

is genuine concern that it may collapse, precipitation some sort of political implosion. Or will the North Koreans, inured to hardship and largely unaware of alternatives, simply bow more deeply beneath their burden?³⁹

No one knows for sure and indeed the biggest problem in dealing with the North is ignorance of what is really happening north of the DMZ. Uncharacteristically, however, the regime actually acknowledged its desperate economic plight in official pronouncements late in 1993 and those schooled in studying May Day line-ups on Lenin's tomb have noted some curious shifts in personalities at the pinnacle of political power in Pyongyang.⁴⁰ Quite what these changes mean is unclear. Are hardliners in the ascendant, arguing that years of negotiations have brought nothing but vague promises from Washington and Seoul? Or are younger, less ideologically inclined apparatchiks gaining a say and promoting emulation of the Chinese Open Door policy?⁴¹

Much of the debate in Washington and elsewhere has been predicated on forcing the North Koreans to give up their nuclear weapons. The argument goes that the North must do so in view of Pyongyang's adherence to the NPT and to the bilateral non-nuclear agreement with Seoul. Furthermore, failure to force the North to forfeit its nuclear weapons would set an unacceptable example for the rest of the world on the eve of the NPT renewal process in 1995. States already emboldened by Iraq's nuclear programme would be persuaded of the value of duplicity if the DPRK were to go unpunished. There are some, however, who argue that the United States and others will have to live with imperfection; that a perfect inspection and accounting regime is beyond realization and that there may be no way to oblige the North to