

An analysis of the ITF's links with the DPRK and that regimes fractious relationship with the International Community:

In this paper I intend focusing on both the political links that existed between the DPRK (Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea) and the ITF (International TaeKwonDo Federation) and on the political situation within the DPRK and its poor relations with the outside world. The North Korean regimes often close links with the ITF for many years should have served as a warning to anyone who truly believed that TaeKwonDo was a politically neutral art and this same regimes bizarre and reckless behaviour on the international stage should have been carefully noted by those in positions of leadership within the ITF.

General Choi Hong Hi's dispute with the South Korean government which subsequently led to the ITF's headquarters being moved to Canada and the rival WTF (World TaeKwonDo Federation) being formed, has been well documented and I do not propose to examine it in any detail. However, the fallout from this disagreement and the visit of General Choi to the DPRK set in train the process by which North Korea would become the pre-eminent and most influential nation in the ITF. It can be said that this influence reached its peak with the inclusion of Juche to the patterns syllabus and the relegation of Kodang. Juche is, of course, the philosophy by which the late Kim Il-Sung and his successor, Kim Jong-Il adhere to in the day-to-day running of the DPRK. According to the North Koreans Juche means self-sufficiency in all aspects of economic, social and political life. It is thus an extreme form of autarky and has resulted in the total isolation of the North from the rest of the world. The policies of the regime have resulted in famine, economic collapse, the total control of society, a massive conventional arms arsenal, an expanding nuclear programme and the export of contraband and arms in the never ending search for hard currency.

Despite the fact that the DPRK is a pariah state the ITF still seemed happy (until the recent split) to maintain a close relationship with it. The 1992 World Championships were held at the splendid TaeKwonDo Palace in Pyongyang which was specially built for the occasion. North Korea has always been the most successful nation at the World Championships in terms of medals won and although the North Korean team are clearly superb Taekwon-Doists the emphasis placed by their government on the art and the close links which were enjoyed between the ITF and the regime have led some to allege that the DPRK enjoyed favourable treatment at many tournaments.

The ITF's decision to base itself in Vienna in no way removed it from Pyongyang's influence and instead offered it a stable environment in which the art could be spread throughout Europe and beyond. The recent split within the ITF was brought about by the DPRK's insistence that a president of their choosing should take over after General Choi's death. This is yet another occasion in which the North Koreans attempted to exercise the influence that they had built up within the ITF and boldly attempted to usurp the wishes of the other ITF members.

In the second half of this work I intend to discuss how the North's policies of economic mismanagement plus their global brinkmanship have led them to becoming a pariah among the international community. I will also touch upon Kims "cult of personality" which rivals and indeed exceeds anything that existed in Saddam Hussein's Iraq or Josef Stalin's Soviet Union.

In recent years the DPRK has come to world attention for all the wrong reasons. Food shortages which have led to famine and its nuclear programme have proved disastrous for the populace.

In 1995 severe flooding exacerbated the problems facing the North's food production industry. For the first time in its history the regime was forced to ask for international assistance.

However, by autumn 1996 further poor harvests together with a drop in fertiliser production led to famine stalking the DPRK. Large-scale relief efforts primarily led by South Korea and China helped alleviate the problem to a certain extent but it is now known that thousands died of starvation. Food shortages are still common place in the DPRK and are not helped by the fact that the military (the regimes guarantor of security) are fed before the civilian populace and receive preferential treatment to their civilian counterparts in virtually all aspects of life in this so-called "workers paradise".

The policy of Juche more than any poor harvests and natural disasters can be said to have caused the misery and hardship that encompasses so much of everyday life in the DPRK. Despite this the regime refuses to make the much needed changes required to alleviate the country's massive problems.

Although the DPRK is the most isolated and insular nation on the planet its leader Kim Jong-Il is an intelligent and well read man who is fully aware of how the outside world lives and how it feels about the policies which he promotes. Clearly Kim feels that any loosening of the rigid ties which bind his subjects will have an adverse effect on the regimes (and his) survival. Kim has played a masterful game of bluff and intrigue in order to keep the world guessing as to what the DPRKs intentions are. The nuclear programme which he has embarked upon best illustrates this.

The North has been developing a nuclear programme for over a decade. It says that the programme is for peaceful purposes (energy creation). The rest of the world disagrees and says the programme has only one aim, to develop nuclear weapons.

By 1994 tensions between the US and the North were at such a height that fears of war were very real. Any such war on the peninsula would result in massive casualties and huge damage to the South as well as the DPRK being devastated. Thankfully agreement was reached by which the North would halt reactor and plutonium development at its two main plants in exchange for help in building so-called light water reactors (which are much more difficult to extract weapons grade material from) as well as large shipments of heavy fuel oil to help with the DPRKs energy problems.

By the late 1990s the North had engaged in a covert effort to produce weapons grade material and admitted this fact 18 months ago. This was followed by the expulsion of UN inspection teams from the DPRK and the dismantling of technical equipment designed to keep watch on Pyongyangs nuclear facilities. These moves appear to be part of Kim's strategy of engaging in belligerent acts with the world at large in an attempt to achieve his aims. In 1994 Kim got what he wanted by sabre-rattling, he is once again engaging in similar tactics. He is aware the US will not risk a costly war and wants to extract as much aid and as many concessions as possible out of the international community. However the present US administration is not willing to give ground unless Kim compromises on a range of matters, the main one being that the DPRK ceases its nuclear weapons programme. The DPRK has been publicly included in the so-called "axis of evil" and is firmly on the US enemies list. The pressure on Kim has been increased in recent times as the US and its allies have begun to search DPRK ships in international waters in order to cut off the exports in arms and contraband that the North needs to sell in order to receive hard currency. In April 2003 the Australian navy seized a North Korean vessel containing 50 million Euro worth of heroin and authorities charged 30 North Koreans with drug smuggling. One year previously Taiwanese police arrested criminals who had unloaded heroin from a North Korean navy vessel. These reports show that the regime is heavily involved in the reprehensible illegal drugs trade and will stoop to any tactics to ensure its own survival.

The major fear that the US has is that the DPRK has developed nuclear weapons and will seek to develop even more, this may lead the South Koreans and the Japanese to engage in their

own nuclear programme and cause China to be sucked into an East Asian arms race which will destabilise the region. The Americans other worry is that the North will sell a nuclear device to the highest bidder with the potential result that terrorists will be able to get their hands on such a weapon. It appears that China, the DPRK's closest ally, is starting to lose patience with Kim's cavalier attitude towards his neighbours and the US, it is to be hoped that the Chinese will pressurise the regime into backing down on its bull-headed approach to international diplomacy and force the North to back down on its nuclear projects.

Kim Jong-Il dwells at the apex of a personality cult he inherited from his father, no theocracy ever demanded veneration of a deity to compare with that routinely offered up to both Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il. Both these men have replaced God in the Democratic Peoples Republic. Huge and elaborate events are held to honour Kim, loudspeakers blare "revolutionary" songs and "poetry" eulogising the Great Leader and his son and no expense is spared to ensure Kim's comfort and that of his cohorts. It can be argued that never before in human history has a populace been so manipulated and marshalled into blind obedience as that which exists in the DPRK.

CONCLUSION:

It is clear from the above that the DPRK is unlike any other country on earth. Although communism and Stalinism have been consigned to the dust-bin of history this has not been the case in the northernmost part of the Korean peninsula. In fact the rule of the Kim family is a blend of communism allied to the cult of personality on a grand scale together with mistrust of the outside world and a ruthless control over society.

The major problem in dealing with the North is that nobody knows what the true intentions of its government are. Is the nuclear programme designed to threaten its neighbours or is it merely to extract as many concessions as possible out of them?

Is the North exporting missile technology to whoever can pay for it or is that mere bluff? Does the regime intend to reform its economy and take a more civilised role in the community of nations or does it intend to one day invade the South?

Such uncertainty makes dealings with the DPRK all the more difficult, this, allied with its human rights abuses and its intolerance of all dissenting voices make it an extremely untrustworthy and malignant state within the East Asia region.

It is this state that the ITF allied itself with for many years and its influence was felt at the highest levels within ITF Taekwon-Do, whether it was a conscious decision by the ITF to do so or whether the DPRK strong-armed its way into a position of influence is unclear. What we can be sure of is that the DPRK's record as a state and in its dealings with the rest of the world leaves much to be desired. Last years split which saw the North's .