

with IAEA demands, might not the international community impose sanctions on the North? The problem with this option was that in general terms sanctions were seen as ineffective. Even if they were effective they would take too long to bite and in the process they might drive the cornered regime to employ its nuclear weapons in a final military paroxysm. More particularly, sanctions would require UN Security Council authorization and it is highly unlikely that China would vote in favour of their imposition as a permanent member.³⁷ Thus while a sea blockade could be thrown up around the DPRK, there would be no way of preventing the flow of goods across the Yalu from China or Russia. Although both nations abandoned their client in the early 90's, in the sense that they demanded payment in hard currency at world prices from the bankrupt North Korean regime, a good deal of trade flows into the north nonetheless. A further argument for the ineffectiveness of sanctions is the fact that the dramatic reduction in the amount of oil reaching the north after the Russian and Chinese decisions means that the DPRK has, for all intents and purposes, been the subject of de facto sanctions for several years now.³⁸

That is not to say that the economy has not suffered grievously. The DPRK's problems are not merely or even largely external. Most are domestic in origin, the result of grotesque distortions in the command economy as Stalinist gigantism destroys agricultural environments and military expenditures sap the remaining economic vitality of the state. Observers reported during 1993 that food was in particularly short supply and that the nation's industrial plant was operating at about forty percent capacity. The question which these conditions pose is how much longer can the DPRK go on absorbing negative growth? There have been some half-hearted attempts to attract foreign investment, but the economy has reached such a parlous state that there