

CHINA CONFIDENTIAL

AMERICAN DIPLOMATS
AND SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONS,
1945-1996

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value. One could go to Hong Kong and once in Hong Kong one would disappear and visit mainland relatives. There were rumors that, because the people in Fujian Province spoke the same language as people in Taiwan, Taiwanese business people could sneak back to Fujian and do a little business. Such travel was easily monitored by the security forces. But the GMD couldn't cut it off because that would damage Mainlander support.

KOREA

In the 1980s, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea remained a client state closely associated with Beijing. But although Kim Il Sung, North Korea's leader, still called his friendship with Beijing "invincible," Beijing had begun to expand its economic relations with South Korea and to think about ways to resolve hostilities on the peninsula that threatened the peace vital to Chinese modernization and development.

FREEMAN: [In the early 1980s, the Chinese] grossly misperceived Korea through ideological blinkers. The South Koreans were fumbling around with the Chinese, through the Korean CIA in Hong Kong. Koreans are very direct and tough people, and they were making quite a hash of this. They tended to demand things up front, and to use very blunt and insulting bargaining techniques, and to misunderstand the difference between things that needed to be done with a wink and a shrug and things that could be done explicitly. And so they were getting nowhere.

Over the spring of 1983, I had quite a number of discussions with the Chinese, arguing with them that they should find a way to have an opening to South Korea, which was something the South Koreans desperately wanted and which we supported, in general terms. This culminated during [Caspar] Weinberger's visit to China in the summer of '83.

He was secretary of defense.

FREEMAN: Deng Xiaoping actually proposed to Weinberger a meeting in Beijing between the South and North Koreans, with the U.S. in attendance, all hosted by the Chinese. I was astonished. That evening, after he left, as we got the reporting cable done, we confirmed with the Foreign Ministry that indeed Deng had said this, that indeed it was very

important, and that indeed he was making a major policy initiative. And we sent off a cable saying that, only to discover that Paul Wolfowitz [assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs] had edited this comment out of the conversation, alleging that he hadn't heard any such thing. Then he denied adamantly that it had been said, and accused us of having put words in Deng's mouth. Washington was mystified by our cable reporting a Chinese initiative in Korea.

During George Shultz's visit to China with President Reagan in the spring of '84, the Chinese again raised the issue of meetings with South Korea, the U.S., and North Korea. Shultz agreed, talking to [Ambassador] Art Hummel. Between Beijing and Shultz's arrival in Seoul, Paul Wolfowitz again reversed this.⁴⁶

Again, we were talking about opening relations at that point?

FREEMAN: We were talking about a Chinese proposal to host a South Korean-North Korean meeting, with the U.S. in attendance, in Beijing, which would have involved, inevitably, U.S. and Chinese mediation between South and North Korea, and which, frankly, was a pretty creative and useful suggestion. It followed up on Deng Xiaoping's earlier suggestion.

And then there was a very nasty leak in the Periscope section of *Newsweek*, accusing Art Hummel of having manipulated George Shultz on the Korean issue. I later discovered that there was a notation made in my personnel file to the effect that I had put words in the Chinese mouths on Korea. Very nasty stuff.

Korea was a very ideological question for us as well as for the Chinese, and evidently, by the middle of '83, the Chinese were thinking a little more creatively and less rigidly on this than we were. The point here was that the United States and China share an interest in maintaining peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula. And this issue had a history of which the Reagan administration was blissfully unaware. Dick Holbrooke, in his last days [in office] had begun a discussion with the Chinese on parallel moves by China toward South Korea, and by the U.S. toward North Korea. That, of course, was killed by the defeat of Jimmy Carter in the 1980 election. Probably, therefore, I was one of the few people left in the government who was aware of that. They then began to do things with South Korea, but we did nothing. From their

perspective, this was puzzling backtracking by us. But this was a very controversial issue in Washington, very dear to certain elements of the right wing.

The Chinese also were absolutely disgusted when, right in the middle of their efforts to broker some contact between the U.S. and North Korea with the South Koreans, Kim Jong Il, Kim Il Sung's son, evidently inspired and directed the bombing in Rangoon of the Korean Cabinet, which resulted in the deaths of many able people.⁴⁷ The interesting thing to me was that, having spent a lot of time talking to the Chinese about Korea, I got a sense of the extent to which they maintained a stiff upper lip about their alleged allies in North Korea, but really regarded them with a mixture of contempt and derision.⁴⁸

At any rate, the North Koreans, by their own actions, ended up obviating any possibility of an opening to either South Korea or the United States. And maybe that was what they tried to do. Still, we had some opportunities that we missed, because of people not hearing what they didn't want to hear.

Why didn't Paul Wolfowitz subscribe to the idea of having a meeting with China, North Korea, and the United States?

FREEMAN: I'm not entirely sure, but I would speculate that there were several reasons. First of all, Mr. Wolfowitz took a very jaundiced, rather ideological view of China, and was inherently suspicious of any initiative that originated with the Chinese. Second, with regard to contacts with North Korea, he was apprehensive about the political reaction from the Republican right, which he has courted and from association with which he has benefited, and that therefore he saw such a development as politically unattractive. And he might also have been concerned about the adequacy of prior consultation with South Korea. On the other hand, he must have been aware that South Korea itself was conducting a whole series of maneuvers intended to get the Chinese to put forward just exactly this sort of proposal.

Could you explain how we felt about North Korea in the late 1980s?

SIGUR: We were particularly concerned about what they might do to upset things in South Korea during the changeover of power from Chun

[Doo Hwan] to a civilian.⁴⁹ This was something that was of great concern to us. We were also very much concerned about the [1988 summer] Olympics and the possibility of the North trying to upset the games. So during this time of crisis in South Korea, we made it as clear as we could to the North that any efforts on their part to try to take advantage of disturbances in the South would lead to American reaction. And we made this clear to the Soviet Union and to China, and urged them to make this clear to their North Korean clients, so that they wouldn't misunderstand here, that the United States would not sit by. I'm not saying that the United States was the mover and shaker in all this; it was the Koreans themselves.

SOVIET UNION

Chinese efforts to better relations with the Soviet Union during the 1980s were slow and hesitant, but ultimately successful. After the Chinese had been satisfied regarding Soviet troop deployments, it appeared that no further barriers would exist to re-establishment of close ties. In fact, in May 1989, Gorbachev traveled to China for a summit judged by all to be a triumph for Deng Xiaoping and a significant advance for peace in Asia. Indeed, Americans increasingly viewed improvement of Sino-Soviet relations as a positive factor, enhancing rather than undermining triangular diplomacy.

SHOESMITH: There was speculation about the possibility of a warming of China-Soviet relations, but at that time it seemed very remote. As of 1981-1983, the Cambodian issue was still very hot, as well as Afghanistan. On both of those issues the Chinese and the Soviets were at loggerheads. There were still problems along their own border. The Soviets were building up their military presence in East Asia. None of these things seemed to augur any improvement in Sino-Soviet relations. On the contrary, although it was regarded as a possibility, if not a near term probability, those who thought it was a possibility would always add the caveat that it will never get back to where it was prior to 1960, at the time of the Sino-Soviet split. That both countries—and particularly China itself—had moved to a degree that any sort of full rap-