

economic pressure. Just as important, without the active participation of both China and Japan, there was little chance of sanctions doing much good. China had an extensive and porous border with Korea while sympathetic Koreans resident in Japan accounted for a surprisingly large flow of hard cash into the North every year. North Korea had escaped the full impact of trade restrictions because of these two factors. In addition, there was the concern that increased pressure might be too successful and could topple the regime. This would force unification at a time and under circumstances that would overwhelm South Korea. Most participants agreed that the unification of Korea would present even more demanding challenges than had the unification of Germany which itself had proven a daunting exercise. Thus, there was a certain logic to modestly bolstering the North's economy for the present rather than trying to damage it.

The issue of how best to respond to the North Korean clandestine nuclear programme precipitated further discussion. Some who saw merit in the "do nothing" approach — accept reluctantly that there was nothing that could be done about the programme — also suggested that the international community should simply ignore North Korea in all fora, thereby denying it the recognition and status it hoped to achieve by going the nuclear route in the first place. After all, some argued, North Korea's example is not a model that anyone else would emulate so this approach risked little in the larger context of the NPT. Accepting but ignoring the North Korean "fact," it was felt, would probably have no negative impact on the NPT.

Other participants were not convinced that this was a wise course — or even possible. First of all, the very fact that there was a suspected nuclear weapon programme in the North would inevitably alter the way other states interacted with North Korea. This could not be avoided. So, ignoring the North Korean nuclear weapon programme — and its many implications — was impossible in practice. Thus, the North Korean example might after all be seen to be worth emulating by other states facing difficult regional problems. Worse, the fact that the North had gone this route, and done so without punishment, could only encourage some other regional states to consider the nuclear option, as well, whether on a clandestine or open and "legal" basis. Japan, some felt, would be sure to move in this direction as might Taiwan, if only for defensive reasons.

These developments would surely undermine the NPT and introduce the potential for dangerous instabilities in the region. At least one participant, however, wondered whether a moderately proliferated world was necessarily all that bad. With the exception of a crazy state like North Korea — about which nothing could be done at present, anyway — how would the proliferation of nuclear weapons to relatively stable and responsible states in the region undermine security? We might be exhibiting an ethnocentric bias in assuming that Asians could not manage affairs as well as the United States and the Soviet Union had during the Cold War.