in North Korea: he estimated a prison population of 150,000, although he did not have any guess as to what proportion were there for political offences like himself.⁵²⁸ According to Lameda, in the prison where he served his time inmates laboured twelve hours a day, seven days a week, with the exception of major holidays. Conditions were generally deplorable, including rations so meager they “reduced grown men to weeping” and insufficient heat during the winter months.

Eduardo Murillo Ugarte, a Chilean who first came to Pyongyang in 1960 on a scholarship to study medicine, was arrested along with his Ukrainian wife, a fellow foreign student. Murillo was accused of sharing South Korean press articles with other Latin Americans in Pyongyang, of having an extra-marital affair, and of spying for the CIA.⁵²⁹ Murillo spent eight months in solitary confinement before being released and deported, as was his wife. Murillo believes he owes his release primarily to the fact that his father was a prominent trade unionist and president of the Chile-Korea Friendship Institute.

⁵²⁶ Ali Lameda, *Ali Lameda: a Personal Account of a Prisoner of Conscience in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea* (London: Amnesty International, International Secretariat, 1979), 27.

⁵²⁷ While Lameda claimed Ceaușescu's personal intervention was paramount in securing his release, there were likely other factors at work. Amnesty International had adopted Lameda's case in the early 1970s, and claims the Venezuelan government was also campaigning on Lameda's behalf. In 1974 North Korea was pushing for diplomatic relations with Venezuela, which finally occurred in October of that year, five months after Lameda's release. In a recent interview Eduardo Murillo claims that Sékou Touré, President of Guinea and a poetry aficionado, may have played a hand in Lameda's release as well. See Interview with Eduardo Murillo Ugarte on Chilean radio station Tele13 103.3FM, 7 February 2016.

⁵²⁸ Lameda, *Ali Lameda: a Personal Account of a Prisoner of Conscience*, 19.

⁵²⁹ Eduardo Murillo Ugarte, personal communication with the author, 4 April 2018.

Since their incarcerations in North Korea, both Lameda and Murillo have offered the same explanation as to why they were targeted by the security apparatus: they failed to sufficiently conceal their critical views of the Kim Il Sung personality cult. Both claim that they, like most foreigners in Pyongyang, inevitably grew irritated by the constant fanatical praise of Kim, and the superhuman feats attributed to him, which they themselves had to routinely regurgitate in their work as translators. Murillo recounts that he and other Latin Americans in Pyongyang often spoke critically of the government amongst themselves, unaware their residences were bugged with microphones.

It is unclear how many other foreigners in Pyongyang ran afoul of the authorities in the same period. Murillo claims he knew of two Colombian women in Pyongyang who met a fate similar to his own. Lameda was arrested alongside Jaques Sedillot, a French veteran of both the Spanish Civil War and the Algerian War of Independence, who was also accused of espionage.⁵³⁰ Sedillot was released in 1975, hopeful he would return to France to see his gravely ill mother before she passed. This was not to be: in his seventies, Sedillot's health had deteriorated badly in prison, and he died in Pyongyang shortly after gaining his freedom.

How should we make sense of these events? As Chapter Two examined, in 1967 North Korea was essentially on a war footing. Since October 1966 Pyongyang had sharply escalated aggressive military actions against South Korea and US forces stationed there. The arrests of Lameda, Murillo, and Sedillot occurred four months after the purge of the Gapsan faction at the Fifteenth Plenum,⁵³¹ and four months before the Blue House raid and the capture of the USS

⁵³⁰ Lameda, *Ali Lameda: a Personal Account of a Prisoner of Conscience*, 22-24.

⁵³¹ Lameda himself recalled that around the time of his arrest, "some rows were going at the top of the Party and the government hierarchy," signaling "a very important change in Korean politics." He further believed the arrest of himself and other foreigners must be understood in the context of the failures of the Seven-Year Plan (1961-70), and

Pueblo. A January 1968 report from the East German embassy in Pyongyang reported that the North Korean government, convinced that war was imminent, had tightened restrictions on internal travel for its citizens, was resettling large segments of Pyongyang's population to the countryside, and relocating vital factories.⁵³² North Korean authorities had even "banned all romantic lyrics and old Korean love stories because love would distract the people from their revolutionary thinking," the Soviet embassy reported.⁵³³ It appears, therefore, that Lameda, Murillo, and others were the victims of the paranoia and obsession with fifth columns and foreign infiltration that often accompanies times of war, especially when a ruling group feels vulnerable and under siege. However, other facets of North Korea's domestic politics in the 1966-69 period, namely Kim's moves to eliminate potential rivals within the KWP leadership, and the intensification of the Kim personality cult, suggests that other dynamics were at play. These included, firstly, an emerging political culture in which the persona of Kim was imbued with such reverence that to question the grandiose claims of his personality cult was a kind of blasphemy, and, secondly, a related psychological climate of zealotry, sycophancy, and collective anxiety, in which people are incentivised to discover and expose internal enemies, if for no other reason, than to avoid being accused of lack of vigilance.

Some might reasonably wonder how North Korea's reputation within the Latin American left weathered the impact of the revelations of Lameda and Murillo's respective ordeals. Was the heartbreaking story of Jaques Sedillot alone not enough to cause international outrage? Did the French Communist Party not raise protests? Certainly there is a question of

the intensification of the Kim personality cult. See Lameda, *Ali Lameda: a Personal Account of a Prisoner of Conscience*, 23-24.

⁵³² "Memorandum on Two Informational Reports from the GDR Embassy in the DPRK, Pyongyang," January 05, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MfAA, C 1088/70. Translated by Karen Riechert. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113708>.

⁵³³ Ibid.

awareness: although Lameda and Murillo wrote about their experiences and elaborated scathing critics of North Korean socialism, the first of these texts were not published until 1979.⁵³⁴

Murillo recalls with some bitterness that, at the time, the Chilean left-wing press remained silent on his incarceration. “I think in those years, nobody even touched the subject. Apparently, everything related to my drama was buried by the Chilean left, with a view to not generate disturbances in the presidential campaign of Salvador Allende...”⁵³⁵ Even to the extent that these incidents were known, surely some on the left reasoned that such heavy-handed measures, and their occasional excesses, were a necessary evil to defend the revolution against its enemies. Others perhaps justified their silence on the grounds of communist solidarity and the desire not to provide the imperialists with more material for their anti-communist propaganda. Nor was it unreasonable to accept that North Korea did indeed have to contend with foreign espionage. However, the most salient explanation is the fact that the experiences of Lameda, Murillo, and others were rare exceptions among those of thousands of foreigners who visited North Korea in the same period, many of whom testified to a remarkable model of socialism for the Global South. Ultimately, the few stories that suggested not all was well in Pyongyang were drowned out by a different narrative presented by the Cuban press, publications like *Boletín Tricontinental* and *Monthly Review*, books like Wilfred Burchett’s *Again Korea?*, and North Korea’s own efforts to influence world opinion.

⁵³⁴ Lameda, *Ali Lameda: a Personal Account of a Prisoner of Conscience*; Eduardo Murillo Ugarte, *Infierno en Norcorea* (Santiago: Alfabet, 1980).

⁵³⁵ Eduardo Murillo Ugarte, personal communication with the author, 4 April 2018.

Chapter Five

North Korea as a Model of Revolution

This chapter continues the theme of the deeper ideological relationships that emerged out of North Korea's growing engagement with Latin America in the 1960s. In Chapter Three, we saw how this engagement included efforts to support armed guerrilla groups throughout the region, in line with Pyongyang's call for an "anti-imperialist, anti-US united front" that could "sever the limbs" of US imperialism. Such activity was inevitably accompanied by some degree of ideological influence as well, and all accounts by Latin American guerrillas who received training in North Korea relate that this training included classes in political theory based on Korean history and the political thought of Kim Il Sung. This chapter explores this subject further, showing how the KWP promoted its own distinctly North Korean body of revolutionary theory, presented as based on the experience of Kim Il Sung's Manchurian partisans during 1932-45, what it called the "revolutionary traditions of the glorious Anti-Japanese Armed Struggle." The points of consensus between North Korean and Cuban revolutionary doctrine ensured that Pyongyang acted as a steadfast ally of the Cuban leadership when it came under fire for its heterodox ideological positions. More significantly, the North Korean and Cuban leaderships jointly defended controversial innovations in the Marxist theory of the party, which both solidified the alliance between the KWP and PCC, and had a tangible influence on the Latin American guerrilla movements.

North Korea and the Cuban heresy

The revolutionary vision of Fidel, Che, and other Cuban leaders was never limited to a strictly national framework. They conceived of their victory against the Batista regime as the

first phase of an unfolding continental revolution that would topple the traditional oligarchies and liberate the region from its neo-colonial subjugation to the United States. “What is it that is hidden behind the Yankee's hatred of the Cuban Revolution?” Fidel asked in the *Second Declaration of Havana*. It was the “...fear that the plundered people of the continent will seize the arms from the oppressors and, like Cuba, declare themselves free people of America.”⁵³⁶ Moreover, Cuban leaders believed that common conditions in Latin America and the Caribbean meant that the revolutionary guerrilla war against Batista during 1957-59 provided a model applicable to the entire region. The Cuban leadership distilled this experience into a body of revolutionary praxis that became known as foquismo, or “foco theory,” primarily defined in the writings and speeches of Che, Fidel and Régis Debray between 1960 and 1967.⁵³⁷

Foquismo was deeply controversial, however - the Polish journalist K.S. Karol dubbed it “the Cuban heresy” for the manner in which it contradicted certain firmly-established conventions of Marxist-Leninist theory.⁵³⁸ Cuban leaders maintained that the objective conditions for revolution in most of Latin America were in abundance – it was the subjective conditions that were lacking: courage, leadership, “an awareness of the possibilities of achieving victory by following the road of violence against the imperialist powers and their allies within the country.”⁵³⁹ This situation did not call for a patient process of organizing among the masses,

⁵³⁶ Fidel Castro, *Second Declaration of Havana* (4 February 1962), available at <http://www.walterlippmann.com/fc-02-04-1962.pdf>.

⁵³⁷ Chief among these documents are Che's *Guerrilla Warfare* (1961), Fidel's *Second Declaration of Havana* (1962) and Debray's *Revolution in the revolution?* (1967); although other important sources include Fidel's 1965 speech, *The Duty of Marxists-Leninists and the Revolutionary Line*, and two essays by Che, *Cuba: Exceptional Case or Vanguard in the Struggle Against Colonialism?* (1961) and *The Marxist-Leninist Party* (1963).

⁵³⁸ The pre-1959 political background of the core of the Cuban leadership, including Fidel, was in the Movimiento 26 de Julio (July 26 Movement, M-26-7). Generally speaking such men and women were essentially left-wing nationalists and quite critical of Cuba's original communist party, the Partido Socialista Popular (People's Socialist Party, PSP). Even the two major leaders with clear Marxist convictions prior to 1958 – Che and Fidel's brother Raúl – were never members of any communist party.

⁵³⁹ Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, “Cuba, Historical Exception or Vanguard in the Anti-Colonial Struggle?” (April 1961) in Luis E. Aguilar (ed), *Marxism in Latin America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968):177-178.

they argued, but rather immediate action by a small vanguard of committed revolutionaries who were to launch guerrilla *focos* (focuses) in the remote, impoverished regions of the countryside. The subjective conditions necessary for revolution would blossom in the course of armed struggle, as bold insurrectionary actions by the guerrillas would reverberate throughout society, sparking a wide-scale uprising. This audacious faith in the ability of a small group of iron-willed revolutionaries to set in motion the wheels of historical change was summarized in the famous words of the Second Declaration of Havana, “The duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution.”⁵⁴⁰ By building upon the Cuban precedent, foquismo dictated that rural guerrilla warfare waged from the mountains was the preeminent revolutionary strategy in Latin America, as “the Andes will be the Sierra Maestra of America.”⁵⁴¹ Moreover, the masses of poor peasants were the primary revolutionary force in society, and could be relied upon to swell the ranks of a rebel army capable of defeating the state’s security forces and seizing power. It must be noted, however, that this schemata was based on a particular interpretation of the 1957-59 struggle against Batista. There is a long tradition of criticism of the official Cuban historiography, the most recent being Steve Cushion’s *A Hidden History of the Cuban Revolution: How the Working Class Shaped the Guerrillas’ Victory*.⁵⁴² Among other points, Cuban leaders have been taken to task for exaggerating the singular role of Fidel’s rebel army in Batista’s overthrow, and diminishing the contribution of the urban movement, a charge that is difficult to refute.⁵⁴³

As seen in Chapter Three, foquismo appealed to the more radical, heterodox and generally younger elements of the Latin American left, and guided the majority of the guerrilla

⁵⁴⁰ Castro, *Second Declaration of Havana*.

⁵⁴¹ Ernesto Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Method* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1964), 16.

⁵⁴² Steve Cushion, *A Hidden History of the Cuban Revolution: How the Working Class Shaped the Guerrillas’ Victory* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016).

⁵⁴³ See Matt D. Childs, “An Historical Critique of the Emergence and Evolution of Ernesto Che Guevara’s Foco Theory,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27, no. 3 (Oct., 1995): 593-62.

movements that emerged across the region in the 1960s. However the theory received fierce criticism from both Cuba's allies within the socialist camp and from Marxists intellectuals affiliated with the established Latin American communist parties. Following the breakdown of Sino-Cuban relations in the mid-1960s the Communist Party of China (CPC) joined the chorus of criticism, positing Mao Zedong's concept of "people's war" as more relevant to Latin America. Such critics chastised foquismo as an idealistic and adventurist doctrine that failed to recognize the unique set of circumstances that made the defeat of Batista in 1959 possible, and naively homogenized what were markedly diverse conditions across the region. In particular, they questioned the revolutionary potential of the Latin American peasant in many countries and pointed out the notable absence of the working class in the Cuban vision. Foquismo also discarded the traditionally preeminent role attributed to the Marxist-Leninist vanguard party, as the courage and will of men in arms seemed to eclipse the importance of sound ideology and political leadership. The notion of "the duty of every revolutionary to make the revolution" appeared to many of these critics as a reckless disregard for objective conditions and a delusional belief in the ability of individuals to force the movement of history. The Soviet and Eastern Bloc parties saw foquismo as further proof of the unfortunate petit-bourgeois tendencies and shallow Marxism of many Cuban leaders. Che's death in Bolivia in October 1967 only intensified such criticism. The Argentine communist Rodolfo Ghioldi, for example, penned an article blaming Che's death squarely on the latter's faulty analysis and strategy.⁵⁴⁴ *Pravda* reprinted the article to

⁵⁴⁴ K.S. Karol, *Guerrillas in Power*, translated by Arnold Pomerans (New York: Hill & Wang, 1970), 391-392.

the outrage of Cuban leaders,⁵⁴⁵ who, in return, declined to attend the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution celebrations in Moscow.⁵⁴⁶

While seemingly under attack from all sides, the Cuban leadership found a steadfast ally and supporter of its controversial positions in North Korea. While the Second Declaration of Havana was criticized by Moscow and the Latin American communist parties as adventurist and patently un-Marxist, it was formally celebrated at the House of Culture in Pyongyang as a “valuable document lighting the way of the Cuban Revolution and the national liberation struggle in Latin America.”⁵⁴⁷ *Kulloja* argued that “...the Cuban revolution illustrates how we ought to carry out the revolution,” as it had, “...set up a model of liberation struggle to the people of Latin America...”⁵⁴⁸ Following Che’s death in Bolivia, Kim Il Sung paid homage to the fallen revolutionary in his second essay for the OSPAAAL journal, *Boletín Tricontinental*. In it, he defended Che’s legacy and upheld it as a model for the Latin American revolutionary movement. Responding to the accusations of the adventurism inherent in the foquista strategy, Kim wrote: “The revolution must unfold in accordance with concrete reality in which the objective situation of the revolution is produced in each country. Nevertheless, this in no way means that the revolution can develop and mature on its own. The revolution can advance and mature at a secure pace only through active and arduous struggle by revolutionaries.”⁵⁴⁹ Kim

⁵⁴⁵ This was not the first time *Pravda* had endorsed such content. In July 1967, in the midst of the OLAS conference, *Pravda* printed an editorial by Luis Corvalán, general-secretary of the Partido Comunista de Chile (Communist Party of Chile, PCCh). The article criticized the Cuban leadership for attempting to impose its leadership on the rest of the Latin American communist movement, and disputed that the Cuban model could be replicated in other countries.

⁵⁴⁶ Karol, *Guerrillas in Power*, 391-392.

⁵⁴⁷ “Meeting marks 2nd Havana Declaration,” Pyongyang KCNA, 4 February 1963, reprinted in *Daily Report: Foreign Radio Broadcasts* (Washington), 05 February 1963.

⁵⁴⁸ Ko Sung-il, “Revolutionary people of the world must support the revolutionary struggle of the Cuban people,” *Kulloja* no. 30 (April 1968), reprinted in *Translations on North Korea* no.87 (July 1969): 109.

⁵⁴⁹ Kim Il Sung, “La Gran Causa Revolucionaria Antimperialista de Los Pueblos de Asia, Africa y America Latina es invencible,” *Tricontinental* no. 8 (October 1968), reprinted in Kim Il Sung, *El Movimiento de los No Alineados es*

echoed Fidel's contention that what was lacking in Latin America was not the objective conditions for revolution, but rather courage within the leadership of the communist movement, invoking Fidel's famous axiom that "the duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution."

Kim wrote:

To turn one's back on the revolution on the pretext of avoiding sacrifice means, in fact, to force the people to be the eternal slaves of capital and to tolerate forever the most cruel exploitation and oppression, unbearable mistreatment and humiliation, and innumerable sufferings and sacrifices [...] to hesitate to make the revolution because you cannot overcome difficulties or for fear of sacrifice is not the attitude of a revolutionary.^{550 551}

North Korea's strident defence of the Cuban leadership can partly be explained by the large degree of consensus between foquismo and what the KWP called the "revolutionary traditions of the glorious Anti-Japanese Armed Struggle," its own, distinctly North Korean body of politico-military theory. Just as foco theory was based on the experience of the Cuban guerrilla war against the Batista regime from 1957-59, North Korean revolutionary theory was presented as based on the experience of the Korean partisans' struggle against Japanese colonial rule in Manchuria during 1932-45. According to the KWP, this heritage lived on as an "immortal and precious revolutionary treasure" and demonstrated how under circumstances of colonial rule, intense state repression and predominantly rural, "semi-feudal" socio-economic conditions, communists could build a mass revolutionary movement capable of expelling foreign forces and

una Poderosa Fuerza Revolucionaria Antiimperialista de nuestra Época (Pyongyang: Ediciones en Lenguas Extranjeras, 1976), 82.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 83.

⁵⁵¹ It is worth noting the difference between the Korean, Spanish, and English translations of this passage. The official English translation, as it appears in the 1985 edition of Kim Il Sung's *Works*, vol. 23, gives a somewhat vaguer and politically neutral translation: "To flinch before difficulties and hesitate in the revolution for fear of sacrifice is not the attitude befitting a revolutionary." Yet the Spanish edition published in *Boletín Tricontinental*, and later in the Spanish edition of the important 1976 book, *The Non-Aligned Movement is a Power Revolutionary Force of our Era*, is much closer to the language of Fidel's famous axiom that, "The duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution," ("El deber de todo revolucionario es hacer la revolución"), in that it uses the wording "hacer la revolución" ("to make the revolution"). The Chosŏnmal version contained in the 2002 edition of Kim Il Sung's *Chŏnjip*, vol. 42 actually uses the verb "hyŏngmyŏnghada," which is most accurately translated as "to participate in revolution." Special thanks to Dr. Don Baker for his help with these translation issues.

seizing power.⁵⁵² The important points of consensus between North Korean and Cuban revolutionary theory strengthened the alliance between the two parties and exerted an important influence on the Latin American guerrilla movements of the 1960s.

Some readers might find it odd that the North Korean model of anti-colonial revolution could be seen as relevant for Latin America. The vast majority of the region had gained independence from colonial rule during the nineteenth century, with the exception of those Caribbean territories that were still European possessions, and the US territories of Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. Nevertheless, anti-imperialism – and a critique of *imperialismo yanqui* specifically – has historically been at the centre of the Latin American left-wing intellectual tradition. Marxist and nationalist intellectuals saw in the region conditions typical of other societies enduring direct colonial rule: resources were monopolized by US corporations, ensuring that wealth flowed primarily outward to the imperial centre, perpetuating underdevelopment, dependency, archaic labour conditions, and massive land monopolies. US military bases dotted the region and Washington routinely intervened when the leaders it favoured to rule were under threat by popular movements for reform. As the Tricontinental Conference declared:

European influence in Latin America was progressively substituted by the new colonial system of the United States, aided and abetted in each country by the native oligarchy, which had seized power when the armed forces of Spain surrendered. The political independence of Latin American countries was limited in reality to a nominal change of sovereignty which actually meant the strengthening of the semi-feudal, social and economic structure instituted by the colonial domination of Spain, with its corresponding class relations, hierarchy and privileges.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵² This chapter limits itself to how this model of revolution as articulated by the KWP in the 1960s engaged with Latin American radical-left discourse of the time. It forgoes an in-depth analysis of the relation of this model to the broader historiography, or to Chinese (Maoist) revolutionary theory, which are important questions but beyond the scope of this dissertation.

⁵⁵³ “Antecedents and Objectives of the Movement of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America,” in *First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America* (Havana: General Secretariat of the OSPAAAL, 1966), 8.

Both the Cuban and North Korean leaderships embraced the concept of “neo-colonialism,” popularized by Kwame Nkrumah’s famous 1965 work, *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, and which had achieved great currency within the international left in the 1960s. From this perspective, the nominally independent countries of Latin America were merely in a different stage of colonialism than, say, the Portuguese colonies of sub-Saharan Africa. “The outstanding feature of the process of colonial exploitation in Latin America has been its evolution into new forms of neo-colonial dependence, a phenomenon which originated earlier in that area than in Asia and Africa. There it appeared in its most acute and extended form only a few years ago, when many countries arrived at political independence.”⁵⁵⁴

The foundation of the “revolutionary traditions of the glorious Anti-Japanese Armed Struggle,” according to North Korean texts, is that Kim had maintained the Chuch’e line, rebuking the “servilists” and “factionalists” who, beholden to foreign dogmas rather than correctly understanding their own society’s unique conditions, called for immediate socialist revolution. Kim maintained that in a colonial and predominantly agrarian society such as Korea, the immediate task was in fact an “anti-imperialist, anti-feudalist, democratic revolution.” The driving force behind this revolution was the peasantry, supported by a broad coalition of “patriotic” forces – even anti-communist ones - uniting the working class, intellectuals, the youth, the middle classes, and the national bourgeoisie. In short, Kim had maintained that the path to victory was a progressive, nationalist movement against Japanese rule and a minority of local comprador elements, in which “ultra-left” and “adventurist” calls for class struggle were premature and dangerously divisive.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 7.

According to North Korean historiography, Kim founded his guerrilla movement, made up of “mostly young communists” on 25 April 1932, ten days after his twentieth birthday. In the first stage, the guerrillas established remote bases in the frontier zones of the north of the country and in eastern Manchuria. In the rural communities they settled amongst, the guerrillas launched local organs of democratic government and led a process of land reform, raising political consciousness and winning the support of the peasants. During this period the guerrillas avoided major engagement with the enemy while they focused on obtaining weapons, recruiting fighters, solidifying their base of support, and forging links with other anti-Japanese forces. Parallel to Chuch’e Sasang’s emphasis on self-reliance, the KWP maintained that revolutionary movements must be able to survive and prosper without outside assistance, making this initial stage of patiently accumulating strength and solidifying community support essential. The successes of the Korean partisans in these initial years allowed Kim to consolidate disparate rebel groups in different regions under his unified military command, giving birth to the People’s Revolutionary Army in 1934.

This build up of forces allowed Kim to initiate the second phase of the struggle in 1936, in which from a new base in Mount Baekdu the guerrillas switched to more offensive and large-scale tactics and extended the territorial scope of their operations. This strategy was carried out in combination with clandestine agitation throughout the country and the launch of a broad-based civilian movement, the Association for the Restoration of the Fatherland. This organization served to both incorporate the widest possible range of sectors into the anti-Japanese struggle, and also to funnel recruits and material aid to the guerrillas. The guerrilla army was not simply a military organization, but also a kind of school in which rebel fighters were groomed into the future leadership of the country. Out of this process came the establishment of the Marxist-

Leninist vanguard party in the final phase of the guerrilla war, for the purpose of establishing and leading a new national government.

Whatever the practical merits of the “revolutionary traditions of the glorious Anti-Japanese Armed Struggle” as a body of revolutionary strategy, they depart considerably from the historical record. The official North Korean historiography of the anti-Japanese struggle distorts, exaggerates, and omits facts to create an impossibly simplistic narrative few historians outside of North Korea give much credence to. While Kim Il Sung was indeed an important and famous guerrilla leader, he was one of many, and his guerrilla unit fought under the supreme command of the Northeast United Anti-Japanese Army, organized and lead by the Communist Party of China (CPC).⁵⁵⁵ Nor did Kim found or lead the Association for the Restoration of the Fatherland, an organization which, in any event, played a far less important role than North Korean historiography maintains. The People’s Revolutionary Army Kim supposedly launched in 1936 is essentially a fiction, a way to endow an image of unity and a distinctly Korean character upon a resistance movement which was much more complex and in which Chinese and Comintern leadership was central. In the final years of 1941-45, Kim and his troops were in fact taking refuge in the Soviet East, having fled there to avoid being exterminated by Japan’s determined counter-insurgency efforts. While Kim’s accomplishments as a revolutionary were numerous and impressive, and his courage and talents indisputable, they could not meet the ambitions of the grandiose personality cult constructed around him during the 1960s.

On the other hand, the wild exaggerations and omissions in the North Korean historiography do not render the revolutionary strategy promoted by the KWP in the 1960s

⁵⁵⁵ Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2011), 51-53; Dae-sook Suh, *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 30-31, 52-54.

insincere or baseless. Rather, the lessons contained within it can be seen as reflecting not just the successes of the anti-Japanese guerrillas, but also their hardships, failures, and blunders. For example, Kim's guerrillas, as might realistically be expected, contended with deserters, traitors, and informants, and did not always receive support from local peasants. Therefore the KWP's emphasis on the fundamental importance of a solid base among the masses likely stems not from the fact that Kim's guerrillas always enjoyed such support, but because they knew the disastrous consequences of failing to achieve it.

North Korean revolutionary doctrine clearly contradicted Cuban foquismo on several points. The Cuban exaltation of courage and will, its insistence that revolutionaries take up arms *despite* an initial absence of support, contrasts markedly with the KWP's more humble image of the guerrilla as one who first and foremost understands and serves the people. Kim juxtaposed his emphasis on recognizing and adapting to objective conditions, efficient military strategy, and winning over the masses, against "adventurist" and "ultra-leftist" positions - precisely what many Marxists accused the Cuban leadership of. Although the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP) had originally argued that the Cuban revolution was, like the Chinese and North Korean forbearers, a "patriotic and democratic national liberation and agrarian revolution," rather than a socialist revolution, this thesis was abandoned in the early 1960s by the Sierra leadership. As Cuba's business community and much of its professional strata rapidly exited the island, and the new government faced mounting hostility from neighbouring states, this thesis no longer seemed to apply to the Latin American context. By 1963 Che argued that in Latin America, especially in the new conditions brought about by the Cuban Revolution, "the weak national bourgeoisie

chooses imperialism and betrays its own country...”⁵⁵⁶ The Cuban leadership then shifted to a concept of the Latin American revolution as a socialist revolution against US imperialism and the domestic exploiter classes, in which the peasantry was the chief revolutionary force, but leadership came from the most advanced sectors of the proletariat – a narrative more in common with Lenin’s classical formation of the worker-peasant alliance.⁵⁵⁷

Nevertheless, there were also strong parallels between North Korean and Cuban revolutionary theory that ultimately outweighed their differences. In both models, revolutionaries establish guerrilla units in the most remote areas of the countryside, recruiting peasants who are won over to the revolution by the desire for land reform and hatred of foreign oppression. Both identify protracted, rural-based guerrilla warfare as the primary form of struggle in the Global South, and emphasize constant mobility and the advantages of effectively utilizing mountainous topography. Both outline escalating stages of combat that were essentially identical: an initial period focused on consolidating local support, obtaining arms from the enemy and recruiting fighters, followed by a more aggressive phase of increasingly bold guerrilla offenses, and finally, the formation of a rebel army capable of engaging the enemy in conventional warfare. Both strategies accounted for an urban underground and a broader united front in the cities that would play a role as well, although subsumed to the guerrilla leadership.

The other similarity between North Korean and Cuban revolutionary theory is that they were both buttressed by creative interpretations of recent history. In both cases, such historical

⁵⁵⁶ Ernesto Che Guevara, prologue to *El partido marxista-leninista* (Habana: Dirección Nacional del Partido Unido de la Revolución Socialista de Cuba, 1963), available at:

http://www.archivochile.com/America_latina/Doc_paises_al/Cuba/Escritos_del_Che/escritosdelche0058.pdf.

⁵⁵⁷ It is worth noting that many of the Cuban-inspired Latin American guerrilla movements of the 1960s stuck to the conception of their projects as “national liberation struggles,” believing that the national bourgeoisie had a vested interest in an end to US economic domination, and could play an important role in economic development following the overthrow of the old order.

narratives served the same, dual purpose: to reinforce the political monopoly of the dominant leadership group vis-à-vis potential rivals, and to assist in the creation of a new national mythos, as required by all young nation-states born of revolution and war.

North Korea, Cuba, and the Marxist Theory of the Party

By far the most significant parallel between Cuban and North Korean revolutionary theory, was how both radically re-conceptualized the traditional Marxist theory of the party. The central role of the vanguard party in the revolution was a ubiquitous pillar of hitherto Marxist-Leninist praxis. Communist political tradition had endowed the party with a virtually sacred status, as captured so powerfully in the novels of Victor Serge. Yet both Cuban and North Korean revolutionary doctrine rejected traditional Marxist formulas of armed struggle in which combat groups (whether militias, guerrilla units, or a people's army) merely served as the military arm of the party. By contrast they actually removed the party from the period of revolutionary struggle altogether: rather than the party leading the revolution, the revolution would give birth to the party. Mao Zedong had famously stated that "Our principle is that the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party." But placing the gun in command is precisely what Cuban and North Korean revolutionary theory demanded.

For the Cubans this was largely justified in pragmatic terms of military strategy: the concentration of authority, communications, and resources in a rural-based military command was necessary to successfully wage the struggle, coordinate its many branches, and withstand the state's counter-insurgency efforts. If victory was ultimately decided on the battlefield, decision-making power must be placed in military commanders rather than political leaders removed from the frontlines. "No political front which is basically a deliberative body can assume leadership of a people's war" Debray maintained, because "only a technically capable executive group,

centralized and united on the basis of identical class interests, can do so; in brief, only a revolutionary general staff.”⁵⁵⁸ The traditional structure and organizational principles of the communist party were inadequate to wage war, which was an inherently undemocratic pursuit and required strict military discipline.⁵⁵⁹ In theory the established Latin American communist parties could transform themselves into the military vanguard, but historical circumstances made this unlikely, and accounted for their consistent refusal to accept the necessity of armed struggle. Just as the Cuban line privileged the military over the political, the most important qualities of a guerrilla were courage, will, and practical battlefield experience – not their familiarity with Marxist-Leninist texts. The historical communist parties were based in urban areas, in the factories, on the waterfront, and in the universities. But the Cuban leadership developed a narrative in which the ascetic, dangerous world of the guerrilla was contrasted with the corruption and decadence of the cities; Debray followed Frantz Fanon’s contention that, in the Global South, the urban proletariat was in fact a relatively privileged stratum and therefore lacking in revolutionary character. In this context, the harsh realities of guerrilla life and the sacrifice it demanded had a kind of purifying effect, producing the most robust human material of the revolution. “As we know” wrote Debray, “the mountain proletarianizes the bourgeois and peasant elements, and the city can bourgeoisify the proletarians.”⁵⁶⁰ It was through guerrilla struggle that the revolutionary movement’s core was cleansed of weakness and ideological shortcomings, making it alone capable of analysing conditions clearly and acting accordingly. In essence, Cuban revolutionary theory called for military and political leadership to be combined in a rural-based guerrilla nucleus, from which the future Marxist-Leninist vanguard party would

⁵⁵⁸ Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America*, translated by Bobbye Ortiz (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 86.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 103.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 76-77.

emerge following the conquest of power, to fulfill the tasks of the new revolutionary state and guide the transition to socialism.

The KWP, on the other hand, argued the traditional concept that the revolution begins with the establishment of the Marxist-Leninist vanguard party, which then leads all aspects of the struggle, was based on the European experience and unsuited to the predominantly agrarian societies of the Global South. In resisting Comintern pressure to found a Marxist-Leninist party in the early days of the struggle, Kim Il Sung was practising Chuch'e: rejecting "servilism" and developing a strategy suited to the demands of the Korean struggle. Organizational forms and tactics must correspond to objective conditions – to dogmatically apply models developed under different circumstances invites failure. The Marxist-Leninist party was the political organizational form of an ideologically-advanced proletariat – what relevance did it have in predominantly agrarian societies, where the bulk of the population were peasants, and the proletariat small and weak? If Kim had established a Marxist-Leninist party at this stage it would have only been a "castle built on air," a "vain fantasy," North Korean historiography maintains.⁵⁶¹ As in the Cuban narrative, North Korean exegesis argued that it was the protracted guerrilla struggle itself that cultivated the human material necessary for the eventual establishment of the Marxist-Leninist party, once the state had been overthrown. There is a fundamental difference between an artificially imported Marxist-Leninist party and one which emerges organically during the course of the revolution. The first is an ideological sect, the latter truly represents the people: born of mass struggle, it fuses the universal relevance of Marxism-Leninism with the experience and the aspirations of the people. Kim wrote:

⁵⁶¹ Kim Il Sung, quoted in Roque Dalton, "Kim Il Sung: Una vida por la revolución," *Punto Final*, supplement to no. 154 (March 1972), 4.

The anti-Japanese armed struggle, to overcome the principle weaknesses that took in the early years of the communist movement in Korea, prepared the organizational bases for the foundation of the Marxist-Leninist party: through the tests of the hard guerrilla struggle, growing the true communist revolutionaries and achieving firm unity in the ranks of the revolution. In the breast of the anti-Japanese armed struggle, Marxism-Leninism has been able to link for the first time with the reality of our country, and the communist movement with the revolutionary struggle of our people for national and social emancipation.⁵⁶²

The iconic role of the Sierra Maestra in the Cuban revolutionary narrative has a striking parallel in the exaltation of Mount Bakedu in KWP historiography, while both contrast heroic guerrillas with the older communist movement. In Cuban accounts, this was expressed through a symbolic dichotomy between *la Sierra* (the mountains) and *el Llano* (the plains). The guerrillas in the mountains led the struggle while the orthodox communists in the cities, represented by the PSP, sat on the sidelines and criticized, joined the revolution late and played only a minor role. Likewise, North Korean historiography distances Kim Il Sung from the original Communist Party of Korea and its somewhat dysfunctional history. Kim found his own guerrilla movement which led the revolution to victory, along the way triumphing over the schemes and blunders of the “factionalists” who cling to ossified dogma instead of adapting Marxism-Leninism to Korean conditions. Both narratives contrast the idealized guerrilla – young, heroic, patriotic, in touch with the people, and with the correct grasp of Marxism-Leninism – with bad communists: cowardly, petty, more concerned with conforming to foreign dogmas than understanding their own country.

The Cultural Congress of 1968

A key moment in DPRK-Cuban collaboration to promote their shared vision for revolution in Latin American was the Cultural Congress of Havana in January 1968. Although absent from much of the existing scholarship on the Cold War and the Cuban Revolution, it was

⁵⁶² Ibid.

arguably among the most important non-governmental international gatherings of the decade. The nine-day event brought some five hundred intellectuals, artists, academics, and scientists from seventy countries to discuss “Colonialism and Neo-colonialism in the Cultural Development of Peoples.” In essence the conference dealt with the role of intellectuals in the unfolding Third World revolution, and the questions of education, culture, media, and technology facing the newly independent countries. These themes were inextricably tied to solidarity with Vietnam and the call for a worldwide offensive against US imperialism. The full cultural development of any society, the congress proclaimed, was only possible when it was liberated from colonial and neo-colonial subjugation, and this end could only be achieved through armed struggle.⁵⁶³ The five commissions of the conference were overseen by international bureaus,⁵⁶⁴ and North Korea was given a seat on Commission IV, “Culture and Mass Media,” along with the renowned Cuban author Lisandro Otero, and two esteemed poets of the socialist world: Khamma Phomkomg of Laos and Mongolia’s Dondogiin Tsebegmid.⁵⁶⁵

The ongoing tensions within the international communist movement were on clear display: China declined to participate, while the Cubans requested that Moscow send only a small delegation, and refused to defer to the leaders of the Latin American communist parties as to who would represent their respective countries. In his speech to the Congress, Fidel argued that Marxism “needs to develop, break away from a certain rigidity, interpret today’s reality from

⁵⁶³ “General Declaration of the Cultural Congress of Havana,” in *Cultural Congress of Havana: Meeting of Intellectuals from all the World on Problems of Asia, Africa and Latin America* (Havana: Instituto del Libro, 1968).

⁵⁶⁴ Each international bureau had one Cuban representative in addition to three or four from other countries. In addition to North Korea, these were North and South Vietnam, Laos, Mongolia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Algeria, Syria, Martinique (represented by Aimé Césaire), Mexico, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay. The five commissions of the congress were “Culture and National Independence,” “The Integral Growth of Man,” “Responsibility of Intellectuals with Respect to the Problems of the Underdeveloped World,” “Culture and Mass Media,” and “Problems of Artistic Creation and of Scientific and Technical Work.”

⁵⁶⁵ *Cultural Congress of Havana: Meeting of Intellectuals from all the World on Problems of Asia, Africa and Latin America* (Havana: Instituto del Libro, 1968).

an objective, scientific viewpoint, conduct itself as a revolutionary force and not as a pseudo-revolutionary church.”⁵⁶⁶ K.S. Karol reported that, “As if it were the most natural thing in the world, they had also invited notorious heretics, ex-Communists, independent Marxists – all of them detested in Moscow.”⁵⁶⁷ Delegates included many of the most influential radical thinkers, novelists, and poets in the world at that moment, making a most remarkable assemblage of personalities: CLR James, George Padmore, Aimé Césaire, Daniel Guérin, Roque Dalton, René Depestre, Ralph Miliband, Alex La Guma, Mário Pinto de Andrade, Jorge Enrique Adoum, Eric Hobsbawm, and Cambodia’s Prince Norodom Ranariddh among them. The congress inspired the American writer and activist Irwin Silber to state:

...we are living in the time when the beautiful, the no longer forlorn, “wretched of the earth” are beginning to claim this world for their own. The peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America – the oppressed, the exploited, the beaten, the dehumanized – are in the process of taking power. They are casting off the old definitions imposed by the new imperialisms of Europe and North America and are now defining themselves anew. In the process they are bringing into being, I believe, mankind’s next level of development – socially, politically, economically, and culturally.⁵⁶⁸

North Korea sent a seven-person delegation to the conference, whose members seem to have been drawn primarily from the government’s Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, and the national Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee. The North Korean contribution to the proceedings was a paper entitled *The Anti-Japanese Armed Struggle of the Korean People Organized and Waged Under the Personal Leadership of Comrade Kim Il Sung*.⁵⁶⁹ It was subsequently published in booklet form, with the authors remaining anonymous,

⁵⁶⁶ Fidel Castro, “Speech given at the closing session of the Cultural Congress of Havana, Chaplin Theatre, 12 January 1968” in *Cultural Congress of Havana: Meeting of Intellectuals from all the World on Problems of Asia, Africa and Latin America* (Havana: Instituto del Libro, 1968).

⁵⁶⁷ Karol, *Guerrillas in Power*, 397-398.

⁵⁶⁸ Irwin Silber, foreword to Irwin Silber (ed), *Voices of National Liberation: The Revolutionary Ideology of the “Third World” as Expressed by Intellectuals and Artists at the Cultural Congress of Havana, January 1968* (New York: Central Book Company, 1970), xiv.

⁵⁶⁹ The working languages of the conference were English, Spanish, and French, with all papers being translated into all three. I am not certain what language the North Korean delegation presented in.

in numerous languages for international distribution by North Korea's Foreign Languages Publishing House, with the added subtitle, *The Document on the Strategy and Tactics in the Period of the Glorious Anti-Japanese Armed Struggle, Adopted at the Havana Cultural Congress, January 4-12, 1968*. It remains perhaps the most definitive North Korean exegesis on the 1932-45 struggle against Japanese rule as a model of anti-colonial revolution, published for foreign audiences. On the one hand, in a crowd made up largely of independent Marxists, bohemians, anarchists, and nonconformists of various stripes, the North Korean presentation was somewhat out of place. The typical North Korean style of heavy repetition and constant praise for the "brilliance" of "the esteemed and cherished leader of forty million Korean people" was met with cynicism by some in attendance. Silber later commented, "I'm sure Kim Il Sung is a great leader, but it should be possible to refer to him once in a while without a whole basket of adulatory adjectives."⁵⁷⁰ On the other hand, the underlining message that the peoples of the Global South must reject foreign models and blaze their own independent revolutionary path certainly resonated with the Third Worldist spirit of the occasion. And the congress's recurrent theme of the building of the "New Man" and the need to resist the cultural and intellectual influence of the advanced Western countries had a definite congruence with KWP ideology as well. However, the real significance of the North Korean presentation was that, coming at the height of Cuba's feud with the Soviet leadership and the Latin American communist parties, it simultaneously extolled Kim Il Sung and North Korea as a model of revolution in the Global South, and endorsed the Cuban position in the ongoing polemics. In the struggle against Japanese colonial rule, the North Koreans explained, Kim had triumphed over those who would have

⁵⁷⁰ Irwin Silber, *The Cultural Congress of Havana 4-11 January, 1968*, self-published pamphlet (New York, 1968), 23.

slavishly followed Soviet orthodoxy instead of developing praxis suited to local conditions, exactly what Cuban leaders accused the Latin American communist parties of doing.

For the communist movement in our country, servilism to great powers and dogmatism carried large consequences in the decade of the 1920s, cultivated and fermented by the factionalists who had infiltrated the ranks of our revolution. In this era, the prejudice of servilism to the great powers was demonstrated in the practise of accepting in a dogmatic manner whatever was done by the Comintern and other big countries, blindly following without questioning whether or not it was just or whether or not it was suitable, given the specific situation of our country, to try and please them rather than have confidence in the revolutionary forces of their own country and try to make them stronger.⁵⁷¹

The North Koreans also gave a clear endorsement of the Cuban position that armed struggle was the only possible way forward in Latin America:

As in all revolutionary movements, there are various forms of struggle in the national liberation movement, each which change according to the subjective and objective conditions. Nevertheless, the form of political struggle most active and most decisive amongst all forms of national liberation struggle, is the organized violent struggle, the armed struggle, in other words, the national liberation war. This is the conclusion that arises inevitably in relation to the nature of the aggressive forces of imperialism.⁵⁷²

Kim, like the Cuban leadership, had correctly recognized that the poor peasantry was the primary revolutionary force in societies where capitalism was still at an underdeveloped stage. And just as the Cubans declared that the Latin American revolution would be fought from the Andes mountains, the KWP claimed the Korean partisans had triumphed because Kim effectively utilized the natural geography of Mount Baekdu and the Amnokkang and Tuman'gang rivers. Forested mountains were the optimal terrain through which a revolutionary guerrilla force could outmaneuver and defeat the superior military forces of the enemy.

Aside from the conflict between the Cubans and the Latin American communist parties, the unity of the conference was threatened when the Arab delegations demanded that the formal

⁵⁷¹ *La Lucha Armada Antijaponesa del Pueblo Coreano, Organizada y Librada Bajo la Dirección Personal del Camarada Kim Il Sung* (Pyongyang: Ediciones en Lenguas Extranjeras, 1968), 38-39.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 7.

resolution condemn Zionism and US imperialism in equally strong terms. However, the Cubans, North Koreans, and Vietnamese – who agreed that equating the two diminished the threat posed by the latter – united to squash the challenge. Karol attributed this feat to the incredible prestige the three countries shared within the international left at the moment.⁵⁷³ The final documents of the congress embedded the central position that united North Korea and Cuba in the 1960s: the central priority of defeating US imperialism through a campaign of armed insurrection throughout the Global South. While the ongoing war in Vietnam was the overwhelming focus of the final resolutions, they also included a condemnation of “military, political, economic and cultural aggression” against Korea, and the need to “alert all the peoples of the world to the intensification of provocative measures to unleash a new war against the People’s Democratic Republic of Korea, and to extend the war to Cambodia.”⁵⁷⁴

While it is difficult to gauge precisely what impact the North Korean delegation had on the five-hundred congress participants, there were at least three figures in attendance who went on to play key roles in the promotion of the North Korean model within the Latin American left. These were the aforementioned José Francisco Aguilar Bulgarelli; the Colombian writer and politician, Jorge Zalamea Borda; and the Salvadorian poet and communist militant, Roque Dalton. The Cuban and North Korean theory of the party did indeed have a tangible impact on the Latin American guerrilla movement in several countries. It was embraced by a number of different groups, including the Ação Libertadora Nacional (National Liberation Action, ALN) in Brazil, the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army, ELN) of Colombia, the Comandos Armados de Liberación (Armed Commandos of Liberation, CAL) in Puerto Rico, and

⁵⁷³ Karol points out that the Cubans had other motivations to counter the initiative of the Arab delegates as well: Cuba had still not broken off relations with Israel, were critical of the Arab countries “both before and after the Six-Day War,” and did not want Middle East issues to dominate the congress.

⁵⁷⁴ *Cultural Congress of Havana: Meeting of Intellectuals from all the World.*

as might be expected, Che's guerrilla project in Bolivia. The following section examines two examples - Peru and El Salvador – as they highlight the different ways in which model could be received and interpreted, and the potential contradictions of this process.

Peru

Peru presents a particularly interesting example of the implications of the North Korean/Cuban theory of the party for the Latin American guerrilla movement, because here it was in fact embraced by two different organizations involved in the 1965 insurgency: the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army, ELN) led by Héctor Béjar, and Luis de la Puente Uceda's Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Left Movement, MIR). As Chapter Three examined, both groups received training in Cuba during 1962-65, while MIR militants also trained in North Korea, China, and North Vietnam. However, these two actors adapted the North Korean/Cuban theory of the party in different ways that ultimately proved contradictory for the guerrilla movement as a whole, illuminating the imbedded contradictions of the model.

In *Perú 1965: Notas de una experiencia guerrillera*, written from prison in the aftermath of the failed insurrection of 1965, Béjar elaborated his interpretation of the concept. While the ELN was not anti-statist and believed every revolution required a vanguard, it approached the role of the party from a quasi-anarchist critique. First, it argued against the “premature” establishment of a vanguard party because it fostered dependency on professional leaders, stymieing the process in which ordinary people become experienced in political organizing.⁵⁷⁵ Second, when the revolutionary party is created in a non-revolutionary period, it has a tendency

⁵⁷⁵ Héctor Béjar, *Peru 1965: Notes on a Guerrilla Experience* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 64.

to degenerate into bureaucratism, isolation, and irrelevance, “separated from the exploited masses, rather than from the exploited masses themselves.” Béjar believed this was a particular danger in developing countries because of the tendency of the leadership of the left to be dominated by middle-class elements. “If the party is created *before* the war is begun, it soon becomes an organization with its own group interests and gives rise to a leadership which also has its own interests,” which are “often in contradiction with the needs of the revolution...”⁵⁷⁶ Third, political parties, by their very nature, strive for hegemony over the diverse elements that constitute any popular movement, and confuse making revolution with the acquisition of power. “A political party is a group driving toward power, toward the supremacy of the movement in which it participates. These attitudes make revolutionary unity impossible by creating mutual suspicion, rivalry, and even hatred between organizations.”⁵⁷⁷ Béjar’s proposed alternative to the traditional Marxist-Leninist vanguard concept was summarized thusly: “It is not a question of calling on the masses to follow the party, but of building the party in the very heart of the masses.” It was only through a process of armed struggle in which the union between revolutionaries and the communities they purport to fight for is solidified, that an “authentic vanguard of the exploited shaped by themselves” could be created.⁵⁷⁸

The MIR also maintained the thesis that the vanguard party needed to emerge organically from the struggle. There was not always total consensus on this formula, however, and in the early years of the organization some members argued that the MIR should constitute itself as a

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 65.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 67.

Marxist-Leninist party of the classical type that could then direct guerrilla focos akin to the Cuban model.⁵⁷⁹ Ultimately, however, the triumphant position was that:

We consider that the party of the Peruvian revolution is going to be constructed within the insurrectional process and that its leading cadres will emerge from the same struggle. We do not use the label of “party,” rather we call ourselves a movement, a movement that purports to be a gestation agent of the party of the Peruvian revolution.⁵⁸⁰

This position presented a paradox, however: while the MIR maintained the formation of the vanguard party awaited a future date, what to do with the assortment of left-wing parties, many with long histories and considerable followings, who presumably saw a leadership role for themselves in any revolution? The MIR called on the parties of the Peruvian left to “transform their ideological positions into action, abandon the paths of deal-making, of postponement, of politicking and of subjectivism; to leave aside the egoism and base maneuvers [...] we call everyone to unity in action, to unity as process, to authentic revolutionary unity to build the grand party of the Peruvian revolution.”⁵⁸¹ In other words, the MIR called upon these established parties to accept that they had outlived their usefulness, dissolve themselves into the guerrilla fronts, and await the creation of a new and all-encompassing party in the future.

Both the MIR and ELN echoed the North Korean emphasis on unity before all else: the necessity, in a colonial/neo-colonial context, to incorporate the broadest segments of society into the revolutionary movement, something that can be jeopardized by ideological sectarianism and ultra-leftist strategies. However, while the ELN saw the danger in any single faction attempting to impose its hegemony on the revolutionary movement, Luis de la Puente Uceda clearly saw the MIR, while perhaps not a party, as certainly being the leading force. The Cubans were frustrated

⁵⁷⁹ Jan Lust, *Lucha Revolucionaria: Perú, 1958-1967* (Barcelona: RBA Libros, 2013), 291.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., 267.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 268.

by their sectarian attitude (which influenced their preference for the ELN) and Béjar argued that despite their claims to the contrary, “The MIR maintained that the revolution should be led by a party: the MIR.”⁵⁸² The contradiction at work highlights a classic dilemma of coalition politics: that the call for unity often masks the desire for the singular hegemony of those calling for it. This presented the ELN with a historical dilemma of anarchist movements: how do you operate within a broader revolutionary coalition when not all elements of that coalition have the same reservations about asserting their hegemony? While both the ELN and MIR agreed that the vanguard party should emerge organically from the guerrilla struggle, and on the goal of achieving a broad united front across class lines, the ELN critique of Leninist vanguardism was incompatible with the central leadership role the MIR envisioned for itself. These differences reached their logical outcome in 1965, as the two groups were unable to coordinate their operations, a disunity that contributed to the defeat of the insurrection.

El Salvador

North Korea played a more direct role in influencing the famous Salvadorian revolutionary Roque Dalton and the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (Revolutionary People’s Army, ERP). Like many young Latin American radicals of the 1960s, Dalton grew disillusioned with his country’s historic communist party, the Partido Comunista de El Salvador (Communist Party of El Salvador, PCS). Drawn to the alternative vision presented by Cuba, he stayed and received guerrilla training there in 1961. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, years in which he visited the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, North Korea, and North Vietnam, Dalton’s writings reveal a search for a new kind of revolutionary organization.⁵⁸³ In 1972, radical Catholic student

⁵⁸² Ibid., 70.

⁵⁸³ Luis Alvarenga, *Roque Dalton: La radicalización de la vanguardia* (San Salvador, Editorial Universidad Don Bosco, 2011), 271.

activists and PCS dissidents, drawing inspiration from the Cuban Revolution, liberation theology, Maoism, and the ongoing national liberation struggle in Vietnam, established the ERP with the intent to launch an armed insurrection. Dalton joined the group in early 1973 in Havana, and returned to El Salvador to join the armed struggle in December of that year.

According to Dalton, the traditional communist movement emphasized the all-important role of the party, marching tightly in sync with an international bloc led by Moscow. Out of this tradition developed parties that were highly organized, disciplined, strong, but also hierarchal, bureaucratic, and dependent on Moscow, both financially and intellectually. It was to this dilemma – the relationship between party, mass, and revolution – that Dalton saw great relevance in the North Korean experience, ideas developed in his 1972 essay *Kim Il Sung: Una Vida por la Revolución* (A Life for the Revolution), published in the important Chilean left-wing journal *Punto Final*. Dalton saw in the “revolutionary traditions of the glorious Anti-Japanese Armed Struggle” a strategy in which the guerrilla is thoroughly embedded in the masses, patiently cultivating its support and, eventually, its active engagement. The revolutionary army establishes its legitimacy through its actions, leading the implementation of meaningful reforms in the communities of the territory in which it operates, and by its heroic victories against the state’s security forces. It is through this process that the future Marxist-Leninist vanguard party is born, constituted by the most advanced workers and peasants to emerge out of the struggle.

Dalton saw the North Korean and Cuban theories of the party as complimentary but not identical. In fact, Dalton believed the lessons offered by Kim’s partisans in Manchuria compensated for the weaknesses inherent in both traditional Leninist vanguardism and Cuban foquismo. The Cuban model privileged the courage and determination of a small group of committed revolutionaries over the support and participation of ordinary people. Like the

approach of the communist parties, such a strategy neglected the fundamental task of integrating the revolutionary movement with the masses, something essential to unlocking their potential and ensuring the revolution's triumph. From the North Korean model Dalton formed the idea that a revolution in El Salvador required a seamless unity between the guerrilla vanguard and the popular civilian movement, akin to the supposed relationship between Kim's guerrillas and the Association for the Restoration of the Fatherland during 1936-45.⁵⁸⁴

It was no coincidence that Dalton's *Kim Il Sung: Una Vida por la Revolución* appeared in the same period that a major ideological rift was emerging within the ERP. The dominant faction in control of the leadership maintained a more strictly foquista strategy and conceived of the struggle in primarily military terms. In line with this framework ERP leaders prioritized constructing an efficient military organization, forging links with radical officers with the national armed forces, and pushing ahead with armed actions that would, it was believed, ignite a broader uprising. A growing dissident tendency within the ERP, however, believed recent developments had proved the short-sightedness of such a strategy. Following fraudulent elections in February 1972 that installed Colonel Arturo Armando Molina (b. 1927) as president, a group of reformist officers within the armed forces led by Colonel Benjamín Mejía seized power in a coup. However, when the masses failed to take to the streets in support of the rebels, Molina was able to regroup with forces loyal to him to swiftly crush the coup, the prelude to a wider crackdown on the left. The conclusion drawn by some in the ERP was that a revolutionary

⁵⁸⁴ What Dalton did not know, however, is that there is little evidence the latter organization ever approached the scale and significance attributed to it in official North Korean historiography. Ri Sang-jo, a veteran of the anti-Japanese struggle and North Korean ambassador to the Soviet Union before his defection in 1956, in a scathing critique of Kim's personality cult, pointed out the organization never exceeded one hundred members – a far cry from the nation-wide movement of “tens of thousands” described in the official narrative. This criticism was made in Ri Sang-jo's letter to the KWP Central Committee dated 5 October 1956, reprinted in “Inside China's Cold War,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, issue 16 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008): 492-511.

response from the masses could not be taken for granted and that the ERP's isolation as a clandestine organization prevented it from acting as a mobilizing agent when it needed to be. Echoing Dalton's interpretation of the North Korean revolution, this faction argued that guerrillas should not be invisible figures secluded in the mountains, waiting for the masses to answer their call, but rather diffused throughout the popular movement, in student organizations, in the trade unions, in the Churches and neighborhood organizations. They must take on the demands of these popular movements as their own, simultaneously acting to radicalize them and draw new recruits into the armed ranks. To this end, ERP militants launched two new civilian organizations during 1972-74, the Frente Universitario Estudiantil Revolucionario Salvador Allende (Salvador Allende University Student Revolutionary Front, FUERSA) and the Frente de Acción Popular Unificada (Unified Popular Action Front, FAPU).⁵⁸⁵

These tensions within the ERP climaxed in April 1975, when the dominant leadership group detained Roque Dalton and Armando Arteaga in a move to neutralize the dissident faction. Although many details remain murky, Dalton and Arteaga were accused of factionalism and of being CIA informants, and were executed by their former comrades on 10 May 1975. This caused the dissident faction to breakaway from the ERP and found a new organization, the Fuerzas Armadas de la Resistencia Nacional (Armed Forces of National Resistance, FARN). Although the Cuban government severed ties with the ERP following the murder of Dalton, the guerrilla group continued to operate while cultivating new relations with China.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸⁵ Alberto Martín Álvarez and Eudald Cortina Orero, "The Genesis and Internal Dynamics of El Salvador's People's Revolutionary Army, 1970-1976," *Journal of Latin American Studies* no. 46 (J2014): 681-682.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 684-685.

Conclusion

In attempting to assess the impact of the North Korean model of anti-colonial revolution on the Latin American left, an apparent contradiction arises: a core tenet of Chuch'e is that all revolutionary movements must develop unique strategies and programs suited to the historical conditions and cultural specificities of their own societies. Kim declared at the KWP's Second Party Conference of October 1966 that "each party's guiding theory is valid only within the boundaries of its country."⁵⁸⁷ Do these principles not refute the very premise of the KWP promoting a model of revolution, based on the Korean experience, to an international audience? The experience of Mexico's Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Action Movement, MAR), whose members underwent training in North Korea during 1969-70, offers some insight into how these apparently conflicting agendas might be reconciled. According to some former members, while their training included classes in North Korean political theory and military strategy, they were told by their hosts that the point of such education was that they learn from and adopt what was relevant to their own revolutionary project, and discard what was not.⁵⁸⁸ What was most important, their North Korean instructors emphasized, is that they studied and understood Mexican society first and foremost – this is what would enable them to connect with the masses and build a movement suited for the great tasks required of it. So while the anti-Japanese struggle led by Kim Il Sung could serve as an inspiration and education for revolutionaries everywhere, its most important lesson of all was that those revolutionaries

⁵⁸⁷ Kim Il Sung, "The Present Situation and the Tasks of Our Party," 5 October 1966, reprinted in Kim Il Sung, *Works*, vol 20 (Pyongyang, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1984), 345.

⁵⁸⁸ Fernando Pineda Ochoa, *En las Profundidades del Mar: el Oro no Llegó de Moscú* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdes, 2003).

practise Chuch'e, thereby maintaining their independence and developing strategies and tactics suited to their own circumstances.

It must also be remembered that the KWP always insisted that the Communist Party of Cuba, and no other party, was leading the Latin American revolution. It is fitting, therefore, that while North Korea exerted a degree of influence on the Latin American guerrilla movement, no group ever adopted a full-fledged Kim Il Sungist programme, in the same way that there were explicitly foquista and Maoist organizations. What the above suggests is that, unlike Cuba, which took the applicability of its model of revolution to the rest of Latin America quite literally, North Korea's own agenda of promoting its model of revolution contained different motivations and expectations. First, it served its fundamental foreign policy objectives in Latin America: to promote armed struggle as part of an international offensive against US imperialism. Secondly, it served the Kim personality cult. As this dissertation has argued, the elevation of this cult was an integral component of the same 1966 political shift that included the new efforts to play a leadership role in the Global South. Lastly, it served to raise the profile of Kim Il Sung and North Korea internationally, in line with the goal of building support for the withdrawal of US troops from the South and the unification of the peninsula.

North Korea's strongest ideological contribution, therefore, was in partnership with Cuba, as the two leaderships embraced a mutual position on the role of the Marxist-Leninist vanguard party for revolutionary movements in the Global South. This consensus strengthened Cuba's position when it was under attack, and aided its efforts to steer the Latin American revolution in the face of resistance from the pro-Soviet communist parties of the region. The North Korean and Cuban theory of the party had a far-reaching, tangible influence because it served the needs of a younger generation of Latin American revolutionaries dissatisfied with the

old formulas of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. As it was actually put into practise in several countries, albeit to varying degrees and in different interpretations, it made a substantial contribution to the canon of twentieth century Marxist revolutionary theory.

The North Korean leadership's agenda of promoting its country as a model for the Third World evolved and grew exponentially in the following decade, as Chuch'e was elevated from a principle or "line" to a body of theory in its own right, one presented as being of tremendous historical importance and global relevance. This came hand in hand with a new agenda of promoting Kim Il Sung and his wisdom to an international audience, sponsoring study groups, organizing international conferences, and bringing foreigners to Pyongyang for six-week courses in Chuch'e Sasang. This new proselytization effort was made possible by a substantial expansion of North Korea's diplomatic relations throughout the Global South, itself achieved through a major reorientation of its foreign policy in the early 1970s. The causes of this shift in strategy, and its impact on North Korea's relationship with Cuba and Latin America more broadly, is the subject of the final chapter.

Chapter Six

The End of the Anti-Imperialist, Anti-US United Front

During the 1960s North Korea and Cuba spearheaded a radical Third Worldist tendency that challenged the leadership of Moscow and Beijing, rejected the economic liberalization occurring in the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc, and championed armed struggle in the Global South. In contradiction of both the Soviet doctrine of peaceful coexistence and China's anti-revisionist crusade, Kim Il Sung and Fidel Castro called for a militant, united front strategy against US imperialism, a global campaign of guerrilla warfare that would give birth to "two, three, many Vietnams." In line with this agenda, the North Korean and Cuban governments collaborated in training, arming, and financing guerrilla movements throughout Latin America that they believed were the vanguards in a rapidly unfolding continental revolution.

However, the radicalism that characterized Cuban socialism in the 1960s, particularly its militant foreign policy towards the rest of Latin America, did not survive into the following decade. Cuba's drastic shift towards a more pragmatic and pro-Soviet direction in the early 1970s, concurrent with major changes in the international political environment, forced the North Korean leadership to re-evaluate the analysis and strategy that had guided its foreign policy through the previous decade. This process saw the demise of the Korea-Cuba-Vietnam axis and the "anti-imperialist, anti-US united front" project, as the dynamics both rested upon evaporated. The North Korean leadership did not abandon its position that the defeat of US imperialism was paramount, or that the Global South would play a central role in this struggle. However, its strategy, tactics, and political alliances underwent major changes as it adapted to the new international situation, with profound consequences for its relationship with Cuba and Latin America more broadly.

The de-radicalization of Cuban policy

In November 1966 Che Guevara arrived clandestinely in Bolivia to commence a plan to launch a guerrilla insurgency in the southeast province of Cordillera. Che's force of some fifty fighters, while achieving some early victories, was gradually worn down in a fierce counter-insurgency operation jointly administered by the CIA and the Bolivian military. The guerrillas suffered a final defeat in October 1967, at which point Che himself was wounded and captured, before being executed two days later. A number of factors contributed to the failure of the insurgency: the Partido Comunista de Bolivia (Communist Party of Bolivia, PCB) withdrew its initial pledge of support, the guerrillas' radios were damaged, cutting off communication with Havana, and local peasants mostly failed to rally to the guerrillas' cause.

The death of Che in Bolivia in October 1967 foreshadowed the end of the Cuban Revolution's radical phase. While formal realignments did not take place until the early 1970s, the disastrous end of Che's expedition was the earliest signal of a change in course, as it was followed by a scaling-down of Cuban support for Latin American insurgents. Roughly a year after Che's death the Cuban government backed out of a plan to support a renewed guerrilla insurgency in Bolivia,⁵⁸⁹ and in 1969 it withdrew its assistance to Venezuela's FLN-FALN, following long-simmering tensions between guerrilla leaders and Cuban military advisors.⁵⁹⁰ These episodes suggested that the Cuban leadership was beginning to succumb to Soviet pressure to abandon its "adventurist" policy of pushing guerrilla struggle throughout the region.

⁵⁸⁹ Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 27.

⁵⁹⁰ Alberto Garrido, *Guerrilla y conspiración militar en Venezuela* (Caracas: Fondo Editorial Nacional, 1999), 91-92.

Another sign of growing Cuban-Soviet cooperation was Fidel's public defence of the Warsaw Pact countries' invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. While acknowledging that the intervention was a "flagrant violation of sovereignty," Fidel nevertheless concluded that the blame lay with corrupt Czechoslovakian leaders, and that it was the duty of the socialist countries to prevent capitalist restoration within their community of states. Fidel also took the opportunity to criticize Czechoslovakia for some of its actions in the past, accusing it of selling Cuba outdated arms and inferior technology at a profit in contradiction of the principles of fraternal solidarity. Less than a year later, in June 1969, Cuba broke rank with North Korea and North Vietnam by participating in Moscow's International Conference of Communist and Worker's Parties, although only as an observer.⁵⁹¹

In a July 1970 public address commemorating the 1953 Moncada Barracks attack, Fidel conceded that the attempted ten million ton sugar harvest had been a failure, that the Cuban economy was in a dire situation, and that government policy and mismanagement were partly to blame. Rejecting material incentives and relying on the revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses had failed to achieve high productivity. The war on bureaucratism had severely damaged the state's capacity for efficient planning and management. Fidel called on the party to "turn the setback into a victory," to learn from past mistakes in order to chart a new course that would revive the economy and achieve the island's development goals. In practice, this took the form of a major economic reorganization that represented humble deference to Moscow's counsel, and a closer political and economic integration with the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc. In September 1971 a Soviet-Cuban Commission of Economic, Scientific and Technical Collaboration held its first meeting in Havana. In July 1972 Cuba became a member of the Council for Mutual

⁵⁹¹ K.S. Karol, *Guerrillas in Power*, translated by Arnold Pomerans (New York: Hill & Wang, 1970), 514-515.

Economic Assistance (COMECON), the organization the North Korean leadership had long rejected as an instrument of Moscow's "big power chauvinism."⁵⁹² Many of the economic reforms that followed were typical of the move towards "market socialism" the Cuban and North Korean leadership had resisted in the 1960s: greater reliance on material incentives for workers, decentralization of economic decision making, and a limited private sector. Improved Cuban-Soviet relations resulted in substantial increases in economic aid: loans on generous conditions, trade credits, higher prices for Cuban sugar and nickel, and the subsidized provision of oil. During 1972 the Cuban navy and air force received a massive upgrade with Soviet missile-boats and MiG-23 fighters planes, accompanied by hundreds of Soviet military advisors.⁵⁹³ Luis Martínez-Fernández (2014) puts Soviet economic aid to Cuba between 1971-75 at \$3.5 billion, almost as much as it had received during the entire 1960s.⁵⁹⁴ As the Cuban leadership accepted the paramountcy of Soviet support and guidance, the days where Fidel might publicly lambast Moscow and its allies for their perceived errors came to a close.

Just as the Cuban leadership was forced to reevaluate its radical economic strategy of the 1960s, it was compelled to shift directions in foreign policy as well. The overthrow of Batista had not had the domino effect once predicted, and by the end of the decade most of the Cuban-inspired guerrilla movements had been eliminated or fatally weakened. Cuban leaders had no choice but to recognize that revolution elsewhere in Latin America might be a more long-term process than previously envisioned. If continental revolution was not on the immediate horizon, and Cuba wished to end its regional isolation, some *modus vivendi* with existing governments would be necessary. Although Cuba never renounced solidarity or broke relations with those

⁵⁹² Carmelo Mesa-Lago, "The Sovietization of the Cuban Revolution: Its Consequences for the Western Hemisphere," *World Affairs*, 136, no. 1 (Summer 1973): 2, 6.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁹⁴ Luis Martínez-Fernández, *Revolutionary Cuba: A History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 134.

revolutionary groups which continued to operate in the 1970s, it backed away from significant involvement in armed insurgency in most countries. Likewise, the two international organizations founded at the Tricontinental conference of 1966 to promote global armed struggle – OSPAAAL and the OLAS – were largely forgotten about in the 1970s, even if they continued to exist in some formal capacity.

Latin America's changing political landscape

Cuba's decision to pursue a more moderate foreign policy in Latin America and the Caribbean was also encouraged by a changing political terrain that offered new possibilities. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a number of left-wing governments came to power in the region, not as a result of revolution, but through parliamentary elections and military coups. In October 1968, a group of dissident officers within the Peruvian armed forces led by General Juan Velasco Alvarado staged a coup against the presidency of Fernando Belaúnde. Once consolidating his power, and supported by the Partido Comunista Peruano (Peruvian Communist Party, PCP), Velasco nationalized key industries (including the US-owned International Petroleum Company) and implemented an agrarian reform program. Moreover, he opened up relations with Cuba and the socialist bloc and took an aggressive stance on what he considered the violation of Peru's maritime borders by American commercial fishing vessels.⁵⁹⁵

Eight days after Velasco's seizure of power in Peru, another military coup prevailed in Panama. Initially lacking a unified leadership or clear political platform, a left-wing faction led by Colonel Omar Torrijos emerged triumphant by 1970. Like Velasco, Torrijos opened relations with Cuba and other socialist countries, and initiated a broad program of reforms called "el

⁵⁹⁵ George D.E. Philip, *The Rise and Fall of the Peruvian Military Radicals, 1968-1976* (London: Athlone Press, 1978).

proceso revolucionario” (the revolutionary process). In late 1969 Torrijos offered the country’s main communist party, the Partido del Pueblo de Panamá (People’s Party of Panama, PDP) legalization and a role to play in *el proceso* in exchange for its loyalty and support. Torrijos initiated a new phase of negotiations with the United States over control of the Panama Canal, culminating with the Torrijos-Carter Treaties of September 1977.⁵⁹⁶

Bolivian military dictator René Barrientos Ortuño (1919-69), who had led the counter-insurgency campaign against Che’s guerrillas, was killed in a helicopter crash in April 1969. In the resulting power vacuum, reformist General Alfredo Ovando Candía (1918-82) seized power the following September, proceeding to institute labour reforms and nationalize the assets of US giant Gulf Oil.⁵⁹⁷ In October 1970 an attempted right-wing military coup plunged the country into political violence once again, from which General Juan Torres González (1920-76) emerged triumphant. Ideologically farther to the left than his predecessor, Torres pushed ahead with social reforms and nationalizations under the banner of “revolutionary nationalism.”⁵⁹⁸

The left-wing victory of greatest significance, however, was the triumph in Chile of Salvador Allende’s Unidad Popular (Popular Unity, UP), the socialist and communist-led coalition that won the national elections of September 1970.⁵⁹⁹ While social-democratic parties had previously formed governments in Britain and Scandinavia, never before had such a radically and explicitly socialist programme been voted into power through the electoral system of a capitalist democracy.⁶⁰⁰ The UP platform vowed land reform and the nationalization of all

⁵⁹⁶ George Priestley, *Military government and popular participation in Panama: the Torrijos regime, 1968-75* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986).

⁵⁹⁷ James Petras, “Bolivia Between Revolutions,” *Monthly Review* 23, no. 2 (June 1971): 14.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15-17.

⁵⁹⁹ “Chile: September 4 to November 3,” *Monthly Review* 22, no. 8 (January 1971): 19.

⁶⁰⁰ “Peaceful transition to socialism?,” *Monthly Review* 22, no. 8 (January 1971): 1-2.

major economic sectors, “putting an end to the power of national and foreign monopolistic capital and of latifundism in order to begin the construction of socialism.”⁶⁰¹ During the previous decade, Allende’s Partido Socialista de Chile (Socialist Party of Chile, PS) and other Chilean leftist organizations had built close ties in Cuba, where Allende was regarded as a committed ally.⁶⁰² Cuban leaders received Allende’s electoral victory as the most important political development in Latin America since their own revolution in 1959, the emergence of a second socialist republic in the Western hemisphere.⁶⁰³

Allende’s victory was also welcomed by North Korea. The presidential inauguration of Allende in Santiago de Chile in November 1970 was attended by Kim Il Sung’s daughter, Kim Kyŏnghŭi, who headed many such delegations during Pyongyang’s diplomatic offensive of the 1970s.⁶⁰⁴ Later that month, the Chilean government withdrew from the UN Commission for the Rehabilitation and Reunification of Korea (UNCURK),⁶⁰⁵ and established “consular, trade and cultural relations” with Pyongyang.⁶⁰⁶ In January 1973 Chilean Minister of Foreign Affairs

⁶⁰¹ UP program quoted in The Editors, “Peaceful transition to socialism?,” *Monthly Review* 22, no. 8 (January 1971): 1.

⁶⁰² Harmer, *Allende’s Chile*, 30-31.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

⁶⁰⁴ Kim Kyŏnghŭi is the aunt of current North Korean president Kim Jong-un, and the widow of senior official Chang Sŏng-t’aek, executed in December 2013.

⁶⁰⁵ “Letter, Chilean Ambassador José Pinera, Concerning Chile’s Withdrawal from UNCURK,” November 16, 1970, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, “International incidents and disputes Korea - correspondence (603.1),” Executive Office of the Secretary-General, S-0196-0003-02, United Nations Archives and Records Management Section (UN ARMS), New York, NY. Obtained for NKIDP by Charles Kraus. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117380>.

⁶⁰⁶ The exact status of North Korean-Chilean relations during the Allende years has been the source of much confusion. Typically Chile does not appear in scholarly and governmental reports on North Korea’s foreign relations, such as the Washington-based National Committee on North Korea’s 2015 report on the subject. However, that diplomatic relations were indeed established in 16 November 1970 was reported in the Soviet journal of Latin American affairs, *Latinskaya Amerika*, in its March-April 1972 issue, and is confirmed by Chile’s Library of National Congress. See *Dos voluntades para el desarrollo: 50 años de relaciones entre Chile y Corea* (Santiago de Chile: Editora E Imprenta Maval, 2012).

“DPRK Represented at Allende Inauguration,” *Nodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), 7 November 1970, and Yu. V. Godunskiy, “The Allende Government’s Foreign Policy,” *Latinskaya Amerika* no.2 (March-April 1972) translated and reprinted in the Readex collection *Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS) Reports, 1957-1995*.

Clodomiro Almeyda Medina led a delegation to Pyongyang to discuss North Korean interest in Chilean copper, during which the two sides concluded a cultural exchange agreement.⁶⁰⁷ The following month the Soviet embassy in Pyongyang, citing the local Chilean charge d'affaires, reported the North Korean government had granted Chile over five million USD in credit.⁶⁰⁸

The growing relations between the two countries were cut short, however, with the Pinochet coup of 11 September 1973. Following years of mounting right-wing opposition and economic pressure from the Nixon administration, the US-backed general Augusto Pinochet mobilized disloyal elements of the military and national guard to topple the UP government, during which Allende was killed. On 9 October, Pinochet's new representative to the UN, Vice Admiral Ismael Huerta Díaz, told the twenty-eighth General Assembly convening in New York City that his government had severed relations with North Korea because "we were able to prove there had been intervention in our internal affairs and an involvement of that country's diplomatic representatives in the training of guerrillas."⁶⁰⁹ A week later, Chilean security forces raided the North Korean embassy and the home of its resident ambassador. Pyongyang issued a statement accusing the "reactionary military bandits" of "threatening at the gun point the diplomatic personnel and their families" and "stealing the properties and personal belongings from the embassy in broad daylight."⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁷ *Dos voluntades para el Desarrollo*, 39.

⁶⁰⁸ "Note on a Conversation with USSR Embassy Counselor Comrade Denisov on 22 January 1973 in the USSR Embassy," February 01, 1973, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PolA AA, MfAA, C 295/78. Obtained by Bernd Schaefer and translated by Karen Riechert.
<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116678>

⁶⁰⁹ United Nations General Assembly Twenty-Eight Session Official Records, 2146th Plenary Meeting, 9 October 1973, New York, 17.

⁶¹⁰ "North Korean statement on Chile," telegram from the US Mission to the United Nations to US Secretary of State, 17 October 1973, United States. n.d. Access to archival databases (AAD), Washington, D.C.: National Archives & Records Administration. Available at
<https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=127045&dt=2472&dl=1345>.

Despite the downfall of Allende, leftward shifts in Latin America and the Caribbean continued in the early 1970s. In February 1970 Prime Minister Forbes Burnham declared Guyana a “co-operative republic” and proceeded to nationalize foreign-owned industries and expand relations with socialist countries. Michael Manley and his People's National Party (PNP) swept Jamaica's national elections of February 1972, announcing a new course for the island under “democratic socialism.” Following years of mounting unrest, Argentina's military regime permitted national elections in March 1973, which brought to power Héctor José Cámpora, leader of the Frente Justicialista de Liberación (Justicialist Liberation Front, *Frejuli*) coalition. Cámpora belonged to the left-wing supporters of Juan Perón, the former president who had been overthrown in a military coup and driven into exile in 1955. Perón was an idiosyncratic, populist leader whose pro-labour policies built him a strong base of working-class support, and who sympathized with the radical Third Worldism of the Tricontinental Conference. Perón returned to Argentina three months after Cámpora's victory and assumed the presidency following new elections in September.

The ascension of left-wing governments across Latin America and the Caribbean between 1968 and 1973 demonstrated to the Cuban leadership that perhaps armed struggle was not in fact the only way forward in the region. Moreover, these developments served to breach the isolation imposed on Cuba by Washington and its allies since 1960, during which Mexico and Canada were the only two countries in the Western Hemisphere with diplomatic relations with Cuba. The trend was furthered as Cuba's more moderate foreign policy and the growing influence of the Non-Aligned Movement meant that more governments in the region were open to re-establishing ties. In 1974 and 1975, for example, Venezuela and Colombia resumed diplomatic relations with Cuba. The several former British colonies of the Caribbean only

recently acquiring independence also provided new avenues. In December 1972, Guyana, Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago, in a symbolic move, simultaneously established diplomatic relations with Cuba in defiance of US pressure. In July 1975, the Organization of American States (OAS) voted to end its participation in the US embargo against Cuba, in a resolution supported by sixteen of its twenty-one member states.⁶¹¹

Critics of the closer Cuban-Soviet relationship emerging in the early 1970s often interpreted it as the death of Che's internationalist vision, and a capitulation to Soviet hegemony. Such a view was on display in the reaction to Fidel's speech to the Fourth Non-Aligned Summit in Algiers in September 1973. As we saw in Chapter One, when Che spoke in the same capital in 1965 he had accused the socialist countries of being "accomplices in imperialist exploitation." Eight years later, Fidel reprimanded those who, "with obvious injustice and historical ingratitude, and forgetting the true events and the deep and unbridgeable abyss that exists between the imperialist and socialist regimes, attempt to ignore the glorious, heroic and extraordinary services that the Soviet people have rendered to humanity."⁶¹² According to a CIA report, Fidel's heavy praise of the USSR caused Muammar Gaddafi to walk out of the room, while Cambodia's exiled leader Norodom Sihanouk heckled from the audience.⁶¹³ The incident highlighted how Cuba's new fealty towards Moscow stood to complicate its commitment to Third World solidarity. Gaddafi was deeply suspicious of Soviet intentions in the Arab world, and while Cuba, all the Asian communist parties, and the Non-Aligned Movement recognized

⁶¹¹ David Binder, "Cuba sanctions, imposed in 1964, lifted by O.A.S.," *New York Times*, 30 July 1975.

⁶¹² Fidel Castro, *Address to the Fourth Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Countries*, 7 September 1973, available from the Latin American Network Information Center, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1973/19730908.html>.

⁶¹³ "Cuba: Focus on Puerto Rico," CIA Intelligence Memorandum, 5 September 1975, CREST electronic database, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland, 1.

Sihanouk's Cambodian government-in-exile,⁶¹⁴ the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact countries did not.⁶¹⁵

North Korea's changing foreign policy

What did the North Korean leadership think of the new direction of its Cuban allies? One of the earliest suggestions came at Kim Il Sung's address to the KWP's Fifth Party Congress in November 1970, the first major party meeting since the Second Party Conference of October 1966. At the latter, Cuba and the Latin American revolution was a major focus, as it was of virtually every official North Korean commentary on international affairs in the years that followed. A central tenet of Pyongyang's foreign policy stance in the second half of the 1960s was that Cuba had been a crucial frontline in the anti-imperialist struggle, demanding the unconditional support of the socialist camp and all progressive forces. Moreover, Cuba was leading a broader, regional revolutionary upsurge that was posed to strike a major blow to US imperialism. At the Second Party Conference of 1966 Kim mentioned Cuba twenty times, and had referred to the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) more frequently than any other fraternal party. By contrast, at the Fifth Party Congress Kim did not make a single mention of Cuba, and made only passing references to Latin America in a few broad statements about the Third World. Instead, Kim's speech revealed a new focus on East Asia. "Today Asia is becoming the fiercest front of struggle against imperialism," Kim proclaimed, "and the principal stage of the anti-imperialist revolutionary struggle."⁶¹⁶ Echoing comments he made several months earlier during

⁶¹⁴ The Royal Government of the National Union of Kampuchea (GRUNK).

⁶¹⁵ Stephen J. Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia: Political Culture and the Causes of War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 199-201.

⁶¹⁶ Kim Il Sung, "Informe sobre las Labores del Comité Central, Presentado ante el V Congreso del Partido del Trabajo de Corea (extracto)," in *El Movimiento de los No Alineados es una Poderosa Fuerza Revolucionaria Antiimperialista de nuestra Época* (Pyongyang: Ediciones en Lenguas Extranjeras, 1976), 113.

Norodom Sihanouk's June 1970 visit to Pyongyang, Kim called for a new united front of the five "revolutionary" Asian countries – North Korea, China, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia – that could carry out "one, collective, powerful counter-offensive" against US imperialism in the region.⁶¹⁷ The silence on Cuba and Latin America in North Korea's updated foreign policy position spoke volumes: Cuba was now either without need or undeserving of solidarity, and Latin America's high point of revolutionary potential had passed. Consequently, Kim's address to the Fifth Party Congress replaced his previous speech at the Second Party Conference, and his 1967 and 1969 essays for *Boletín Tricontinental*, as the primary text cited in KWP foreign policy statements.

The North Korean leadership's changing perspective on Latin America, however, was symptomatic of a more fundamental shift in foreign policy being driven by broader changes in the international situation. The opening of the Paris Peace Talks in May 1968, followed by Richard Nixon's election victory in October, marked the slow beginnings of the gradual de-escalation of the Vietnam War. Unable to turn the tide in the conflict and facing growing anti-war sentiment at home, the new Nixon administration was soon searching for a way to extricate US military forces from Vietnam. North Korean leaders, however, were disappointed with their Vietnamese comrades' decision to negotiate with Washington – they wished to see the anti-imperialist struggle intensify and expand, not diminish. With the Latin American guerrilla movement defeated, and its Cuban allies no longer committed to helping create "two, three, many Vietnams," North Korean leaders hoped the flames of armed struggle could be kept burning in Asia. Ten days before Sihanouk's visit to Pyongyang on 15 June 1970, KPA naval

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., 115-116.

forces attacked a South Korean ship off the west coast of the peninsula.⁶¹⁸ In the early 1970s, the North Korean government funneled substantial arms and supplies to the Khmer Rouge guerrillas in Cambodia, fighting to overthrow the US-backed government of General Lon Nol.⁶¹⁹ According to Sihanouk, Kim offered to send North Korean troops into Cambodia as well.⁶²⁰

By the early 1970s there were signs of growing tension between Pyongyang and Hanoi. The North Vietnamese leadership, like their Cuban allies, had been drifting to a markedly more pro-Soviet position since 1969.⁶²¹ Hanoi reacted coldly to Kim's call for a united front of the five "revolutionary" Asian countries, countering that "since American imperialism is an enemy of every socialist country and of the entire mankind, not only of the 'five countries,' it is necessary to achieve cooperation not only between the 'five countries' but also between all antiimperialist forces."⁶²² At the same time, diplomats in Pyongyang in the early 1970s reported that all mention of the Paris Peace Talks were censored from North Korean media.⁶²³

In the same period in which the Vietnam War was de-escalating, developments in the People's Republic of China (PRC) facilitated a major improvement in DPRK-Sino relations. The Cultural Revolution of 1966-69 had left Beijing isolated within the socialist camp. In fact, the Communist Party of China (CPC) had come to an analysis of the international situation which only recognized itself and Albania as governed by legitimate Marxist-Leninist parties. As the

⁶¹⁸ Robert Simmons, "North Korea: Silver Anniversary," *Asian Survey* 11, no. 1 (January 1971): 107.

⁶¹⁹ Balazs Szalontai, "In the Shadow of Vietnam: a new look at North Korea's militant strategy, 1962-79," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 162-163.

⁶²⁰ Norman Webster, "Sihanouk Says North Korea Offered Him Troops," *The Globe & Mail* (Toronto), 10 July 1970.

⁶²¹ Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*.

⁶²² "Telegram, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry," August 07, 1970, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1970, 54. doboz, 81-10, 0026/1970. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Balázs Szalontai. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116584>.

⁶²³ Ibid.

Cultural Revolution began to recede in the aftermath of the CPC's Ninth Party Congress in April 1969, Chinese leaders took steps to improve relations with some of their estranged allies. The North Korean leadership appeared equally enthusiastic for such reconciliation. As changing circumstances in Latin America and Indochina eroded the Korea-Cuba-Vietnam axis, Pyongyang recognized the need for new international alignments. A turning point came in September 1969, when Ch'oe Yonggŏn attended the twentieth anniversary of the People's Republic celebrations in Beijing as the guest of Mao Zedong.⁶²⁴ According to Bernd Schaefer, during the visit Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai suggested his government was willing to commit two million soldiers if war broke out on the Korean peninsula once again.⁶²⁵ The first high-ranking Chinese delegation to visit Pyongyang since the advent of the Cultural Revolution took place the following April.⁶²⁶ Following meetings between Zhou Enlai and Kim Il Sung, cooperation agreements in a range of fields were concluded, and the Chinese leadership lent its endorsement to Kim's call for a new revolutionary offensive in East Asia. The CIA reported in December 1970 that the KWP's Fifth Party Congress "registers satisfaction over Peking's shift, particularly in the past year, away from an intransigent sectarianism to a search for a community among small and medium powers in opposition to superpower dominance."⁶²⁷ While the 1970s were certainly a highpoint for Sino-DPRK relations, North Korean leaders insisted they were still a neutral party in the ongoing Sino-Soviet rivalry, and that their foreign policy was an independent one. They refused to join Beijing's anti-Soviet campaign and rejected the CPC thesis that the

⁶²⁴ Bernd Schaefer, "North Korean "Adventurism" and China's Long Shadow, 1966-1972," Cold War International History Project, Working Paper no. 2 (October 2004), 29.

⁶²⁵ Ibid., 29.

⁶²⁶ Ibid., 30-31.

⁶²⁷ "The Fifth North Korean Party Congress: Stress on Independence," *Trends in Communist Propaganda Supplement* (28 December 1970), Foreign Broadcast Information Service, CREST electronic database, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland, 7.

USSR was “social-imperialist.”⁶²⁸ Like most socialist countries, North Korea broke relations with Chile following the Pinochet coup of September 1973, and Kim was incensed that China, Albania and Romania declined to follow suit.⁶²⁹ In the Angolan Civil War, North Korea initially sided, then broke with China, recognizing the MPLA and withdrawing its military advisors from Zaire.⁶³⁰ Pyongyang also defied Beijing by maintaining friendly relations with India and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.

The rapprochement between the United States and China, begun in July 1971 and formalized with Nixon’s February 1972 visit to Beijing, added value to closer Sino-DPRK relations for the North Korean leadership.⁶³¹ While the Soviets and North Vietnamese criticized Mao Zedong’s decision to meet with the US president, Pyongyang chose to interpret the historic meeting in a positive light. While the US imperialists could not be trusted – they “hold the olive branch in one hand, and the bayonet in the other,” Kim cautioned⁶³² – the fact remained that Nixon’s visit was a sign of weakness, evidence that the US was an empire in steady decline. As the US and China entered negotiations towards the normalization of relations, Pyongyang was hopeful that Beijing would use its new seat at the bargaining table to press North Korean

⁶²⁸ “Memorandum of Conversation between The First Secretary of the Mongolian People’s Republic and the Head of Delegation of Korean Worker’s Party on the 50th Anniversary of the Mongolian People’s Revolution,” July 15, 1971, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Mongolian Foreign Ministry Archive, fond 3, dans 1, kh/n 122, khuu 1-14. Obtained and translated by Onon Perenlei and Sergey Radchenko. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115201>.

⁶²⁹ For example, see “Memorandum on the Conversation between Kim Il Sung and Todor Zhivkov,” October 30, 1973, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, From the personal collection of former Bulgarian diplomat Georgi Mitov. Translated by Donna Kovacheva. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114533>

⁶³⁰ “Report from the GDR Embassy in the USSR, “Note about a Conversation between Comrade Bauer and Comrade Basmanov, Deputy Head of the 1st Far Eastern Department of the USSR Foreign Ministry, on 10 May, 1976.” May 13, 1976, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office, Berlin (PolA AA), MfAA, C 6857. Translated for NKIDP by Bernd Schaefer. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114288>.

⁶³¹ Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong, Kim Il-Sung, and Sino-North Korean Relations, 1949-1976* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 203-205.

⁶³² Kim Il Sung, “Triunfará Ciertamente la Lucha Conjunta de los Pueblos Revolucionarios de Asia Contra el Imperialismo Yanqui” (6 August 1971), in *El Movimiento de los No Alineados es una Poderosa Fuerza Revolucionaria Antiimperialista de nuestra Época* (Pyongyang: Ediciones en Lenguas Extranjeras, 1976): 131-133.

demands vis-à-vis the Korean peninsula. At the Fourth Supreme People's Assembly in April 1971, Pyongyang released its "eight-point programme for the peaceful unification of Korea." When the Nixon-Mao meeting resulted in the Joint Communiqué of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China, also known as the Shanghai Communiqué, the Chinese statement endorsed the eight-point programme and repeated North Korean calls for the dissolution of UNCURK.

The heightened priority the North Korean leadership placed on its relationship with China was also related to the new importance it was beginning to identify in the United Nations (UN). As European colonies in the Global South continued to gain independence during the 1960s and 1970s, membership in the UN expanded dramatically. When the Korean peninsula was divided in 1945, the UN was constituted by its fifty-one founding members; by 1970 membership had more than doubled to 127 states. As two-thirds of these were "Third World" countries, North Korea stood to benefit from a growing level of support for its position on Korean unification within the annual General Assembly. In December 1971 the CIA commented that the newly-independent states of the Global South

...tend to be instinctively sympathetic to Pyongyang's strident anti-Western rhetoric. They see in North Korea a fellow victim of the colonial period, somehow managing to avoid Soviet or Chinese domination and loudly critical of the US. Pyongyang has learned to manipulate the symbols of anti-imperialism, small-country nationalism and economic self-reliance to exploit these natural sympathies.⁶³³

In October 1971 the PRC replaced the Taiwan-based government of Chiang Kai-shek as the rightful representative of China at the UN, thereby gaining a permanent seat on the five-

⁶³³ "North Korean Policy Toward the Non-Communist World: Objectives, Results, and Prospects," Memorandum of the CIA Office National Estimates, 16 December 1971, CREST electronic database, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland, 20.

member Security Council. Until then, US-sponsored resolutions on “the Korean question,” which legitimized UNCURK and the presence of US troops in the South, had routinely passed in the annual General Assemblies. Pyongyang, meanwhile, had simply rejected the right of the UN to play a role in resolving the division of the peninsula. With this new balance of power in the General Assembly, and now having two allies – the Soviet Union and China - with veto power on the Security Council, Pyongyang began to see the utility of working within the institution.

The evolving climate inside the UN General Assembly also reflected the growing influence of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which hit its stride in the 1970s to become an important force in international politics. Formally established at a meeting of twenty-five heads of state in Belgrade in September 1961, NAM served as a coalition of small and newly independent countries asserting their right to remain independent of both Cold War blocs. By its Fourth Summit in Algiers in September 1973, membership had grown to seventy-five countries, and its platform had coalesced around decolonization, disarmament, south-south cooperation, global economic justice, as well as opposition to “Apartheid, racism, Zionism and all forms of alien domination.”⁶³⁴ Possessing neither military nor legislative power, the organization primarily pursued its goals through the UN and its various specialized agencies. In August 1972, Georgetown, Guyana, hosted the Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers Conference inside a large *benab* -a traditional palm thatched hut - built by Wai-Wai Amerindians for the occasion. The meeting passed a resolution calling for the immediate withdrawal of US troops from South Korea, providing an early sign to North Korean leaders that NAM might constitute an important vehicle for its geo-political goals.⁶³⁵ The Fourth Non-Aligned Summit in Algiers in September

⁶³⁴ A.W. Singham (ed), *The Nonaligned Movement in World Politics* (Westport, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1977), 236.

⁶³⁵ Steven Lee, “The Korean Armistice and the End of Peace: The US-UN Coalition and the Dynamics of War-Making in Korea, 1953-76,” *The Journal of Korean Studies* 18, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 205.

1973 passed a resolution on the Korean question endorsing key demands of Pyongyang: immediate withdrawal of US troops from the South, the dissolution of UNCURK, and no dual representation in the UN.⁶³⁶

The final aspect of the changing international situation in the early 1970s influencing a shift in North Korean foreign policy pertained to the Korean peninsula itself. Pyongyang's aggressive military provocations and its efforts to stimulate insurrection within the South since late 1966 had not borne fruit. Moreover, July 1969 saw the announcement of the so-called Nixon Doctrine, signaling a reduction of the US military presence in Asia. Between late 1970 and early 1971, some 20,000 of the 64,000 US troops stationed in South Korea were sent home.⁶³⁷ Finally, while Pyongyang had long declared there could be no negotiation with Park Chung Hee, by 1970 it was evident that South Korea's democratic opposition headed by Kim Dae Jung was in ascendance. North Korean leaders believed a victory for Kim Dae Jung in presidential elections scheduled for April 1971 could open up a new era in North-South relations. Kim proclaimed that "we are ready to resolve peacefully the issue of reunifying the country through negotiations between the North and the South, in the event that after the removal of Park Chung Hee's puppet faction in South Korea, a real people's rule is established, or a patriotic democratic figure comes to power."⁶³⁸ In this context, continuing its militant path against the South held the danger of delaying US troop withdrawals, and could only increase support for the hardline Park.

⁶³⁶ "Hungarian Embassy in the DPRK, Report, 27 September 1973. Subject: The DPRK and the NonAligned Summit in Algiers," September 27, 1973, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Non-Aligned Movement, 1973, 120. doboz, 209-10, 00614/49/1973. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Balazs Szalontai. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116004>.

⁶³⁷ Ria Chae, "Diplomatic War: Inter-Korean Relations in the 1970s," *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 27, no. 2 (December 2014): 312.

⁶³⁸ "Information Regarding: New Developments Concerning the Unification of Korea and Relations between the DPRK and South Korea," August 16, 1972, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Diplomatic Archive, Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sofia. Record 28, File 1705. Pgs 114-123. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Sveta Milusheva. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112242>

To summarize, the defeat of the Latin American guerrilla movements, the dim prospects for revolution in South Korea, and the de-escalation of the Vietnam War all undermined Pyongyang's strategic vision of a global campaign of armed struggle that could "sever the limbs" of US imperialism. These developments, concurrent with shifting priorities for the Cuban and North Vietnamese leaderships, removed the basis for the Korea-Cuba-Vietnam axis of the 1960s. Pyongyang did not immediately abandon its project of an "anti-imperialist, anti-US united front," but rather shifted its attention more squarely on Asia, which was in part made possible by the improvement in DPRK-Sino relations in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, and the outbreak of guerrilla struggle in Cambodia. This new call for a united front of the five "revolutionary" Asian countries was short-lived, however. Changing conditions in the South, the growing influence of the Third World within the UN General Assembly, and Beijing's entry to the UN Security Council, broadened the possibilities of what might be achieved through peaceful dialogue with Seoul, multilateral cooperation, and broader diplomatic engagement with the international community. These were the primary international circumstances which gave birth to North Korea's new phase of Third Worldism, and by extension, the second major chapter of its involvement in Latin America and the Caribbean.

North Korea's new direction: diplomacy, multilateralism, and non-alignment

Despite Park Chung Hee's victory in South Korea's April 1971 elections, Kim Il Sung announced the following August that his government was ready to enter peaceful negotiations with Seoul. While the circumstances may not have been ideal, the North Korean leadership still hoped opening dialogue would encourage US troop withdrawal, while allowing them to reach

more South Koreans with their message of unification.⁶³⁹ Secret meetings between officials began in November 1971,⁶⁴⁰ and led to the historic joint-statement of July 1972, in which both sides affirmed their commitment to peaceful unification of the peninsula "without being subject to external imposition or interference."⁶⁴¹ This diplomatic progress was short-lived, however: talks deadlocked over crucial issues of US troop withdrawal and UN representation, while the Park government had become increasingly repressive against domestic opposition. In August 1973 Kim Dae Jung was kidnapped from a Tokyo hotel by South Korean intelligence agents. The same month Washington announced the 40,000 US troops still stationed in the South would remain there. Two days after the US statement Pyongyang withdrew from the talks, and condemned the "big-scale political plot to strangle the patriotic forces of South Korea demanding the democratization of society and national reunification..."⁶⁴²

Despite the failure of the North-South dialogue, Pyongyang's broader strategy of pursuing its goals through diplomacy and multilateral cooperation anchored its foreign policy for the remainder of the 1970s and into the 1980s. High profile North Korean delegations frequently toured the globe soliciting diplomatic and commercial relations with governments across the Cold War divide, seeking support for Pyongyang's stance on "the Korean question" at the UN. Between 1973 and 1977 North Korea also sought and gained seats on a number of international bodies, including the World Health Organization (thereby gaining observer status in the UN), the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Group of 77, and most importantly, the Non-Aligned Movement.⁶⁴³ For the moment, however, full UN membership was not on the agenda. While

⁶³⁹ Chae, "Diplomatic War," 313.

⁶⁴⁰ Shen and Xia, *A Misunderstood Friendship*, 211-212.

⁶⁴¹ Lee, "The Korean Armistice," 204.

⁶⁴² Chae, "Diplomatic War," 317.

⁶⁴³ In addition to these organizations, between 1973 and 1975 Pyongyang also joined the World Meteorological Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Telecommunication Union, the Universal

Seoul supported the formula of dual membership (in which both South and North Korea would enter the UN separately), Pyongyang opposed it, insisting that as “Korea was one,” only a single body could represent the peninsula.

North Korea enjoyed considerable success in its new strategy. By the end of 1971 the CIA could report, “North Korea is no longer the pariah in the international community. Although it is still badly upstaged by Seoul in terms of diplomatic recognition (82 vs 40), it has established a presence around the world much beyond that which it had in the mid-1960s.”⁶⁴⁴ By 1975 this disparity had narrowed considerably, with North Korea having the diplomatic recognition of seventy-two countries, versus South Korea’s ninety-three. The US State Department commented in March of that year that Pyongyang was “rapidly escaping its past insularity” and was “redressing the north/south diplomatic balance that once leaned heavily in Seoul's direction...”⁶⁴⁵

A new phase of North Korean Third Worldism: the “Era of Independence” doctrine

North Korea’s drastic shift in foreign policy in the early-mid 1970s was mirrored in its ideological stance. In 1974 Kim unveiled a new Third Worldist doctrine, one which diverged from that of the 1966 Tricontinental Conference, and which was even more remote from conventional Marxism-Leninism. The first major public presentation of this line was a speech by Kim Il Sung during the visit by Algerian president Houari Boumédiène in March 1974, published under the title, “The Revolutionary Cause of the Peoples of the Third World that

Postal Union, the International Labour Organization, the International Civil Aviation Organization, and the UN Educational and Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It also participated in a broad range of UN and non-UN, governmental and non-governmental international conferences, including the World Population Conference of August 1974 in Bucharest, the Eight World Mining Congress in Lima in November 1974, and the first World Conference on Women in June-July 1975 in Mexico City.

⁶⁴⁴ “North Korean Policy Toward the Non-Communist World,” 2.

⁶⁴⁵ “Planning talks paper on Korea,” telegram from US Secretary of State to US Embassy in Tokyo, 13 March 1975, United States. n.d. Access to archival databases (AAD), Washington, D.C.: National Archives & Records Administration. Available at <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=201109&dt=2476&dl=1345>.

March Flying the Banner of Independence Will Certainly Triumph.” It was further developed in Kim’s October 1975 speech marking the thirtieth anniversary of the KWP’s founding, and an essay Kim wrote for the Argentinian Third Worldist journal, *Guía del Tercer Mundo* (Third World Guide) and published in December 1975, “The Non-Aligned Movement is a Powerful Revolutionary Force of Our Era.” Kim now proclaimed that the world was in the “era of independence” (sometimes translated into English and Spanish as “the era of sovereignty”) in which the primary contradiction was not between socialism and capitalism, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, but rather the small countries of the Global South and the imperialist countries of the Global North led by the United States.⁶⁴⁶ Moreover, the progressive orientation of what Kim now called “the second world” – Canada and some governments of Western Europe and Scandinavia – meant that these countries could be counted as allies. While the defeat of US imperialism remained the central goal, the strategy was no longer a global campaign of guerrilla struggle. Rather, Kim outlined a grand coalition of the “Third World” supported by the socialist bloc and the more progressive capitalist countries that could, through multilateral institutions and international conventions, forge a new global order based on the principles of self-determination and non-interference.

In the KWP’s new political line unveiled in 1974, the Non-Aligned Movement took on paramount importance. While the KWP never renounced its place in the international communist movement, Kim now proclaimed that NAM had become “a powerful revolutionary force” that was “reflecting the basic trends of a new historical era”⁶⁴⁷ Quite remarkably, the North

⁶⁴⁶ Kim Il Sung, *El Movimiento de los No Alienados Es una Poderosa Fuerza Revolucionaria Antiimperialista de Nuestra Época* (Pyongyang: Ediciones en Lenguas Extranjeras, 1976).

⁶⁴⁷ Son Chin-pal, “The noble ideals of the Non-Aligned Movement are triumphant,” *Kulloja* (Pyongyang) July 1976, translated and reprinted in *Translations on North Korea* no. 493 (29 November 1976) Joint Publications Research Service (Washington): 54.

Korean leadership did not merely champion NAM as an important and noble organization worthy of support. Rather, in a Marxist historical framework, it posited NAM, and not the “communist and workers parties,” as the primary agent of historical change in the world at the time. NAM was of “epochal significance in the development of human history” because it “emerged as an international revolutionary movement by reflecting the demands and aspirations of the times”⁶⁴⁸ At the August 1975 Fifth Conference of Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Non-aligned Countries in Lima, North Korea was granted full membership in NAM, while South Korea’s application was rejected. Pyongyang went on to earn a seat on the NAM Coordinating Bureau at the Sixth Summit in Havana in September 1979.

By 1974 the KWP had, in effect, abandoned what had been central pillars of its political line in the 1960s, namely the paramount importance of armed struggle and Marxist-Leninist leadership. There was little talk of socialism or class warfare in this new narrative. In the context of the “era of independence,” Third World nationalism surpassed Marxism-Leninism in practical importance. What mattered was that governments rejected “servilism:” compromising independence by kowtowing to foreign powers. The political actors Kim now put forth as examples to be emulated were not revolutionary guerrillas or Marxist-Leninist parties building socialism, but rather Third World governments practising economic nationalism and south-south cooperation. Praise once reserved for Cuba and North Vietnam was now bestowed on Algeria, Somalia, Peru, and Argentina, among others. In March 1975 the US State Department observed that “North Korea is apparently diluting its ties with the communist world” and that Kim Il Sung “regards North Korea as a member of the Third World and apparently wishes to have his primary

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., 53-54.

relationship with developing countries rather than with his communist neighbors.”⁶⁴⁹ By the time of the KWP’s Sixth Party Congress in October 1980, the Hungarian ambassador to North Korea could remarked that “The characteristic attribute of these views is a pragmatic and nationalistic approach that is moving more and more away from Marxism-Leninism.”⁶⁵⁰ An Albanian delegate was more blunt: “What kind of congress it is where not a single word mentions Marxism–Leninism, and parties with no connection to communist ideologies participate as well?”⁶⁵¹

North Korea’s new foreign policy towards Latin America and the Caribbean

While Pyongyang’s foreign policy towards Latin America and the Caribbean changed in line with its broader international strategy, the region by no means lessened in importance. In fact, in September 1976 the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs told its US counterparts that Latin America had become a top focus of Pyongyang’s international diplomacy.⁶⁵² This reflected the fact that the North Korean leadership still believed that the triumph of left-wing and nationalist forces in Latin America and the Caribbean, given the economic and geo-political importance of the region to the United States, would be a major advance in the anti-imperialist struggle. As Kim Il Sung told an Argentine journalist in September 1974, “Latin America, once called the ‘patrimonial territory,’ the ‘tranquil backyard’ of North American imperialism, has been transformed today into a revolutionary continent that advances under the banner of anti-

⁶⁴⁹ “Planning talks paper on Korea.”

⁶⁵⁰ “Telegram from the Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, ‘Foreign opinions regarding the KWP’s 6th Congress’,” November 11, 1980, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MNL OL XIV-J-1-j Korea 25-001140/1980. Obtained by North Korean Materials Archive, IFES, Kyungnam University, and translated by Imre Májer. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/123748>.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

⁶⁵² “DPRK diplomatic activities,” telegram from the US Embassy in Seoul to the US State Department, 27 September 1976, United States. n.d. Access to archival databases (AAD), Washington, D.C.: National Archives & Records Administration. Available at <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=344915&dt=2082&dl=1345>.

imperialism and independence.”⁶⁵³ As the peoples of various Latin American countries were willing to, “defend political independence, natural resources and jurisdictional waters,” they were, “dealing fatal blows to the imperialists” and “contributing greatly to the acceleration of the downfall of imperialism.”⁶⁵⁴ What was new in the North Korean leadership’s revised narrative on Latin America was that primary agency had shifted from non-state to state actors. What signaled the region’s potential was no longer the proliferation of Cuban-inspired guerrilla movements, but the growing strength of the Non-Aligned Movement. Progress was coming not through armed struggle from below, but by governments standing up to foreign powers – primarily the United States - on issues of territorial sovereignty and resource control. Indeed, the United States faced a wave of attempts to nationalize US corporate assets across Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1970s. Cuba, Guyana, Jamaica, Peru, Panama, and Argentina were all important players in NAM, and together had the potential to tip the scale in a particularly close vote in the UN General Assembly. Several regional issues were high on NAM’s agenda during the 1970s, including US control of Guantanamo Bay and the Panama Canal, Puerto Rican and Belizean independence, the campaign for an internationally-recognized 200-mile coastal exclusive economic zone (EEZ),⁶⁵⁵ and Argentina and Britain’s dispute over the Malvinas (Falkland Islands).

However now that the North Korean leadership’s focus was on expanding bilateral ties with governments it had only recently condemned as “fascist puppet states of US

⁶⁵³ Kim, Il Sung, *América Latina Avanza Victoriosa bajo las Banderas del Antimperialismo, Independencia y Soberanía* (San José, Costa Rica: 1975), 107.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., 107-108.

⁶⁵⁵ In the 1970s several Latin American countries, Peru in particular, were active in the campaign for international recognition of a 200-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ), that is, the principle that all coastal nations should possess exclusive economic rights to the sea within a 200-mile boundary of their coastline. North Korea also placed major importance on the issue. This movement led to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in December 1982.

imperialism,”⁶⁵⁶ it faced considerable challenges. Most Latin American governments simply did not have much incentive to recognize North Korea, much less permit trade offices or embassies. Pyongyang’s well-publicized support for Mexican guerrillas in 1969-70 hardened its reputation as a subversive, communist state whose friendly approaches masked ulterior motives. Most of the left-wing governments that emerged in Latin America and the Caribbean during the 1970s were essentially moderate and reformist, and some were threatened by the kind of radical-left groups North Korea supported throughout the previous decade. The US State Department applied considerable pressure to dissuade governments of the region from accepting North Korea’s diplomatic overtures.⁶⁵⁷ Closer ties to Pyongyang could also hurt relations with Seoul, which had been cultivating bilateral ties with Latin American governments since the early 1960s, and which was typically regarded as having more to offer in terms of trade than its northern counterpart.

Despite such obstacles, Pyongyang’s made considerable progress as it shifted to a focus on diplomacy and multilateralism during 1972-75. Just as the emergence of several left-wing governments in Latin America and the Caribbean in the early 1970s and the growing influence of the Non-Aligned Movement countered Cuba’s isolation in the region, the same developments allowed new opportunities for North Korea. Throughout 1972 Pyongyang was host to visiting delegations of political activists, trade unionists, government officials, and scholars from Puerto

⁶⁵⁶ “Repuestas a las Preguntas de Gabriel Molina, Jefe de Información del Periódico ‘Hoy,’ y de Otros Periodistas Cubanos,” (6 July 1965), in Kim Il Sung, *Repuestas a las Preguntas de los Corresponsales Extranjeros*, (Pyongyang: Ediciones en Lenguas Extranjeras, 1974), 83.

⁶⁵⁷ The collection of declassified US State Department diplomatic records from 1973-1979 available in the US National Archives are replete with examples. Typically, upon learning that a North Korean delegation was visiting a country to propose closer bilateral ties, the US ambassador would intervene to dissuade leaders and officials from considering any such move. US arguments generally focused on North Korea’s history of supporting guerrilla movements in the region, that North Korea had little to offer in terms of trade, and that recognizing North Korea would have a deleterious impact on that country’s relations with both Washington and Seoul.

Rico, Brazil, Peru, Chile, Cuba, Uruguay, the Dominican Republic, Barbados, and Guyana. In May 1973, a North Korean delegation lead by Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Kim Ŭnhwan toured Latin America and the Caribbean, making stops in Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, Panama, Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana and Peru,⁶⁵⁸ seeking to expand bilateral ties and gain support within the upcoming UN General Assembly.

Argentina proved to be North Korea's first major diplomatic breakthrough in Latin America under this new strategy. North Korean Vice-President Kang Ryang'uk (a maternal uncle of Kim Il Sung) and Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kim Yongt'aek, attended the May 1973 presidential inauguration of Héctor José Cámpora in Buenos Aires. Before leaving, officials of the two governments issued a joint-declaration establishing diplomatic and commercial relations on 1 June. Local press reported North Korean interest in importing Argentinian beef, bone meal, tallow, and fishmeal.⁶⁵⁹ Pyongyang had, in fact, begun importing Argentinian wheat in the 1960s, and had already purchased 51,00 tons of the 1972-73 harvest.⁶⁶⁰ Kang returned to Buenos Aires in October to meet President Juan Perón, following the latter's return from exile.

Pyongyang's diplomatic offensive in Latin America in 1973 was largely in preparation for the historic show-down between North and South Korea at the twenty-eighth UN General

⁶⁵⁸ "Government delegation returns from Latin America," Korean Central News Agency (Pyongyang), 17 May 1973, in the Readex Collection, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports, 1941-1996*,

⁶⁵⁹ "Funds released to open embassies in Cuba, East Germany and North Korea," telegram from the US Embassy in Buenos Aires to the US State Department, 1 August 1973, United States. n.d. Access to archival databases (AAD), Washington, D.C.: National Archives & Records Administration. Available at <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=13634&dt=2472&dl=1345>.

⁶⁶⁰ "North Korea's Foreign Trade," CIA Intelligence Memorandum, 10 January 1968, CREST electronic database, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland; "IWC: ASMC Meeting of March 20," telegram from the US Embassy in London to the US State Department, 3 April 1973, United States. n.d. Access to archival databases (AAD), Washington, D.C.: National Archives & Records Administration. Available at <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=10320&dt=2472&dl=1345>.

Assembly, the first one in which both Koreas would participate as observers. Delegates were faced with two rival resolutions, one introduced by Algeria calling for the dissolution of UNCURK and the removal of all foreign troops from the south of the peninsula, and the second put forth by the US aimed at maintaining the status quo. US and South Korean diplomats, realizing the two resolutions were “neck in neck”⁶⁶¹ and that their own would likely fail to receive the two-thirds vote necessary, made a last-moment bid to avoid a defeat. The US proposed to the North Koreans – via the intermediaries of New Zealand and Algeria – that both sides forgo a vote on the two rival resolutions, and instead adopt a compromise “statement of consensus.” The proposed text affirmed the North-South Korean declaration of July 1972, stated unification should be “achieved by peaceful means, without recourse to the use of arms” but also “independently, without reliance upon outside force or its interference,” and declared the immediate dissolution of UNCURK. North Korea accepted the proposal and celebrated the statement of consensus as a great victory, to the surprise of some of its allies.⁶⁶² The US State Department also took it as a win: the consensus statement did not mention US troops in South

⁶⁶¹ “Korea in the UN -- successful outcome,” telegram from US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to all diplomatic posts, 22 November 1973, United States. n.d. Access to archival databases (AAD), Washington, D.C.: National Archives & Records Administration. Available at <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=108645&dt=2472&dl=1345>.

⁶⁶² For example, the Romanian embassy in Pyongyang reported that the consensus statement was “a topic intensely debated within the diplomatic corps in Pyongyang” and remarked “From the comments of socialist diplomats as well as of other countries, partially confirmed by the insistence with which the Korean press is justifying the position of the DPRK government, it has become apparent that some members of the Korean leadership, militaries most of all, have not fully grasped the concession made in favor of U.S. troops stationing in South Korea....” US diplomats also noted Algerian and Libyan frustration with the compromise, and that “several dels [*sic*] expressed surprise that North Koreans would settle for so little.” See “Telegram from Pyongyang to Bucharest, SECRET, No. 61.537,” December 06, 1973, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Matter 220/Year: 1973/Country: Democratic People’s Republic of Korea – other states, CLASSIFICATION: SECRET, Department I Relations, Folder 1514, Vol. II, Regarding the Foreign Policy of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea towards Other States, Period: 06.08 – 24.12.1973. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Eliza Gheorghe <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114080>; “Korea in 28th GA: final day of first Comité [*sic*] debate” telegram from US Mission to the UN to Secretary of State, 22 November 1973, United States. n.d. Access to archival databases (AAD), Washington, D.C.: National Archives & Records Administration. Available at <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=108634&dt=2472&dl=1345>.

Korea, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger pointed out, and “avoided [a] bruising confrontation in what would have been complicated procedural votes.”⁶⁶³

North Korea’s momentum in Latin America and the Caribbean grew from that point on. During 1974 Pyongyang established diplomatic relations with Guyana, Jamaica, Costa Rica and Venezuela. In March 1974 a Peruvian trade delegation to Pyongyang secured a sale of twenty million dollars worth of Peruvian copper, leading to a commercial agreement between the two countries four months later.⁶⁶⁴ In November of that year Lima hosted an “International Conference to Support the Independent and Peaceful Reunification of Korea,” a landmark event in the growing DPRK solidarity movement in Latin America.⁶⁶⁵ While Cuba had been North Korea’s sole state-to-state-relationship in Latin America and the Caribbean during the 1960s, by 1982 it had formal diplomatic ties with thirteen countries in the region. Moreover, through the activities of Chuch’e study groups, friendship societies, and solidarity committees, as well as partnerships with opposition parties, parliamentary bodies, trade unions, and universities, North Korea established some presence in virtually every country in Latin America and the Caribbean during the 1970s.

⁶⁶³ “Korea in the UN -- successful outcome.”

⁶⁶⁴ “Visit of North Korean director general of foreign commerce,” telegram from the US Embassy in Lima to US Secretary of State, 21 March 1974, United States. n.d. Access to archival databases (AAD), Washington, D.C.: National Archives & Records Administration, available at <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=48197&dt=2474&dl=1345>; “Peru-North Korea trade convention signed,” telegram from the US Embassy in Lima to US Secretary of State, 26 July 1974, United States. n.d. Access to archival databases (AAD), Washington, D.C.: National Archives & Records Administration, available at <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=155573&dt=2474&dl=1345>.

⁶⁶⁵ Although North Korean-Peruvian relations warmed rapidly during 1974, and plans for full diplomatic relations were announced, President Velasco was overthrown in a military coup in August 1975.

DPRK-Cuban relations in the 1970s

The North Korean and Cuban leaderships both undertook radical foreign policy shifts in the early 1970s. As Havana firmly aligned itself with Moscow, and Pyongyang became a closer ally of Beijing while continuing to emphasize its opposition to big power hegemony, relations between the two governments cooled considerably. One indication of this is the drastic change in how both countries covered one another in official state media. During the 1960s the North Korean press routinely engaged in emphatic praise for the Cuban revolution and its leaders. The island was presented as standing on the frontlines of the anti-imperialist struggle, and Kim Il Sung frequently insisted that solidarity with Cuba must be a top priority of the international communist movement. During the first half of the 1970s, however, such rhetoric steadily evaporated, and official North Korean pronouncements on Latin America commonly omitted any mention of Cuba at all. On the other hand, new political actors in Latin America became the subject of frequent accolades. When Kim was interviewed by a Peruvian journalist in June 1974, he claimed Peru and Argentina were leading the struggle against imperialism in the region.⁶⁶⁶ From North Korea's new ideological standpoint, leaders like Velasco and Perón were heeding Chuch'e by championing a "national" political line and maintaining their independence from both Cold War blocs, while Cuba was guilty of *servilism* towards Moscow.

Likewise, the constant support for North Korea in *Granma*, a newspaper which in the 1960s occasionally featured Kim's portrait on its front page, also vanished in the same period. While Cuba's annual "Month of Solidarity with the Korean People" would receive daily front page coverage in the latter half of the 1960s, now it might be addressed in a small feature in the

⁶⁶⁶ Kim, *America Latina Avanza*, 73.

back pages only on the opening day. When the first-ever “International Conference to Support the Independent and Peaceful Reunification of Korea” to take place in Latin America was held in Lima in November 1974, it received scant mention in Cuban media, and was not attended by a high-ranking PCC representative.

A report from the Hungarian embassy in Pyongyang the same year also suggests the tone between the two governments had changed. It relayed how, when North Korea requested 300,000 metric tons of sugar for 1974, the Cubans replied that they could only provide 80,000, and that this amount would be delivered in quarterly shipments, each of which would be cancelled if there were outstanding payments. The North Koreans criticized the Cuban response as “incompatible with the policy of mutual assistance that socialist countries pursued toward each other,” to which the Cubans rebutted “that they also needed assistance, and it would greatly help them if they could receive payment for the sugar shipments in a timely manner.”⁶⁶⁷ According to the US Interests Section in Havana⁶⁶⁸ during the later half of the 1970s North Korean yearly purchases of Cuban sugar averaged only ten to twenty thousand tons, a dramatic decrease from the 120-200 thousand tons imported annually in the 1970-73 period.⁶⁶⁹ Following the April 1977 meeting of NAM’s Coordinating Bureau in New Delhi, the South Korean government observed that Cuban support for North Korea within the organization had declined

⁶⁶⁷ “Hungarian Embassy in the DPRK, Telegram, 22 January 1974. Subject: Cuban-DPRK relations,” January 22, 1974, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1974, 65. doboz, 81-10, 001025/1974. Translated for NKIDP by Balazs Szalontai. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115806>

⁶⁶⁸ While the US severed diplomatic relations with Cuba in January 1961, in 1977, during the Jimmy Carter administration, the two governments negotiated an agreement in which each would operate an “interests section” out of its former embassies in Havana and Washington D.C. respectively.

⁶⁶⁹ “Cuban-Chinese economic relations,” telegram from US Interests Section in Havana to US Secretary of State, 3 March 1978, United States. n.d. Access to archival databases (AAD), Washington, D.C.: National Archives & Records Administration, available at <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=79348&dt=2694&dl=2009>; “(LOU) Cubans criticize U.S. military exercise in Korea,” telegram from US Interests Section in Havana to US Secretary of State, 23 March 1979, United States. n.d. Access to archival databases (AAD), Washington, D.C.: National Archives & Records Administration, available at <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=199981&dt=2776&dl=2169>.

from previous years, concluding: “This possibly seems to indicate the emergence of a new facet in the relations between the North Korean puppets and its traditional supporters.”⁶⁷⁰

Ongoing developments in Vietnam and Cambodia in the latter half of the 1970s contributed to the decline of DPRK-Cuban solidarity. In December 1978, following years of small-scale fighting along the Vietnamese-Cambodian border, Vietnam militarily invaded Cambodia to remove the Khmer Rouge government of Pol Pot. Like the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc states, Cuba applauded the invasion, while North Korea sided with China and the majority of the Asian communist parties in condemning it as an act of imperialism. This was no minor issue for the North Korean leadership: it had backed Khmer Rouge guerrillas in the early-mid 1970s, and had enthusiastically supported Pol Pot since his coming to power in April 1975. In March 1979 the US Interests Section in Havana speculated that the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia “raised questions about Cuba's continued solidarity with Pyongyang.”⁶⁷¹ In April, China’s director of Korean affairs, Zhang Ruijie, told a visiting Japanese official that Pyongyang opposed Fidel’s bid to be elected NAM chairman at the upcoming Coordinating Bureau meeting in Colombo.⁶⁷² This is confirmed by the US State Department, which reported that at the Colombo meeting the North Koreans appeared to be “engaged in anti-Cuban and anti-Vietnamese maneuvers within NAM.”⁶⁷³ More specifically, North Korea joined efforts by more

⁶⁷⁰ “Telegram to the Minister of Foreign Affairs from the Deputy Director of the United Nations Division,” April 10, 1977, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Roll 2007-25, File 7, Frame 73-77, South Korean Foreign Ministry Archive. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118384>.

⁶⁷¹ “(LOU) Cubans criticize U.S. military exercise in Korea.”

⁶⁷² “Sino-Japanese exchange of views on Korea,” telegram from US Embassy in Tokyo to US Secretary of State, 18 April 1979, United States. n.d. Access to archival databases (AAD), Washington, D.C.: National Archives & Records Administration, available at <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=13617&dt=2776&dl=2169>.

⁶⁷³ “Non-aligned Movement (NAM) treatment of Korea question,” telegram from US Secretary of State to US Embassy in Seoul, 31 May 1979, United States. n.d. Access to archival databases (AAD), Washington, D.C.: National Archives & Records Administration, available at <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=235062&dt=2776&dl=2169>.

conservative member states who wished to limit Cuba's power once it assumed chairmanship, by pushing for greater democratization of NAM's internal structure.

By the Sixth Non-Aligned Summit in Havana in September 1979, there was no mistaking that North Korea and Cuba had emerged on different sides of the fence. During the later half of the 1970s NAM had become progressively divided internally. Of greatest consequence, fundamental disagreements emerged between a "radical" faction led by Cuba and backed by other pro-Soviet states such as Vietnam, Laos, Afghanistan, and Ethiopia, and the "moderates" headed by Yugoslavia. Cuba argued that the socialist bloc was the natural ally of the Third World, and that Soviet foreign policy could not be equated with the imperialism of the United States. Yugoslavia, on the other hand, defended a more classic conception of non-alignment that stressed détente and complete independence from both Cold War blocs. These contradictory visions clashed at the Sixth Summit, expressing themselves in battles over Cambodian representation, the wording of the summit's declaration, and a host of procedural matters. To the surprise of many, North Korea emerged clearly on the "moderate" side of the divide, having, in the words of a Japanese foreign ministry official, "abandoned its former radical position, espousing support for the 'true spirit of NAM' and backing Yugoslavia over Cuba and Vietnam."⁶⁷⁴ It was a remarkable example of just how much the perspective of the North Korean leadership had changed in a decade. In the late 1960s North Korean leaders refused to consider diplomatic relations with the Yugoslav "renegades,"⁶⁷⁵ while proclaiming, as the Soviets put it, "the correctness of F. Castro's policy on all issues of domestic and foreign policy..."⁶⁷⁶ Some ten

⁶⁷⁴ "North Korea: Japanese views," telegram from US Secretary of State to US Embassy in Seoul, 20 September 1979, United States. n.d. Access to archival databases (AAD), Washington, D.C.: National Archives & Records Administration, <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=311848&dt=2776&dl=2169>.

⁶⁷⁵ Won Chun-yong, "The Correct Policy for the Present Anti-Imperialist, Anti-American Struggle" *Kulloja* (Pyongyang) 25 Nov 1966, translated and reprinted in *Translations on North Korea* no. 36 (23 February 1967): 45.

⁶⁷⁶ "From a 2 June 1967 Memo of the Soviet Embassy in the DPRK (1st Secretary V. Nemchinov) about

years later, Kim Il Sung was standing alongside Josef Tito and a coterie of non-socialist governments in opposing Cuba's leadership aspirations in the Global South.

Conclusion

The North Korean leadership's project of an "anti-imperialist, anti-US united front" in the 1960s was a response to the international conditions prevailing at that time. North Korean leaders, frustrated with the priorities of its Soviet and Chinese allies, believed that supporting and extending the kind of armed struggle being waged in Vietnam could counter the global military hegemony of the United States. Moreover, they believed that conditions in Latin America had reached a decisive breaking point, and that a wave of revolutionary insurgencies throughout the continent stood to strike a major blow to Washington's informal empire. These circumstances forged a bond between the North Korean and Cuban leaderships, who found unity in a vision of world revolution in which guerrilla war throughout the Global South would tie down and cut off the many arms of US imperialism. It is only natural that, as international conditions shifted substantially in the early 1970s, Pyongyang would reanalyze the global state of affairs and recalibrate its foreign policy strategy accordingly. The North Korean leadership did not abandon its conviction that the Global South had become the principal theatre of struggle, or that the defeat of US imperialism should be the central task of the international left. However it arrived at new conclusions about the strategy, tactics, and the international political alignments this agenda required. It should also be noted that North Korea never renounced armed struggle. It merely adjusted its position to accept that there were a plurality of legitimate strategies for anti-

Some New Factors in Korean-Cuban relations," June 02, 1967, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVPRF f. 0102, op. 23, p. 112, d. 24, pp. 53-57. Obtained by Sergey Radchenko and translated by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116706>.

imperialist struggle in the Global South, including electoral politics.⁶⁷⁷ More importantly, it shifted the central focus of its strategy from one of backing revolutionary movements, to one of cultivating relations with existing governments. This new policy was not without nuance, however. Like Cuba, North Korea never recognised the military junta of Augusto Pinochet, and continued to support opposition forces within the country, including the radical armed group, the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Left Movement, MIR).⁶⁷⁸ This was another important way in which North Korean foreign policy remained parallel with that of Cuba, and diverged with that of China, despite the overall trend towards the contrary during the decade.

The KWP's turn from the militant Third Worldism of the Tricontinental Conference, to the considerably more moderate Third Worldism of the Non-Aligned Movement, was a radical shift, but not an irrational one. The fundamental goal behind North Korean foreign policy had always been an alteration in the global balance of forces that would make possible the unification of the peninsula. By the early 1970s, it no longer looked probable that this change would come via armed revolutionary struggle across the Global South. However the rapid growth of the Non-Aligned Movement suggested that perhaps there was an easier and less costly path towards the same goal. In Kim's many interviews with foreign journalists from the 1970s, there is what appears to be a sincere optimism that the international community at large was losing its patience with US interventionism, and was ready to make national self-determination a fundamental

⁶⁷⁷ In an interview with Chilean journalist Oscar Weiss published in July 1972, Kim now argued that "if the reactionaries and imperialism are weak, there will be no need for violent struggle," and that while imperialism would not give up without a fight, this "does not mean that it is impossible to make revolution without any kind of violence." See "Premier Kim Il-Song says revolution must fit country's situation," *La Nación* (Santiago de Chile), 9 July 1972, reprinted in Readex collection, *Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS) Reports, 1957-1995*.

⁶⁷⁸ Francisco Artanza, "Andrés Pascal Allende: Gaddafi envió armas al MIR", 29 Oct 2011, available at: <http://diario.latercera.com/2011/10/29/01/contenido/reportajes/25-88597-9-andres-pascal-allende-gaddafi-envio-armas-al-mir.shtml>.

principle of international relations. As Kim told the Ecuadorean publisher and DPRK solidarity activist, Humberto Ortiz Flores, in October 1974:

Today, sovereignty has been made a global current. We talk not just of the countries of the Third World, but also amongst the capitalist nations, many demand sovereignty. Canada wants sovereignty and the Japanese people also [...] France and Italy demand sovereignty; Denmark, Sweden and Northern Europe demand sovereignty. We regard this era as the era of sovereignty.⁶⁷⁹

While Kim's faith in a coalition of the Third World and the left-leaning governments of the West might seem naïve from our vantage point today, it was by no means unreasonable at the time. The US had been defeated in Vietnam, leaving a domestic political climate strongly averse to further overseas military adventures. Canada's Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau was openly defiant of the United States, embraced economic nationalism, and supported Third World countries struggling for greater ownership of their resources. North Korea was benefiting from growing trade with Japan, Western Europe, and Scandinavia, and its prestige with the Third World was peaking, largely at the expense of that of South Korea.

On the other hand, one can identify the seeds of North Korea's new phase of Third Worldism in the concept of Chuch'e first put forth by Kim in December 1955. At the heart of Chuch'e was the principle of *chajusŏng* (independence), that all countries, regardless of their size or power, were equally entitled to govern themselves without foreign interference. This aspect of KWP ideology provided a natural affinity with the Non-Aligned Movement. Kim argued that revolutionary movements must "creatively adapt" Marxism-Leninism, and develop distinctly national political programmes based on their society's unique historical conditions and cultural specificities. It was not a far step to conclude that revolutionaries in the Global South need not depend on Marx and Lenin at all. Kim had much in common with the Latin American and West

⁶⁷⁹ Kim, *America Latina Avanza*, 73.

Indian statesmen he aligned himself with in the 1970s, namely Juan Velasco, Juan Perón, Omar Torrijos, and Forbes Burnham. They were personalistic, nationalist leaders who asserted their independence of both Cold War blocs, rejected ideological orthodoxy, and claimed to be leading authentically national projects based on indigenous traditions and values.

This dissertation has argued that North Korean Third Worldism evolved in tandem with the KWP's larger ideological structure, in particular the growing emphasis on Chuch'e and the elevation of the Kim personality cult. The developments of the early-mid 1970s confirm this hypothesis. The religious-like worship of the Kim dynasty that confounds many outside observers of North Korea today emerged in the early 1970s. The opening paragraph to a February 1972 editorial in *Kulloja* exemplifies the new literary style which became routinely employed by the party:

To our people no honour and happiness are greater than those of living and fighting under Comrade Kim Il Sung, the great leader. Because our people support Comrade Kim Il Sung, our esteemed and cherished leader who is the unprecedented patriot and a national hero admired by the revolutionaries and progressive peoples of the whole world, the ever-victorious general of steel, and one of the outstanding leaders of the international communist movement and labour movement, and live and make revolution under his guidance, they are the happiest people in the world.⁶⁸⁰

The intensification of the Kim personality cult was accompanied by the elevation of Chuch'e from a "principle" or "spirit" to a complete body of theory in its own right. A new constitution was adopted in 1972, replacing the republic's original constitution of 1948, which enshrined Chuch'e as the basis of state policy.⁶⁸¹ Kim was recast from a great defender of the "purity" of Marxism-Leninism, to an original philosopher of universal and transhistorical importance. Not only did references to Marx and Lenin become markedly less common in KWP

⁶⁸⁰ Kim Kwan-sop, "Kim Il-Song admired by revolutionaries of the world," *Kulloja* (Pyongyang), 5 February 1972, translated and reprinted in *Translations on North Korea* no. 255 (30 June 1972): 105.

⁶⁸¹ Dae-Kyu Yoon, "The Constitution of North Korea: its Changes and Implications," *Fordham International Law Journal* 27 (2003): 66.

literature, Kim occasionally made statements implying their ideas had become outdated. *Kulloja* announced in April 1972, for example, that “during the almost half-century since V.I. Lenin expounded the theory of imperialism, it has developed many new features and has been transformed into modern imperialism...” Therefore, Kim had now “proposed an original theory, strategy and tactics for ultimately destroying modern imperialism.”⁶⁸² In a discussion with members of Venezuela’s Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Towards Socialism, MAS) in September 1981, Kim argued:

Of course, we have understood the theories and methods of our revolutionary ancestors, such as Marx and Lenin. But we cannot continue to apply these dogmatically. With the shifting of time the character of the era changes, the social conditions and the goal of the revolution. As these change, so does the character of the revolution and the theories and methods of it as well.⁶⁸³

What the above demonstrates is that while the KWP’s new Third Worldist political line of the 1970s was a means of adapting to changing international circumstances, it was also shaped by deeper impulses within the North Korean leadership. Namely, the long-standing resentment towards the “big power chauvinism” of Moscow and Beijing, the will to escape dependency on foreign powers, and shed its junior status within the socialist camp. This agenda was paralleled by a domestic political and ideological project: to craft a distinct and wholly independent political order, complete with a concomitant ideological system, which acknowledged no other foundation other than its authentic “Koreaness,” and the exalted persona of Kim Il Sung.

⁶⁸² Kim Tong-gyu, “The international communist movement and the world revolution,” *Kulloja* (Pyongyang) April 1974, translated and reprinted in *Translations on North Korea*, no. 264 (29 August 1972): 147.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This dissertation has examined how, in the aftermath of the Korean War, the North Korean leadership became increasingly focused on the Global South as a site of revolutionary struggle. The Cuban Revolution of 1959 was a turning point in this process, as it inspired guerilla insurgencies throughout the Americas, and a new revolutionary government in Havana searched for allies who shared its militant, internationalist vision. In the context of the Sino-Soviet split and escalating US aggression in Indochina, North Korean leaders gravitated towards the radical Third Worldism which coalesced at Havana's Tricontinental Conference of 1966. North Korea and Cuba became leaders of a new, radical Third Worldist political tendency that disrupted the status quo of the socialist camp and changed the conversation within the international left. These remarkable developments naturally raise the question: what was, ultimately, the significance of radical Third Worldism, and what happened to it?

In the introduction to this dissertation we considered the words of Mehdi Ben Barka, who said that the Tricontinental represented an effort to bring together, “the two great contemporary currents of World Revolution [...] the current which started with the October Revolution in the Soviet Union, and which is the current of socialist revolution, and the parallel current of the revolution for national liberation.”⁶⁸⁴ Ben Barka's words suggest that the rise of radical Third Worldism reflected the reality that capitalism and colonialism were the two fundamental sources of contradiction driving international politics in the twentieth century. “Decolonization, however, was no uniform matter,” Aijaz Ahmed reminds us. “All classes and all political ideologies, from landowners of various sorts to fully fledged national bourgeoisies, and from the most

⁶⁸⁴ Mehdi Ben Barka quoted in the introduction to *First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America* (Havana: General Secretariat of the OSPAAAL, 1966).

obscurantist to the most revolutionary, had contended for leadership over the anti-colonial movements, with diverse consequences in different parts of the world. Anti-colonial struggle was itself, in other words, a riven terrain.”⁶⁸⁵ In most colonial nations, particularly in the immediate postwar period and throughout the 1950s, decolonization meant that power was inherited by elite sectors who ensured their countries would remain aligned with the dominant Western powers, even if sometimes employing nationalistic and socialistic rhetoric. The 1960s, however, was the highpoint for those revolutionary processes in the Global South in which “the national bourgeoisie had been sidelined and socialist hegemony established in the course of the anti-colonial struggle.”⁶⁸⁶ These events included the Vietnamese, Cuban, and Algerian revolutions, the outbreak of guerilla insurgencies across Latin America, the upsurge of powerful communist parties in Indonesia and India, and the armed national liberation movements of sub-Saharan Africa. In these movements, “the colonial question converged with socialist revolution.”⁶⁸⁷

However, the radical Third Worldism of the Tricontinental was not merely an ideological marriage between nationalism and Marxism – that would frame the goal, but not the strategy of the movement. Nor did the twin goals of independence and socialism differentiate it from the standard platforms of the orthodox communist movement or the broader left. What was new and controversial in the Tricontinental vision was the position that the central goal of the international left must be the immediate defeat of US imperialism through a global campaign of armed struggle - Kim Il Sung’s “anti-imperialist, anti-US united front,” and Che Guevara’s “two, three, many Vietnams.”

⁶⁸⁵ Aijaz Ahmed, *In Theory*, 2nd edition, 2008, 18.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., 31.

By positing the defeat of US imperialism as the central revolutionary task of the epoch, radical Third Worldism was a reaction to, on one hand, the mass-scale aggression and brutality of US military imperialism since the end of the Second World War and, on the other hand, the Soviet doctrine of peaceful coexistence. The tendency to view the decolonization period as one of a great ushering in of freedom and dignity obscures the fact that it occurred simultaneously with the emergence of an unprecedented degree of global US hegemony, one which drastically curtailed the ability of countries in the Global South to exercise true sovereignty. As Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman wrote in their 1979 book, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*:

The old colonial world was shattered during World War II, and the resultant nationalist-radical upsurge threatened traditional Western hegemony and the economic interests of Western business. To contain this threat the United States has aligned itself with elite and military elements in the Third World whose function has been to contain the tides of social change.”⁶⁸⁸

What North Korea, Cuba, and Vietnam shared in common in the 1960s was that they all stood face to face with US power in its most intrusive, aggressive, and destructive expression. North Vietnam was being carpet bombed in what would amount to twenty-years of carnage in which over a million people were killed and the country devastated. Cuba, having successfully repelled the attempted invasion at Bay of Pigs, now faced an economic blockade and a sustained campaign of sabotage and terror carried out by the CIA and their surrogate terrorist organizations in Miami. North Korea, having survived the cataclysm of the Korean War, in which an estimated twenty percent of its civilian population was killed and the country laid to rubble, now faced 50,000 US troops and tactical nuclear weapons stationed in the southern half of the peninsula. As these young socialist republics under siege looked around in search of potential new allies, or

⁶⁸⁸ Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1979).

breakthroughs in the international situation that might provide some relief, what prospects existed were quickly strangled by the long-reaching arms of the US military and the CIA. The savage murder of Patrice Lumumba in 1961, the US-backed coups in Iran, Guatemala, Brazil, Bolivia, and Ghana, the massacres in Indonesia, the CIA destabilization campaign in British Guiana, and the US occupation of the Dominican Republic in 1965 - all these events furnished proof that the US had become the primary obstacle to the aspirations of the Third World to escape backwardness and dependency.

Moscow's response to the realities of the post-war world was to pursue détente with the United States, to strive for the kind of peaceful coexistence that would allow the rebuilding of the Soviet economy and eliminate the threat of total annihilation posed by thermonuclear war. This was a rational response by Soviet leaders emerging from three-decades of Stalin's rule, who had lived through the horrors of the Second World War and witnessed the awesome destructive potential of the atomic bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. From the perspective of North Korea, Cuba, and Vietnam in the 1960s, however, in taking such a stance the Soviet leadership was shirking its responsibilities as leader of the international communist movement, betraying the principle of proletarian internationalism, and abandoning the oppressed peoples of the Global South for its own geo-political self-interest. Beijing professed this same critical assessment of Moscow, and this explains the North Korean, Cuban, and Vietnamese sympathy for the Chinese position in the Sino-Soviet split before late 1964. However, the perception that the Chinese leadership did not match its anti-imperialist rhetoric with action, prioritized its feud with Moscow at the expense of Vietnam, and had become dogmatic and imperious towards its allies, undermined that support. In this context, radical Third Worldism sought to build a new international of sorts whose members were united more by action than ideology, who held that

neither peace, nor genuine independence, nor meaningful development were possible without first defeating US imperialism. In the words of the Tricontinental Conference:

Recent history corroborates with utmost clarity, that Yankee imperialism is the greatest enemy of world peace; the fortress of colonialism and neo-colonialism, the bastion of the forces of reaction, the public enemy number one of all the peoples of the world. Therefore, to fight for national liberation, self-determination, independence and peace, fundamentally, means to fight without quarter against North American imperialism, which is responsible for the worsening of the international situation because of its policy of intervention, aggression and subversion all over the world.⁶⁸⁹

And as a *Kulloja* editorial put in July 1969:

The struggle against American imperialism is the most urgent problem all the world's peoples now face. For American imperialism is the most ferocious enemy of the world's peoples, and apart from the struggle against American imperialism any revolutionary struggle waged by the world's peoples or any progressive movement cannot succeed. Only through the resolute struggle against American imperialism can we defend world peace and achieve national liberation, independence and the victory of democracy and socialism."⁶⁹⁰

A second Tricontinental Conference, originally planned to take place in Cairo in 1968, never materialized. By the early 1970s, OSPAAAL was fading into obscurity. While a range of Third Worldist political tendencies continued to exist throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the most important being the Non-Aligned Movement, the specific, radical project launched in 1966, with Cuba, North Korea, and North Vietnam at its head, did not prosper beyond the 1960s. Chapter Six examined some of the factors that contributed to its demise. In the face of economic crisis and the defeat of the Latin American guerilla movements, the Cuban leadership shifted to a much more moderate and pro-Soviet path in the early 1970s. The Vietnam War wound down, as the North Vietnamese leadership entered peace talks with the United States and also moved towards closer alignment with Moscow. However, there were deeper dynamics at work which speak to

⁶⁸⁹ "Antecedents and Objectives of the Movement of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America," in *First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America* (Havana: General Secretariat of the OSPAAAL, 1966), 26.

⁶⁹⁰ Ko Yong-il, "The anti-American struggle is the first priority," *Kulloja* No. 7 (1 July 1969): 58-64, translated and reprinted in *Translations on North Korea*, No. 127 (9 Sept 1969): 86-99, here 87.

the contradictions that lay at the heart of the radical Third Worldist project, and to the broader objective barriers that stood in its way. The massive display of unity at the Tricontinental Conference masked fundamental differences within the diverse spectrum of political actors represented. The unanimous exhortations of anti-imperialist struggle reflected the fact that Cuba was at the height of its international influence, as well as the incredible power of the Vietnam War on the world at the time. However, not all parties present were ever truly committed to the armed struggle and militant internationalism called for by the Tricontinental. Most of the various Third World nationalist governments represented were nowhere near as radical in their outlook as the Cuban or North Korean leaderships. It is insightful to reflect on what governments, besides Cuba, North Korea, and North Vietnam, were represented on OSPAAAL's twelve member executive when it was created in 1966. These were Egypt (then the United Arab Republic), Syria, and Guinea. Nasser's commitment to militant Third World solidarity, like his alliance with the Soviet Union, was a tactical move. Nasserism, fundamentally anti-communist and committed to state-driven capitalist development, paved the way for the *infitah* of Muhammad Anwar el-Sadat, who took power in October 1970 following Nasser's death.⁶⁹¹ As Samir Amin has argued, this development was not so much a counter-revolution as the predictable evolution of the Nasserist system given its fundamental characteristics.⁶⁹² The left-wing of the Syrian Ba'ath Party, led by Salah Jadid, seized power a month after the Tricontinental, and was an important ally of the Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation and the Hashemite monarchy of Jordan. However, Jadid's grip on power was tenuous from the beginning.⁶⁹³ It was further weakened by the Arab-Israel War of 1967 and the disastrous

⁶⁹¹ Samir Amin, *Re-Reading the Postwar Period: An Intellectual Itinerary* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1994), 41-42, 110-111.

⁶⁹² Ibid, 41.

⁶⁹³ David Roberts, *The Ba'ath and the Creation of Modern Syria* (London and New York: Routledge, 1987), 89-93.

intervention in Lebanon during the events of Black September in 1970. These failures paved the way for rightist forces led by Hafez al-Assad to seize power in a coup a month later. Although Guinean President Ahmed Sékou Touré's support for anti-colonial guerillas in Africa was real, his foreign policy was firmly neutralist, rather than anti-imperialist. Ironically, in the same period that the Guinean government gained a seat on the executive of OSPAAAL, it was courting investment and aid from the United States.⁶⁹⁴

The difficulty which North Korea and Cuba had in finding governments in the Global South that shared their commitment to a global armed offensive against US imperialism speaks to the dominant political dynamics taking shape in the post-colonial world during the 1960s. North Korea, Cuba, and North Vietnam were republics born of popular revolutionary struggle, and governed by firmly-entrenched communist parties. The spectrum of "radical" Third World governments that arose in the 1960s, by contrast, followed a much different historical trend. The legacy of colonialism was a skewed development process in which, in the words of Walter Rodney, "Capitalism failed to develop the productive resources of the colonies, including the working class itself, and any induced growth was lop-sided and dependent upon the interests of the dominant colonising economy."⁶⁹⁵ In this context, independence delivered state power into the hands of a petit-bourgeois stratum largely concentrated in the state sector: the civil service, the education system, parastatals, and the military. This stratum's statist orientation and the weakness of the domestic bourgeoisie ensured that development was often envisioned in "socialist" terms. However, in this context socialism typically meant state-capitalism and limited economic nationalism. It was conceived as a technocratic and top-down process of development

⁶⁹⁴ Ladipo Adamolekeun, *Ahmed Sékou Touré's Guinea: An Experiment in Nation Building* (London: Methuen & Co, 1976), 57-60, 119-121.

⁶⁹⁵ Walter Rodney, "Contemporary Political Trends in the English-speaking Caribbean," *The Black Scholar* 7 no. 1 (1975): 21.

rather than a popular and radical social transformation. While such ruling elites may have been sincere opponents of colonialism and apartheid, they had little interest in the global “fight to the death” against US imperialism that the Tricontinental promised.

The unsustainability of the Tricontinental project was also symptomatic of the obstacles to socialism more broadly in the twentieth century, particularly in the underdeveloped societies of the Global South. As noted, the United States emerged from the Second World War to assume a position of unmatched economic and military power, coupled with an agenda to isolate and crush the nascent forces of socialism whenever and wherever they arose. As a result, the young socialist republics of the post-war era were burdened with the task of building socialism under near impossible conditions. Nowhere was this demonstrated more vividly than the tragedy of Vietnam, and its thirty-year struggle against intense foreign aggression. By the time of its victory in 1975, Vietnam was utterly devastated. In conditions of such scarcity, displacement, and mass trauma, there was little prospect for the emancipatory goals of socialism to take shape. “Vietnam was simply left with little more than hunger and horror to redistribute, and with no power, not even remotely, to seek as much as an iota of reparations,”⁶⁹⁶ Aijaz Ahmed writes. Angola faced a similar fate, when, having finally liberated itself from Portuguese rule, it was plunged into nearly thirty years of civil war fueled by US and South African intervention. Like Vietnam, Cuba was compelled to tightly align with the Soviet Union and its foreign policy as a matter of economic survival. The Latin American guerilla movements were almost all wiped out in ruthless counter-insurgency operations financed with US dollars. Of course, the failures of socialist states in the twentieth century cannot be entirely placed on external factors. Nor can the ideological and tactical blunders made by many Latin American guerilla movements be ignored. However, the

⁶⁹⁶ Ahmed, 28-29.

decline of the radical Third Worldism of the Tricontinental in large part resulted from the colossal military, political, and economic resources deployed against the states and political movements which were its lifeblood.

While Kim Il Sung's "anti-imperialist, anti-US united front," and Che's call for "two, three, many Vietnams" faded away in the early 1970s, neither North Korea nor Cuba abandoned internationalism. As Chapter Six examined, the Global South remained central to the foreign policy of both governments, and both embraced the growing Non-Aligned Movement. Both Pyongyang and Havana continued to support the underground resistance to the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile. Both would later lend their support to new armed struggles that erupted in Central America and the Caribbean in the late 1970s and early 1980s: the Nicaraguan and Grenadian revolutions, and the guerilla insurgencies in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Cuba was a key ally in the ongoing struggle against colonialism, apartheid, and counter-revolution in Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, most notably in Angola, where some 500,000 Cuban soldiers, doctors, teachers, engineers, and technicians served between 1975 and 1991. To the present day, the most impactful and admired expression of Cuba's commitment to Third World solidarity has been its medical internationalism. Some 30,000 Cuban healthcare practitioners work abroad, while Cuba's famed Escuela Latinoamericana de Medicina (Latin American School of Medicine, ELAM) provides full scholarships to about 1500 foreign medical students a year.⁶⁹⁷

While the role played by Cuban doctors and aid workers in various poor and disaster-stricken countries has received widespread praise, North Korea's own legacy of Third World

⁶⁹⁷ While most of these students come from poor countries, ELAM is increasingly a destination for American students who cannot hope to afford medical school in the US.

solidarity is much less recognized. In fairness, the North Korean government has never undertaken anything on par with Cuba's medical brigades. However, in the 1970s and 1980s Pyongyang provided development aid and disaster relief to a number of countries throughout the Global South. This included building supplies and construction materials, agricultural and fishing vehicles and machinery, and teams of agronomists, engineers, and doctors. Although the severe economic difficulties North Korea has been under since the 1990s have greatly hindered its ability to provide such assistance, Pyongyang continues to profess its internationalist convictions. Visitors to North Korea today, at least those from the Global South, can hear from their hosts a vocabulary that sounds quite vintage in the post-Cold War present: "Third World solidarity," "non-alignment," "south-south cooperation," "the New International Economic Order."

In recent years, as the Cold War era recedes further into the past, there has been a growing acknowledgement of the role the Soviet Union played in the end of colonialism and apartheid in Africa, and as a restraining force on otherwise unbridled US aggression.⁶⁹⁸ Other intellectuals and academics have reflected on how seriously socialist states took the project of creating a colour-blind society free of racism and chauvinism, despite the contradictions such initiatives often involved, and their varying degrees of success.⁶⁹⁹ Of course, some people will continue to see in such history nothing more than the subterfuge and realpolitik of an "evil empire," as the enemies of the Soviet Union did during the Cold War. The more insightful intellectual efforts, however, have come from those who confront and navigate the contradictions

⁶⁹⁸ See the recent discussion between Tariq Ali and Aijaz Ahmed on the TeleSUR English program "The World Today," season 3, episode 39, July 2017, available at: <https://tariqaliv.com/portfolio/s3e39-the-world-we-live-in-part-1>.

⁶⁹⁹ For example, Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Culture of Lies: Antipolitical Essays* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1998).

of Soviet history, who have attempted to understand how the good and the bad, the heroic and the deplorable, the noble and the depraved, were simultaneously given impetus within the same system.⁷⁰⁰

As the history of North Korea's ideology and practice of Third World solidarity continues to be brought to light by historians, a similar approach will be required in North Korean studies. The number of North Korean historical figures who appear in this dissertation only to be purged before the end of the 1960s - Ri Sang-jo, Han Sŏrya, Pak Chŏng'ae, Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi, An Mak, Ri Hyosŏn, Pak Kŭmch'ŏl - speaks to a frightening dimension of the Kim Il Sung era. The deeply hierarchal and authoritarian character North Korean socialism developed in the 1950s and 1960s was perhaps inevitable given historical conditions. These include the Japanese colonial legacy, the externally-imposed division of the peninsula, the very process in which the North Korean state and ruling party was pieced together under Soviet occupation, the total destruction and mass trauma of the Korean War, and the continuing existential threat posed by the United States. However, those aspects of the Kim Il Sung era that appear so divergent from the democratic and humanist tradition of socialism must be reconciled with another North Korea: the one which stood by Chilean freedom fighters during the darkest days of the Pinochet dictatorship and which gifted entire fleets of tractors and deployed medical missions to poor and embattled countries throughout the Global South. Scholarly efforts to reconcile these contradictions will inevitably require a willingness to delineate the motivations and perspectives of elite Pyongyang decision-makers from those of the much more "ordinary" people – cadres, minor officials and bureaucrats, diplomats, doctors, technicians, skilled-workers, artists and

⁷⁰⁰ It should be pointed out that there is a long and rich tradition of literature exploring the clash between the emancipatory ideals of socialism and some of the unpleasant realities of life in the Soviet Union in a balanced manner, produced both outside and inside the USSR, from John Scott's *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel* (1942) to the novels of Chinghiz Aitmatov.

performers, athletes and coaches, intellectuals, military officers, and intelligence agents – who constituted the bulk of human labour involved in North Korea’s internationalist projects. As Andre Schmid points out, North Korean studies has been slow in escaping a narrow focus on the agency of the Kim dynasty, anchored in a conception of a monolithic and all-powerful state.⁷⁰¹ Mexican scholar Fernando Pineda Ochoa is one of the hundreds of young Latin American militants who travelled to North Korea in the late 1960s to undergo the training they hoped would transform them into capable revolutionary fighters. Over thirty years later he reflected on his old North Korean instructors: “I am convinced that one of their main contributions consisted of making us comprehend the necessity to be better day by day, thus understanding the qualities of simplicity, honesty, *compañerismo*, respect for the workers, the marginalized and oppressed, and at the same time to understand the necessity to hate all forms of injustice.”⁷⁰² One does not have to take a romantic view of the North Korean leadership of the 1960s to accept that many North Korean citizens believed in such ideals quite sincerely. Acknowledging and navigating this complexity and contradiction of the Kim Il Sung era can only be an asset to the future of North Korean studies.

⁷⁰¹ Andre Schmid, “Historicizing North Korea: State Socialism, Population Mobility, and Cold War Historiography,” *The American Historical Review* 123, issue 2 (April 2018): 439–462.

⁷⁰² Fernando Pineda Ochoa, *En las profundidades del MAR: El oro no llegó de Moscú* (Ciudad de México: Plaza y Valdez, 2003), 49.

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