

- mouldering away. What if the centre loses control of the periphery? What happens if the military community in the Russian Far East blunders fatally somehow? And even if it doesn't, will the Russians be back in strength in a decade at which time the Americans might not be to hand. And what of the Chinese with their maritime ambitions that could endanger Japan's sea lanes of communication?²⁴

Compounding these concerns are anxieties about developments on the Korean peninsula. Tokyo has a vested interest in maintaining peace on the peninsula, but lacks the authority to resolve the nuclear impasse between Washington and Pyongyang. Japan's sense of impotence was underscored in May 1993 when the North Koreans launched a Nodong-1 intermediate range ballistic missile in the direction of the Japanese home islands. While the missile fell well short of Kyushu (by design), intelligence estimates concluded that Pyongyang would soon be able to deliver nuclear or chemical warheads to most of western Japan. In the aftermath of the test shot the Japanese and Americans engaged in high level talks about the possibility of installing a limited ABM system in Japan based on the Patriot PAC 2 missile.²⁵

It is difficult to say what impact the North Korean threat will have on domestic defence debates. The Peacekeeping Operation Bill, enacted in 1992, following a year of national soul-searching and factional manoeuvring, may be the thin edge of the wedge in terms of greater participation by Japanese Self Defence Force personnel outside of Japan.²⁶ Slowly but surely the legacy of Japanese brutality in World War II appears to be losing its currency. Apologies, albeit limited, have been made, comfort women grow old, a new generation emerges in Asia, and the elderly leaders have derived what benefit they are likely to get from playing the Japan card.