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*KIM IL-SONG
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North Korean Strategy and Tactics: An Appraisal

A Research Paper

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North Korean Strategy and Tactics: An Appraisal

Central Intelligence Agency
National Foreign Assessment Center

April 1978

Key Judgments

A study of North Korean strategy and tactics suggests that Kim Il-song's policy toward the South has been most heavily influenced by external factors—changes in US, Soviet, and Chinese policy toward Korea and political developments in South Korea. Internal factors, however, have acted as a restraint on North Korea's reunification policy at times when Kim has been preoccupied with economic problems or political friction within the North Korean leadership, as in the mid and late 1950s.

Eight factors¹ can be identified as the major influences that have shaped Kim's policies since 1950:

- The US commitment to defend South Korea against an attack from the North.
- Soviet and Chinese support for reunification on Kim's terms.
- The attitude of the South Korean Government toward negotiating reunification with the North.
- Political stability in South Korea.
- North Korean military capabilities.
- Pyongyang's economic situation.
- Kim's power position in the North Korean leadership.
- North Korea's international position relative to South Korea.

In Kim's view, optimum conditions for an attack on the South would be: no US military commitment to defend South Korea; strong Soviet and Chinese support for North Korean military action; political instability in the South, with strong indigenous support for military intervention from the North; a clear-cut military advantage on the part of the North over the South; satisfactory economic progress in the North; and no challenge to Kim's authority.

¹ For a graphic presentation of Kim's assessment of these factors over the past 30 years, see the Appendix.

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Given Kim's past behavior, the next five years are likely to be a period in which internal economic problems and military development will take precedence over aggressive pursuit of reunification. This does not mean that reunification will be abandoned as a long-term goal—at least while Kim lives—but that it will be relegated to a secondary position, as it was from 1961 to 1965. Kim's tactics will be suited to his immediate objective of improving relations with the US and solving North Korea's foreign trade problems. He will keep his options open, however, by maintaining a subversive capability—one of the best in the world—and building up his conventional military forces as well.

The one development—however unlikely—that could alter this general outlook would be the sudden emergence of widespread political instability in the South. In that case, or in the even more unlikely event of an armed uprising against Pak, Kim might switch to the "revolutionary" tactics of the late 1960s, without regard for the effect this would have on North Korea's relations with the US, Japan, and the rest of the non-Communist world. He is not likely to risk the diplomatic gains of the past five years, or the possibility of improved relations with the US and Japan, unless the odds of overthrowing Pak appear high.

In the meantime, he will continue to exert pressure for Pak's removal by an active diplomatic campaign against Seoul and incessant calls for Pak's overthrow. He is not likely to consider any softening of his position toward Pak, such as the resumption of North-South talks, while strains are apparent in the US-ROK relationship over US troop withdrawals, the Tongsun Park case, US human rights policy, and US-ROK trade differences.

Although North Korea has registered its dissatisfaction with the gradual and partial nature of scheduled US troop withdrawals, Pyongyang is likely to continue to court the Carter administration in hopes of opening a dialogue with Washington. Kim seems sincerely interested in negotiating a peace treaty, mutual force reductions on the Korean Peninsula, the establishment of diplomatic relations with the US and Japan, and trade and aid agreements. Beyond that, he would relish the effect that US - North Korean bilateral talks would have on South Korea and on US-ROK relations. He is likely to persist in his bid for talks with the US even in the face of official US denials of any interest in bilateral contacts.

Whether this period of relative calm, like the 1961-65 interlude, will be the quiet before the storm, as in 1967-68, depends largely on US actions and South Korea's response. Kim is already planning for the day when US troops leave Korea. It is almost inevitable, at that point, that South Korea will face a stepped-up subversive threat from the North—assuming that Kim lives that long. If Kim dies within the next five years or so, the struggle for power that would probably ensue would tend to be a restraining factor that over the near term would weigh against a militarily aggressive policy.

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Kim Il-song
President of North Korea

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North Korean Strategy and Tactics: An Appraisal

The Korean War: A Disastrous Miscalculation

Kim's decision to attack South Korea in June 1950 seems to have been based on his assessment of three external factors: the US response to an invasion by the North, the political situation in South Korea, and Soviet and Chinese support for North Korea's actions.

Given the international situation in 1950, Kim's calculation that the US would not intervene, though quickly proven wrong, was not irrational or even unreasonable.

- The US had withdrawn its troops from Korea in June 1949.
- Washington had no stated commitment to defend South Korea; indeed, a number of indicators, including comments by Secretary of State Acheson, suggested that Korea was outside its defense perimeter.
- US troops had left Korea just as the Chinese Communists were consolidating their control over the mainland. The US had not become militarily involved in the Chinese civil war, and it seemed even more unlikely that it would intervene in Korea.

The Soviets and Chinese had concurred in Kim's assessment. Despite some initial doubts about US intervention, Stalin reportedly agreed that if the war were fought swiftly—and Kim was sure it could be—US intervention would be avoided. Mao, also, felt that the US would not intervene.

In a second miscalculation, Kim overestimated the extent of domestic opposition to the South Korean Government and the potential for revolution in the South. Here, too, his calculations were not unreasonable.

- The Rhee government was very weak. In fact, Rhee's party had retained only 22 of

210 seats in the May 1950 elections for the National Assembly.

- The Communist movement was the most powerful single political force in the country.
- North Korea's calls for reunification had struck a responsive chord in the South.

Kim must have expected, therefore, that the Seoul government would collapse in the face of a direct military invasion and that the Communist party could then organize popular support for a new government. Instead, the country rallied in support of Rhee's determined stand against the Communist aggressors, and the North Korean invasion produced no internal uprising.

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Bitter Lessons and Limited Opportunities

Ever since the war, Kim has repeatedly stressed the serious consequences of another military confrontation with the US—a theme that North Korean propaganda reinforces by recalling the staggering devastation caused by the war. In addition to the destruction of North Korean facilities—more than 8,700 industrial plants were destroyed according to North Korean estimates—the North lost 1.3 million people out of a prewar population of some 12 million.

From Kim's perspective, the war had the disastrous result of formalizing the US commitment to defend South Korea by the signing of the US-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty of 1954 and the stationing of US ground forces in South Korea. Moreover, the Soviets and the Chinese had become thoroughly disenchanted with Kim's war, while the Communist party in the South had been "totally destroyed." The few scattered agents left in the South had little chance of resurrecting a Communist movement in the climate of anti-Communism that the war had produced.

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On the home front, Kim faced pressing problems of economic reconstruction and political survival. By 1956, prewar production levels had been restored in all major sectors of the economy, and by the late 1950s a groundwork had been laid for future industrial development. North Korea's economic gains during these years were impressive by any standard but particularly impressive in comparison with South Korea, where economic stagnation, trade imbalances, and spiraling inflation were major problems.

Kim was also working hard to consolidate his political power during these years. After a methodical purge of the South Korean faction of the Communist party in 1953-55, the pro-Soviet faction in 1956, and finally the pro-Chinese faction in 1956-58, Kim succeeded in establishing the predominance of his "Kapsan" faction, composed mainly of fellow veterans of his guerrilla days in Manchuria. The creation of a new Political Committee of the Korean Workers Party in 1961—nine of whose 11 members owed their positions solely to Kim—legitimized one-man rule in North Korea.

Despite the war and his problems at home, Kim's commitment to eventual reunification was undiminished. In August 1953, he enunciated a policy of "peaceful reunification" as a way of sustaining his cause during the early postwar years. The emphasis on peaceful tactics made sense during this period since it seemingly called upon the North to do little more than seek negotiations.

Even before the war, Kim had tried to negotiate reunification with the South; in April 1948, he had sponsored a conference of political leaders from North and South Korea to discuss steps toward reunification. Kim renewed the effort after the war, and at the Geneva Conference in April 1954 he offered the first of over 100 proposals that North Korea has since made on reunification. Despite some differences in detail, these proposals have all called for a peace treaty, the withdrawal of foreign troops from Korea, mutual force reductions, and negotiated arrangements for either a federal government or some form of confederation of the two Koreas.

Kim seems to have been serious about negotiating reunification, on his terms, of course. All his proposals were, however, rebuffed by the Rhee government, which passed them off as mere propaganda ploys.

The Emergence of a Revolutionary Strategy

In committing himself to a policy of "peaceful reunification"—meaning no war between North and South Korea—Kim had clearly not ruled out the use of limited force. He describes his policy as both "peaceful" and "revolutionary," acknowledging an element of force basic to Communist theory. Thus, the policy of "peaceful reunification" allows for a variety of tactics, which Kim has used in accordance with changes in Korea and abroad.

In the early 1960s, domestic trends in North and South Korea, rather than external factors, seem to have set Kim's thinking about reunification on a different tactical course. At the beginning of the decade, the North successfully completed its first Five Year Plan (1956-61) under Kim's firmly entrenched leadership. Meanwhile, South Korea was unraveling politically, a trend that seemed likely to aggravate South Korea's already critical economic situation. In little more than a year, the Rhee government had fallen, an ineffective parliamentary government had been overthrown, and a military junta installed under a little known major general, Pak Chong-hui.

Kim may well have regretted the fact that North Korea was so ill prepared to take advantage of the political turmoil in South Korea in 1960-61. Several years later, he was reported to have said that "had there had been 50 hard-core Marxist-Leninists to properly plan and direct the riots, revolution in South Korea could have been accomplished in either April 1960 or May 1961."

At the time of Pak's takeover, or shortly thereafter, Kim seems to have made up his mind that Pyongyang would never again be so unprepared to support a revolutionary situation in the South, whenever that might occur. After the events of 1960-61, he began the long-term process of building a subversive political organization in the South that could be activated whenever future

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political events warranted. At the same time, the North also began training special forces within the North Korean military that could be infiltrated into the South to engage in acts of terror and sabotage, including guerrilla operations.

By early 1967, Pyongyang's subversive efforts began to feature a new element of terror and sabotage. Although Kim had earlier envisaged the change to guerrilla tactics as taking place in late 1968 or early 1969, he advanced his timetable. By late 1966, some 20,000 special forces trained in infiltration, sabotage, assassination, and guerrilla tactics were available for deployment to South Korea. High-ranking military leaders, who were purged after the unsuccessful attempt to assassinate President Pak and to land armed guerrillas on the east coast of South Korea, reportedly convinced Kim that chances for sparking a revolution in South Korea were good. Between 1967 and 1969, hundreds of ROK troops were killed and many more wounded in almost daily small-scale skirmishes along the DMZ and in clashes with North Korean commando teams well inside South Korea.

The disastrous consequences for North Korea of the Blue House raid (January 1968) and the landing at Ulchin (November 1968) are well known: the loss of all but one of the North Korean agents involved, the blow to North Korea's international prestige, and the strengthening of the "antirevolutionary" rather than the "revolutionary" forces in South Korea. Instead of exacerbating tensions in South Korea, North Korea's tactics united the country even more firmly around the Pak government.

North Korea's seizure of the USS Pueblo in 1968 and the downing of a US EC-121 a year later—incidents that were tangential to Pyongyang's confrontation with Seoul—further tarnished North Korea's image in the US and led to negative reactions in other countries as well. Moreover, Soviet cooperation with the US in searching for survivors of the EC-121 in the Sea of Japan made Kim painfully aware of the changes emerging in great-power relations. By late 1969, the failure of the North's confrontation policy, combined with the changes on the inter-

national scene, led to another major policy reassessment in Pyongyang.

New Directions in the 1970s

The speed and extent of international changes from 1969 to 1971 were major factors underlying subsequent distinctive shifts in North Korean policy. In particular, US retrenchment in Asia and improving US relations with both the USSR and PRC provided a different great-power backdrop against which the North would have to pursue reunification in the future.

During the mid- and late 1960s, Moscow had supplied Pyongyang with essential—though limited—military and economic assistance, while China, engulfed in the Cultural Revolution, had contributed relatively little. By mid-1969, however, Peking began to emerge from its self-imposed isolation. Premier Chou En-lai's trip to Pyongyang in April 1970—one of his rare foreign trips during this period—signified a major Chinese effort to restore amicable relations with Kim. Frustrated over perceived Soviet parsimony and annoyed at the Soviet response to the EC-121 incident, Kim quickly chose to emphasize the Chinese connection. Since then, Pyongyang has supported Peking's position on most international issues; in return, Kim has received Chinese political support for "peaceful reunification," as well as military and economic assistance. At the same time, the North's relations with Moscow have cooled and Soviet military assistance has declined to a minimum.

The poor prospects for major Soviet assistance inclined Kim toward two basic decisions: to attempt to increase Pyongyang's contacts with the non-Communist world both diplomatically and economically and to make a major investment in domestic military production.

The Domestic Scene: Economic Failure and Military Success

The North's most conspicuous failure in the 1970s has been in the economic sphere. Modernization of the economy as envisaged in the new Six Year Plan (1971-76) was contingent upon modern industrial equipment and technology be-

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ing imported from the West and, most important, on grants of credit. In 1971-72, Pyongyang placed orders for large amounts of machinery and equipment (including some 10 whole plants) valued at \$1 billion, to be delivered in 1973-74. Instead of seeking long-term financing that would have eased the financial strain, Pyongyang opted for medium-term credits repayable in five years.

The North Koreans' inexperience in international trade and financial practices was not the only reason for their balance-of-payments problems in 1975-77. The country's limited port facilities, inadequate transportation networks, and poorly trained labor force all contributed to excessive delays in plant construction.²

Adding to Pyongyang's economic troubles were a series of disastrous harvests caused by bad weather and the recession-induced drop in world demand for nonferrous metals, North Korea's main export. In 1973-74, the North was forced to import unprecedented amounts of grain from Canada and France. Again, the North Koreans compounded their troubles by negotiating these imports on a one-year credit. By mid-1974 they had begun to default on the grain payments—the first Communist country ever to do so.

The one clear-cut advantage that the North has achieved over the South since 1970 is in the military balance. The North Koreans have developed large, well-balanced ground and naval forces with much better offensive capabilities than those of the South. Since 1970, North Korea's inventory of tanks has tripled, giving Pyongyang more than a 2 to 1 advantage over South Korea; the number of combat aircraft has increased by 25 percent, a 2 to 1 advantage for the North; and the production of naval craft (mainly submarines and missile attack and torpedo boats) has roughly doubled the size of the Navy, providing North Korea with significant new offensive capabilities on the sea. Although the SAM program has slackened, the North's extensive air defense system now covers the entire country. Pyongyang also commands one of

² In fact, none of the plants contracted for in 1972-73 are yet in production.

the largest and best trained guerrilla forces in the world today—a commando force of 40,000 men ready to infiltrate the South on quick notice. It is estimated that North Korea's advantage over Seoul will continue to grow for another year or two before the South Koreans' Force Improvement Plan (1976-81) begins to show results.

Although his current economic difficulties argue strongly in favor of an increased allocation of resources to the civilian sector, Kim is faced with an increase in South Korean military expenditures that will press him to move in the opposite direction, seriously complicating his already difficult choices for the future.

The International Sphere: Mixed Results

From 1972 to 1976, North Korea made impressive gains on the international front, as well as in domestic military production. On the advice of President Tito and perhaps others, Kim had made a decision some time in 1971 or 1972 to seek the support of the nonaligned nations on the issue of Korean reunification. With the backing of Yugoslavia and Algeria, Kim succeeded in gaining the support of the nonaligned movement, something the South Koreans had tried but failed to accomplish. North Korea's diplomatic gains were also reflected in the growth in the number of countries recognizing Pyongyang. By the end of 1977, a total of some 90 countries had diplomatic relations with Pyongyang, compared to only 35 in 1970.

North Korea had invested substantial time, money, and effort in its diplomatic campaign. Kim, who had traveled only to the USSR, China, Indonesia, and Burma prior to 1972, visited China, Mauritania, Algeria, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Romania in one year—1975. During 1972-76, Foreign Minister Ho Tam visited 28 different countries, some of them more than once; Pak Song-chol had traveled to only nine countries during his 11-year stint as foreign minister (1959-70). Fifteen heads of government made state visits to North Korea during 1972-76, and another seven in 1977. Over the previous 23 years, only 11 heads of state had visited Pyongyang.

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By 1974, North Korea was ready to contest its case at the UN; a resolution calling for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from South Korea came within one vote of passing the General Assembly. A year later, the resolution passed over the strong opposition of the US and South Korea.

The North's diplomatic campaign had been given an early boost by the development of a dialogue with the South. In August 1971, shortly after the announcement of President Nixon's forthcoming trip to Peking, Kim repeated his call for talks "with all interested parties in South Korea." This time, Seoul responded positively.

The talks, however, only served to highlight the fundamental differences separating the North and the South. They did not induce US troop reductions as North Korea had hoped, nor open up the South for political subversion from the North. By late-1972, they had become stalemated and were broken off by Pyongyang a year later.

At this point, North Korea shifted its emphasis to the US. Having concluded that the ROK was not interested in negotiating reunification, a peace treaty, or mutual force reductions, Kim incorporated the idea of a peace treaty into his bid for improved relations with Washington. Foreign Minister Ho Tam first proposed bilateral talks with the US with the stated purpose of signing a peace treaty in March 1974; since then North Korea has repeatedly proposed US - North Korean bilateral contacts.

Kim's handling of the Western Island crisis of October 1973 and the Panmunjom crisis of August 1976 also suggests that he has been anxious to avoid a military confrontation with the US. Neither incident seems to have been planned by Pyongyang as a military provocation against the US. In the first instance, Kim's primary concern was apparently to establish North Korean sovereignty over a 12-mile territorial sea at a time when that issue was receiving major attention from China, Japan, and South Korea in the controversy over the continental shelf. When the US took a firm stand in support of Seoul, Kim quickly backed down rather than risk a confrontation at sea.

Kim seems immediately to have recognized the disastrous consequences of the killing of two American officers at Panmunjom in August 1976 for North Korean foreign policy. As he suspected, the negative worldwide reaction to the slayings all but destroyed the chances of a favorable vote at the UN on North Korea's resolution calling for the withdrawal of US troops. The momentum of North Korea's diplomatic offensive had been lost in the events of those few hours at Panmunjom.

The US Troop Withdrawal

Kim may have been worried that the Panmunjom incident would delay consideration of further US troop withdrawals; however, the election three months later of President Carter, who had pledged during the campaign to withdraw US troops from Korea, probably eased his concern.

There is no question that Kim views the US troops in Korea as an important though not crucial element in the US deterrent, not only because of the added strength they provide in terms of the combined US-ROK military force level—particularly in terms of command and control capabilities and intelligence and communications functions—but also because of the "tripwire" effect of their automatically involving the US in a ground war in Korea.

Kim seems to believe that the stabilizing effect of the US troop presence on the internal political situation within South Korea is even more important. When Kim addresses the US military deterrent, he almost always talks about US air and nuclear power. When he has talked about US ground troops in Korea, he has repeatedly described them as "the single greatest obstacle to peaceful reunification."

Kim believes that, at a minimum, the large US presence in the South lends legitimacy to the Pak regime and acts as a constraint on the coalescence of political opposition to Pak. Although US military forces have never been directly involved in civil disturbances in South Korea, even during the period of extreme stress and instability in South Korea in 1960-61, Kim is probably persuaded that the US would not stand by and watch the overthrow of Pak, certainly not by unknown elements of questionable political reliability.

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The North Korean Reaction

The promise of US troop withdrawals by the Carter administration elicited an immediate response from North Korea. After more than 25 years of attacking the US without letup, Pyongyang suddenly stopped all propaganda attacks on the US and the new Carter administration. Kim publicly expressed his hopes for a speedy and complete troop withdrawal, improved relations with the US, and a favorable response from President Carter on his longstanding proposals for bilateral talks and a peace treaty. After the announcement in July 1977 of the US decision on a partial and gradual troop withdrawal subject to review and a compensating military aid package to South Korea, however, Kim returned to the attack, characterizing planned US troop withdrawals as "token withdrawals" and nothing more than a "smokescreen" for a military build-up in South Korea.

Kim has been careful, however, to differentiate between US policy on troop withdrawals and his policy on other matters, such as bilateral talks with North Korea, a peace treaty, and US - North Korean diplomatic relations. He has also spoken hopefully of possible trade and aid arrangements with the US. Kim obviously does not want to prejudice the US decision on these matters with the kind of across-the-board attack on the US that was standard North Korean propaganda fare for almost 30 years.

Whether the US decision to withdraw troops will prove to be something of a turning point in Korean affairs, as were events in 1961 and 1971, will depend in large measure on developments in South Korea. Although Kim is clearly dissatisfied with the gradual pace of US troop withdrawals, as currently planned, he probably still has some hope that any withdrawal will prove unsettling to South Korea. The real test will be the political and psychological effects of a US withdrawal on the morale, determination, and stability of the Pak government. Kim is clearly hoping for a collapse of willpower, self-confidence, and determination on the part of the Pak government as strains in the US-ROK relationship develop over the troop withdrawals and other issues like the

Tongsun Park case, human rights, and trade. A crisis in confidence—similar to that in South Vietnam in 1975 after the US departure—would open up a new range of opportunities for the "revolutionary" forces of the South and new options for Kim.

Kim's Various Options

All-out War

Some have suggested that as he grows older, Kim may feel that time is running out and that he must act quickly to reunify Korea. Given the combination of North Korea's military superiority over South Korea and the country's grave economic problems at the moment, he might decide to risk all in a desperate gamble to reunify Korea by force.

The North Koreans have not been in as favorable a military position vis-a-vis the South since 1950. They are capable of launching an invasion of many times the strength of their attack at that time. Their tank inventory is almost 14 times larger, their army is now more than five times stronger, and their combat aircraft inventory is almost seven times greater than in 1950.

The US Military Deterrent

The argument that Kim might attack now presumes, however, that the North-South military balance is the key factor in Kim's military calculations—which it is not. Kim cannot afford to assume that the US would not become involved in a major war in Korea. He must include the US factor in any realistic equation of the military balance. In that total picture, the US deterrent is clearly the determining factor. So long as the US commitment to defend South Korea is credible in Kim's eyes, he is not likely to risk major military aggression.

Of the various elements in the US deterrent, the crucial one, in Kim's eyes, seems to be US air power. Having experienced the devastating results of US bombing, Kim has never again taken lightly the serious consequences of another military confrontation with the US. After 25 years, he still speaks in emotional tones of the damage

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wrought by US bombing during the Korean War. The fact that Kim has gone to unprecedented lengths to strengthen North Korea's air defenses, including the construction of numerous underground facilities, is further testimony to his fears.³

The threat of nuclear war also looms large in Kim's thinking. While he apparently is not certain that the US would use nuclear weapons, he cannot rule out the possibility. Kim certainly remembers the impact of the US threat to use nuclear weapons in the late days of the Korean War. North Korea's lack of nuclear weapons and the absence of any pledge from the USSR or China to defend North Korea with nuclear weapons must add to his concern.

Kim cites nuclear war and a permanently divided Korea as the two greatest dangers facing North Korea today. This suggests, probably better than anything else, the priority of the US nuclear threat in Kim's thinking.

Economic Constraints

The argument that its severe economic problems would induce North Korea to attack now is not supported by the evidence. Far from encouraging Kim to undertake risky adventures, current difficulties are likely to keep his attention at home. Kim seems to be making a determined effort to see his economic difficulties through. The North Koreans have cut imports significantly⁴ and have tried, with much less success, to expand exports. They have also tried in vain to obtain additional loans and to renegotiate existing loans.

Recent appointments in both the party and government suggest the priority of economics at this time. In late 1976 and early 1977, three economic experts were promoted to the political

committee of the KWP central committee. The reorganization of the government, announced at the Sixth Supreme People's Assembly in December 1977, also featured the promotion of economic specialists. Yi Chong-ok, a veteran economist who was personally associated with North Korea's quest for foreign machinery and equipment in the early 1970s, was made premier.

A Further Constraint: the USSR and China

Since the Korean War, Kim has faced a changing international situation; one constant, however, has been the desire of all four of the major powers in the area—the US, Japan, China, and the USSR—to avoid war. While the USSR and China publicly support Kim's cherished goal of reunification, neither places as high a priority on it as they do on the avoidance of war and, more recently, on the improvement of relations with the US and Japan.

Moscow has reportedly made its "opposition to the use of force to seek the reunification of Korea" quite clear to Kim. The Soviets have indicated that "this is one matter on which both the USSR and China agree—by coincidence, not by design." The Chinese have also made it clear that they favor only the peaceful reunification of Korea. Kim is thus under no illusions as to the lack of Soviet and Chinese support for a North Korean military attack on the US and South Korea.

The Final Deterrent: The Lack of a "Revolutionary" Situation in South Korea

In 1950, Kim was apparently convinced that the "first poke of a bayonet into South Korea would touch off an internal explosion." In 1978, he can have little hope of a revolutionary upheaval in the South in the short run, because there is no broad, popular movement in South Korea actively opposed to the Pak government. 25X1

Confrontation Tactics

Since the failure of North Korea's confrontational tactics in 1967-68, Kim has continued his efforts to subvert the Pak regime by overt propaganda and political subversion, but there has been

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no hint of a return to the aggressive tactics of the late 1960s when North Korea had no equity in good relations with the non-Communist world. Unless the odds of overthrowing Pak by such tactics were very good, Kim would be reluctant to jeopardize his diplomatic gains of the past five or six years—and the possibility of improved relations with the US and Japan—by a return to violent tactics.

Moreover, a return to armed tactics might well be counterproductive in the South, as it was in 1967-68, when Kim's guerrilla methods had a galvanizing effect in rallying support for Pak. This, of course, is the last thing Kim wants.

Kim is still keeping open the option of "revolutionary" tactics, however. Today, there are some 40,000 paramilitary troops ready to provide covert military support, at quick notice, should anti-Pak elements make a determined bid for power.

Political Subversion

Since the collapse of the North-South talks, civilian agents of North Korea's Liaison Bureau have continued the long process of building a subversive apparatus within South Korea in the face of mounting difficulties. The reorganization and improvement of South Korea's security forces, an effective registration system, and the strong anti-Communism of the South Korean people have made agent operations so risky, however, that seasoned agents, with a long record of successful missions, are now defecting to the South. During the past three years, there have been fewer than 10 encounters with civilian infiltrators in the rear areas of South Korea (excluding military infiltrations across the DMZ for intelligence purposes). Current reports indicate that the North is nevertheless making a long-term investment in agent training. Pyongyang now has some 1,200 agents trained and ready to infiltrate into South Korea, as soon as more favorable conditions permit, and the number of agents is likely to increase.

In a change from the 1960s, the South Korean military is now the major target of North Korea's subversive operations, suggesting that Kim be-

lieves that a military coup, like that in Indonesia in 1965 and the recent military takeovers in Portugal and Ethiopia, is the most plausible means of removing Pak from power. Agents have been told that "a coup could be accomplished with only a few intelligent battalion and company commanders. In Portugal, a battalion commander aided by six company-level commanders succeeded in a coup d'etat."

There is no way of knowing what assets the North Koreans have in the South Korean military, which is generally thought to be a pillar of support for the Pak government. The discovery in March 1974 of an 18-member spy ring directed by a North Korean agent in Japan, whose contacts included a South Korean major in the Army Chief of Staff's office and a civilian employee in the Army's central reporting office, was a shock to Pak and the military. It suggests vulnerabilities that the South Koreans may be reluctant to acknowledge.

Diplomatic Competition With Seoul

North Korea is likely to continue—if not step up—its efforts to weaken the Pak regime through propaganda and diplomatic means. In a 180-degree turn from the days of the North-South talks, when North Korean propaganda singled out the US as the main enemy and refrained from attacks on Pak, North Korea now openly courts the Carter administration and calls for the overthrow of Pak.

Kim is not likely to moderate his attacks on the ROK so long as Pak remains in power. He will continue to seek to drive a wedge between Washington and Seoul by criticizing Pak's internal security controls, his "suppression of the opposition," censorship of the press, and "human rights" policy. In contrast to North Korean propaganda of the 1960s, however, Pyongyang, with its present economic woes, will stay away from the economic themes that were formerly the prerogative of North Korea.

A Dialogue With the US

One of Kim's major objectives at this point is to open bilateral talks with the US. He is interested

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in negotiating a peace treaty, mutual force reductions on the Korean peninsula, US-DPRK diplomatic relations, and trade and aid. Beyond that, he would relish the effect such talks would have on South Korea and US-ROK relations. For this reason, the North Koreans are likely to tone down their strong anti-US propaganda of recent years and to persist in their bid for talks, even in the face of official US denials of any interest in bilateral contacts.

North Korean propaganda is likely to continue to complain that US troop withdrawal plans are less than adequate. However, Kim will probably decide not to confront the US at the UN or at other international meetings on the issue of troop withdrawals. On balance, the odds are probably against the introduction of another North Korean resolution on troop withdrawals at this year's meeting of the General Assembly.

Kim will be particularly careful to avoid any actions that might slow down the pace of US troop withdrawals. Most of all, he will try to avoid the sort of confrontation that the Pueblo and Panmunjom incidents represented. His willingness to return the surviving crew member of the US helicopter that inadvertently strayed into North Korea in July 1977 demonstrated his desire to avoid unnecessary provocation at this time.

Kim might conceivably see a tactical advantage in resuming a dialogue with the South if he thought this would entice the US into bilateral talks. Recently, however, he has stated explicitly what he has implied before—that he will negotiate with the South only when Pak leaves the scene. To reverse his stand at this point would

undermine all his efforts to bring pressure in the direction of Pak's overthrow.

Prospects

At this point Kim is watching and waiting for a response from the US. How long he is prepared to wait depends on a number of factors—the direction of US policy over the next two or three years, the progress of troop withdrawals, and political developments in South Korea.

Even if North Korea exercises restraint over the next few years, this does not mean that it has lessened its commitment to reunification in the long run. Kim's tactics will be suited to the immediate goal of improving relations with the US and solving North Korea's economic problems, but his sights will remain set on the longer term goal of reunification. To this end, he will keep his options open by maintaining a subversive capability and building up conventional military forces.

Kim is already planning for the day when US troops leave Korea. Whether this period of relative calm, like the 1961-65 interlude, will be the quiet before the storm, as in 1967-68, depends largely on US actions and South Korea's response. It is almost inevitable, at that point, that South Korea will face a stepped-up subversive threat from the North, assuming that Kim lives that long.

Kim's death would introduce a new element of uncertainty about longer term North Korean intentions. In the short run, however, an internal struggle for power would be likely, and this would tend to reinforce other factors that weigh against military aggression from the North.

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APPENDIX

FACTORS AFFECTING NORTH KOREAN POLICY

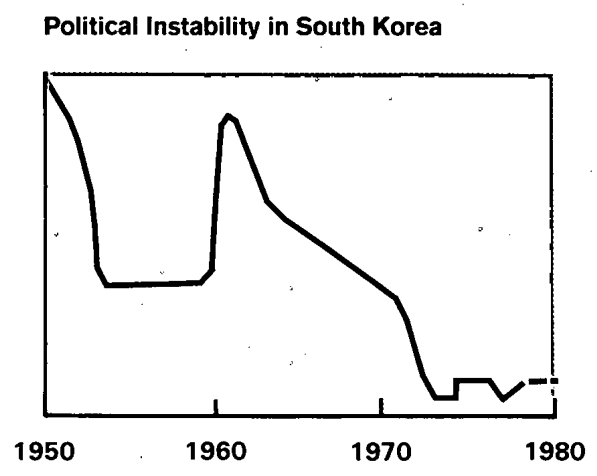
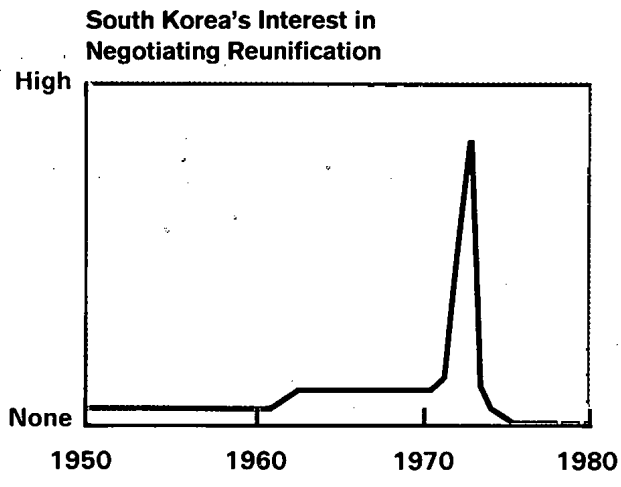
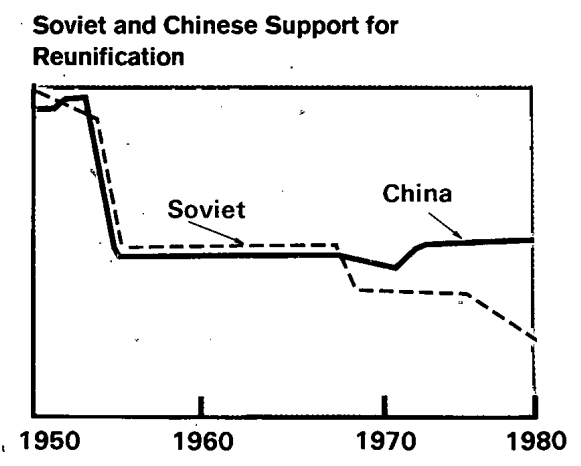
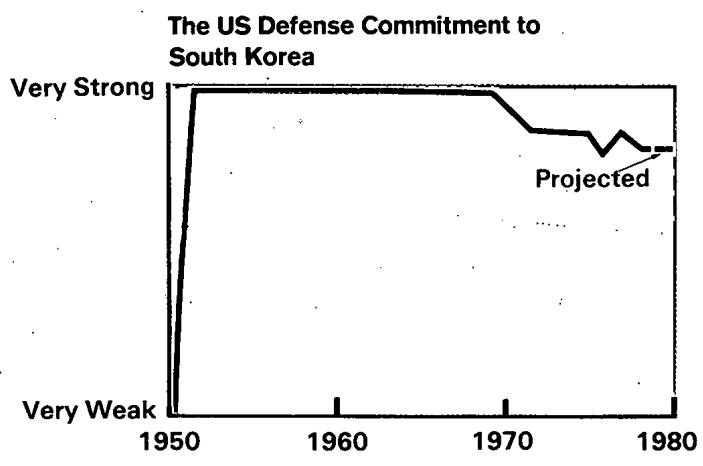
The graphs on pages 12 and 13 depict Kim Il-song's changing assessment of the eight factors that can be identified as major influences shaping North Korean policies since 1950. Kim's assessment of these factors, rather than the factors themselves, has been the key determinant of his policies. At times, he has assessed the situation incorrectly, as he did in 1950, when he seriously miscalculated the US commitment to defend South Korea, Soviet support for his actions, and the degree of political support for reunification in South Korea.

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Kim's Assessment of:



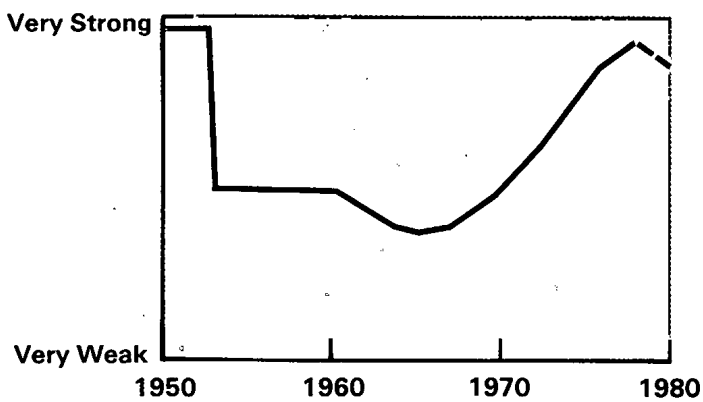
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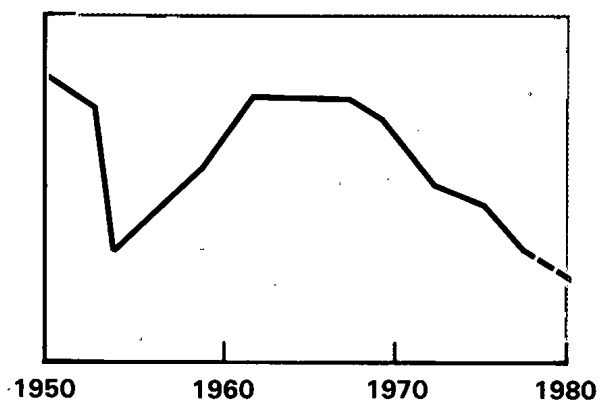
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Kim's Assessment of:

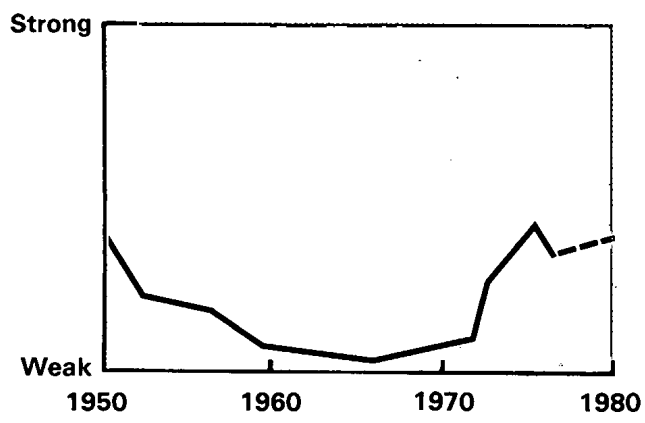
North Korean Military Capabilities vis-a-vis South Korea



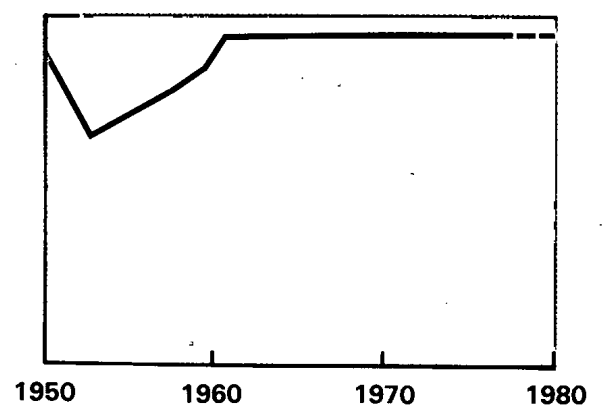
North Korea's Economic Position vis-a-vis South Korea



North Korea's International Position vis-a-vis South Korea



Kim's Power Position in the North Korean Leadership



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KIM IL-SONG'S CHANGING ASSESSMENT OF NORTH KOREA'S SITUATION

Figures 1 through 5 employ a multidimensional scaling technique to show Kim's changing assessment of North Korea's situation over the years.

At any given time, certain factors that argue in favor of an aggressive military policy have been offset by other factors of a restraining nature. For example, even though North Korea's military position vis-a-vis the South may have improved over a certain time period, overall conditions may not be as propitious for a North Korean attack.

It is possible to quantify the mix of factors at a particular time and compare it to the mix of factors that existed in 1950, when Kim went to war, or to the mix of factors that would be considered ideal from Kim's point of view for initiating hostilities.

Multidimensional Scaling

Multidimensional scaling is a technique that measures the change in a person's assessment of the same set of factors over time. In the table below, each of the factors that has shaped North Korean policy was considered independently, and interpretations of Kim's assessment of the factors

were coded for nine different time periods. The coding consisted of an interval-level zero to 10 scale. Zero indicates the weakest possible assessment and 10 the strongest. For example, consider the column "US Defense Commitment to South Korea." In 1950 Kim believed the US would not come to South Korea's aid. However, from 1953 to 1960 his assessment obviously changed; thus, the reversal in the code assigned to this factor.

If the relationship between the rows of data were obvious, multidimensional scaling would be unnecessary. However, it is difficult to relate one row of numbers to a second row, and even more difficult to see the interrelationship of all the rows. Multidimensional scaling relates the differences among the various rows in a configuration of dots that measures the change from one time period to the next.

Findings

Figure 1 demonstrates the application of multidimensional scaling to the data in the table. It can be seen that Kim's assessment of all eight factors in 1950 very nearly accorded with optimum conditions for war. The clustering of points away from the 1950 point and away from the optimum point suggests that his assessment of North Korea's situation since 1953 has been very different

Kim's Assessment of Key Factors Affecting Korean Reunification by War

	US Defense Commitment to South Korea	Soviet and Chinese Support for North Korea	South Korea Intention for Peaceful Negotiations of Reunification	Political Instability in South Korea	North Korea Military Capability vis-a-vis ROK	North Korea Economic Position vis-a-vis ROK	North Korea International Position vis-a-vis ROK	Kim's Internal Political Power
1950	0	10	0	10	10	8	6	9
1953-61	10	5	0	1	5	5	3	7
1962-66	9	5	1	7	4	7	1	10
1967-68	9	5	1	5	4	7	1	10
1969-72	8	5	8	3	6	6	2	10
1973-74	8	5	0	0	6	5	4	10
1975-76	7	5	0	0	8	4	5	10
1977	7	5	0	1	9	3	4	10

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from his assessment in 1950. In 1967-68 it was most like his assessment in 1950, and in 1977 it was most unlike 1950. This would suggest that times have never been so unpropitious for a North Korean attack as they are today.

The multidimensional scaling technique can be used to make projections into the future. Figure 2 projects each of the factors over the next five years to arrive at the most likely measurement of Kim's thinking in 1982. If the projections of the various factors are correct, Kim should be even less inclined to go to war in 1982 than he is now.

The one factor—however unlikely—that might cause Kim to reassess the risks of military action, even with the US commitment to defend South Korea, would be the appearance of widespread political opposition to President Pak Chong-hui in the South. In Figure 3 a high level of political instability in South Korea has been assumed to measure the effect of a change in that one factor on the projection for 1982. Note the movement of the dot closer toward 1950.

Another possibility that would significantly increase the chances for North Korean military action would be a change in the Soviet attitude toward Korea, occasioned either by a perceived change in the US commitment to South Korea, the death of Kim, or possibly a change in the Soviet leadership. Figure 4 illustrates the effect of substantially increased Soviet support for Korean reunification in response to a perceived lessening of the US commitment of Seoul. Assuming no change in any of the other variables, North Korea would be much more inclined toward military action under those circumstances than under any other foreseeable situation, except the collapse of political order in South Korea.

Finally, Figure 5 shows the effect that an internal struggle for power in North Korea, after Kim's death, would have in moving Pyongyang even further from the optimum point for war. The effects of an internal struggle for power are almost inevitably to freeze policy, discourage political initiatives, and lessen the chances for military adventures.

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Figure 1
**Kim's Net Assessment of Eight Selected Factors
 Shaping North Korean Policy, 1950-1977**

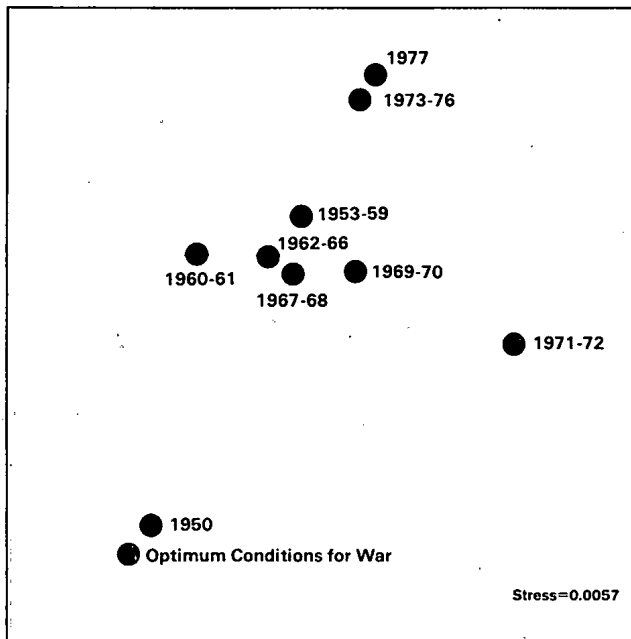


Figure 2
1982: A Projected Scenario

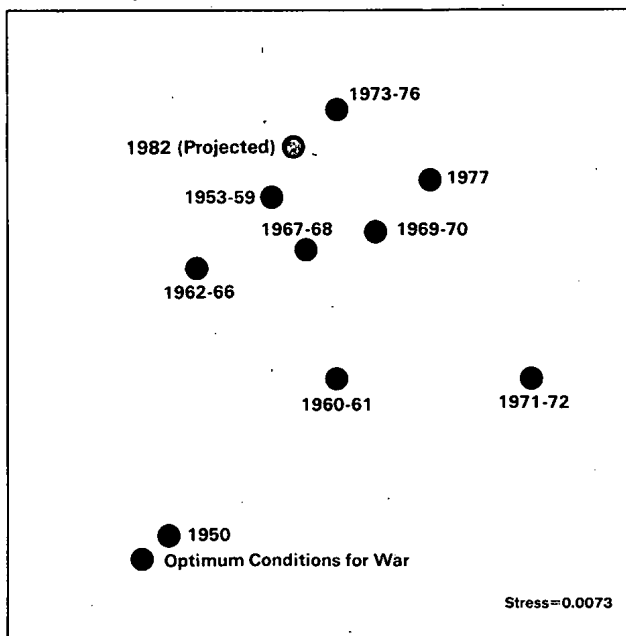
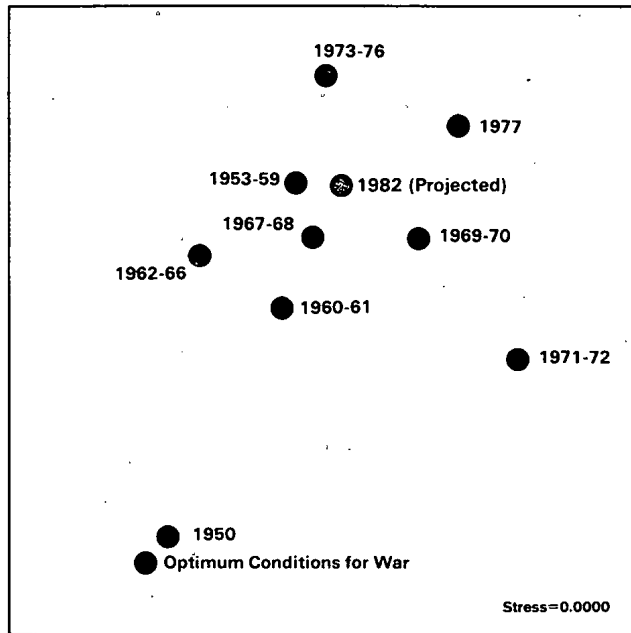


Figure 3
Assuming Political Instability in South Korea



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Figure 4
Assuming a Weakened US Defense Commitment to South Korea and Stepped-Up Soviet and Chinese Support for North Korea

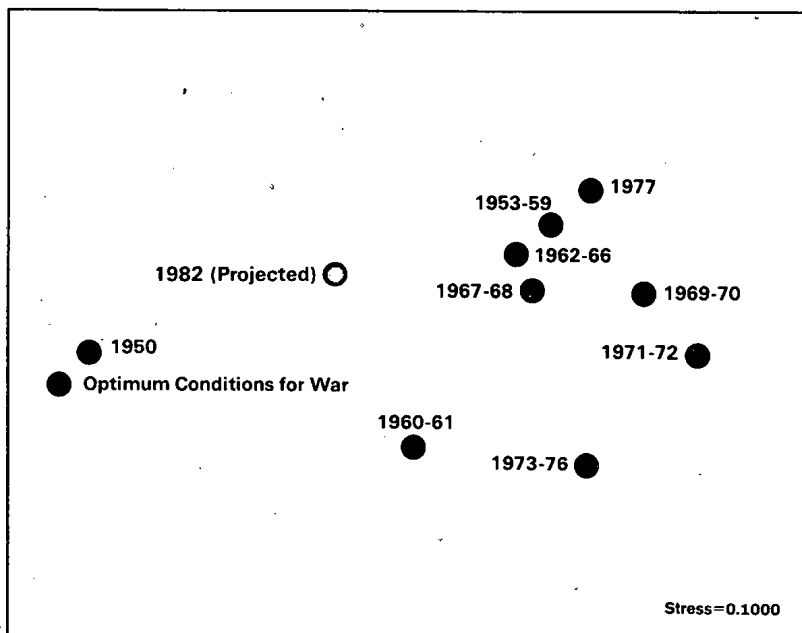
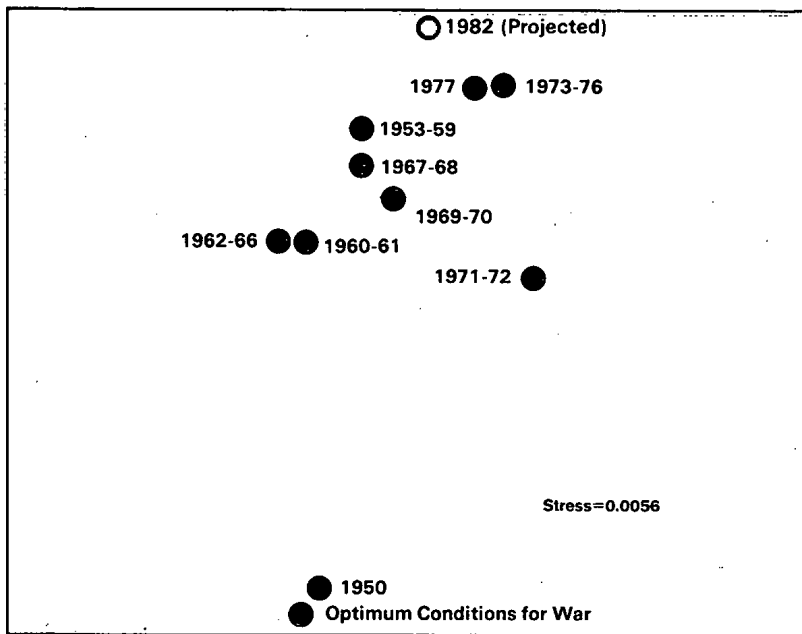


Figure 5
Assuming a Power Struggle in North Korea



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