US Policy Dilemma: Food Aid to an “Enemy State”? The Case of Communist China, 1961-1963, and North Korea, 1993-2000*

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Both Communist China of the early 1960s and North Korea of the 1990s posed significant policy challenges to the United States revolving around the important question of food aid. The Clinton administration was faced with the task of responding to the height of the North Korean famine, which was estimated to have taken place between 1995-1998. Interestingly, the dilemma that confronted the Clinton administration of whether to provide US food assistance to a nation considered an “enemy state” was reminiscent of the circumstances faced by the Kennedy administration with regard to the famine that scoured Communist China in the early 1960s. Estimated to have claimed nearly 30 million lives, the details of the Chinese famine resulting from the Great Leap Forward of 1958 have only recently been examined, as foreigners were unable to gain access to the PRC until nearly twenty years after the events. Similarly, only time will bring to surface the details of the famine in North Korea (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, hereafter “DPRK”) due to the country’s present self-imposed isolation, comparable to that of the PRC in the 1960s.

This study will examine the policy dilemma that confronted the United States with regard to the famine in Communist China following the Great Leap Forward in the 1960s and again in North Korea from 1993-2000. The divergent responses of the Kennedy administration and that of the Clinton administration will be studied, with a focus on Congressional discussions regarding the donation of US food aid to an “enemy state.”

Keywords: food aid, famine, US-China relations, US-North Korea relations, US Northeast Asia policy

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I. INTRODUCTION

The famine that ravaged North Korea will later be documented in history as one of the greatest human tragedies of the 1990s. Often referred to as the "secret famine," widespread food shortages and starvation afflicted the entire North Korean population, yet due to restricted access into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), death rates and casualties cannot be verified to this day. Nonetheless, through refugee accounts and the work of religious and relief organizations, the death toll is generally estimated to have been between two to three million, though there are also other studies that suggest a lower number of casualties.¹ The inability to gain access to the hermetically sealed country of North Korea posed one of the greatest challenges to the international community's response to the famine.

The Clinton administration was faced with the task of responding to the height of the North Korean famine, which was estimated to have taken place between 1995 and 1998. Interestingly, the dilemma that confronted the Clinton administration of whether to provide US food assistance to a nation considered an "enemy state" was reminiscent of the circumstances faced by the Kennedy administration with regard to the famine that scoured Communist China in the early 1960s. Estimated to have claimed nearly thirty million lives, the details of the Chinese famine resulting from the Great Leap Forward of 1958 have only recently been examined due to the inability of foreigners to gain access to the People's Republic of China (PRC) until nearly twenty years after the events. Similarly, only time will bring to surface the details of the famine in North Korea due to the present self-imposed isolation of the state, comparable to that of the PRC in the 1960s.

Both Communist China of the early 1960s and North Korea of the 1990s posed policy challenges to the United States revolving around the important question of food aid. For the Kennedy administration, the events related to Communist China were directly influenced by the dynamics of a bipolar Cold War environment, within which the political power of the Communist bloc led by the Soviet Union was perceived domestically as being roughly equivalent to that of the United States, thereby heightening the significance of each interaction between the two spheres. Likewise, despite the demise of the Cold War and the rise of the US to global preeminence, many in the mid-1990s, continued to view the DPRK in the bipolar framework of the Cold War confrontation. North Korea has and continues to remain one of the last bastions of Stalinism, retaining one of the largest standing armies in the world. Thus, although in different time periods, both the People's Republic of China and the DPRK represented an "enemy state" to the United States, and the US policy response to both famines was undoubtedly influenced by such historical circumstances. Despite the similarities in initial scenarios, however, the US response to the North Korean famine was markedly different from its reaction in the early 1960s in the case of Communist China.

This study will examine the policy dilemma that confronted the United States with regard to the famine in Communist China following the Great Leap Forward in the 1960s and again in North Korea from 1993-2000. The divergent responses of the Kennedy administration and that of the Clinton administration will be studied, with a focus on Congressional discussions regarding the donation of US food aid to an "enemy state." As Andrew Narsios observed in his study of the North Korean famine, although documentation of what occurred in the DPRK will continue to be clarified and supplemented by de-classified materials, the striking similarities between the scenarios of Communist China in the 1960s and North Korea in the 1990s and the US policy debates with regard to the widespread famines of these two socialist states warrant an initial study of comparison.²

II. THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION AND COMMUNIST CHINA: 1961-1963

1. US Policy for the People's Republic of China

The international profile of the People's Republic of China in the 1960s was directly influenced by the political position taken by the United States. Since October 1949, as the Chinese Communists came to power after the defeat of the Chinese Nationalists (KMT), the Truman and Eisenhower administrations had established and strictly adhered to policies of non-recognition and containment coupled with a total embargo against the newly-found People's Republic. Within the context of the Cold War that prevailed through the 1950s, it was established that the United States would focus on containing the spread of communism as manifested by the Peking regime and taking responsibility for the defense of the "free" Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan.

As indicated in Rosemary Foot's argument, the US policy of containment also implied that Washington would make sure to adopt a policy "that did not further empower but instead diminished and held back that 'awakening giant'" as Communist China demonstrated rapid development during the 1950s.³ The perceived threat of international communism and the hysteria of McCarthyism proved to be an all-consuming force in the US that left its mark on the 1950s and beyond as it ravaged any move toward a rapprochement with the Chinese Communists as "a treasonable betrayal of the national interest," ultimately resulting in "the almost total paralysis of American policy in the Orient."⁴

Thus, when the Kennedy administration arrived at the White House in 1961, its political stance towards the PRC had to be formulated within the context of the events of the 1950s that had indelibly shaped the image of the People's Republic in the eyes of the "free world." The Korean War, the two offshore islands crises of 1954-1955 and 1958, and belligerent activities in Southeast Asia were all incidents

through which Peking demonstrated its continued militancy and cast into bright light the true scope of the Chinese Communist threat to the stability of East Asia.

2. China in the Aftermath of the Great Leap Forward

Yet under its blanket of stiff hostility, by the early 1960s Communist China was already suffering from the disastrous consequences of the Great Leap Forward, a political campaign that focused on accelerated socialization through the mobilization of the Chinese masses. With Sino-Soviet relations at a tenuous phase and the Soviet Union continuing to display increasing technological advances as exemplified by the 1957 Sputnik launching, the Great Leap Forward was precipitated by Mao Ze Dong's desire to revive the spirit of the Chinese revolution and to demonstrate to the world that, by concentrating on the latent energies of the Chinese masses, Communist China could indeed achieve rapid economic development.

However, rather than bringing about economic prosperity as originally intended, the Great Leap Forward of 1958 ultimately represented the harrowing "abandonment of a balanced development strategy" as the Chinese Communists pursued an intensive drive to promote industrial output, which focused on the building of factories throughout the country to the neglect of agricultural production.⁵ In fact, the means of agricultural production themselves underwent drastic change as they were assimilated into the effort to build up industrial capacity. The PRC organized Chinese peasants into massive communes whereby thousands of individual households were combined into a "self-sufficient, economic, social, and political unit," hence allowing for a more complete mobilization of both male and female labor by the "pooling of all household, child-raising, and cooking arrangements" which made more workers available for the industries.⁶ The feverish pitch that permeated Communist China in the drive to achieve unprecedented economic growth is well-characterized by the campaign slogan for the masses to "build socialism by exerting our utmost efforts and pressing ahead consistently to achieve great, faster better and more economical results."⁷

Despite such fervor, however, the Great Leap Forward would bring about disastrous consequences. Although the bountiful harvest of 1958 misled the Chinese masses as they indulged in generous meals at the commune mess halls, the economic crisis that soon followed resulted in a famine that would ultimately claim the lives of approximately fifteen to thirty million Chinese and would haunt the country for years to come.⁸

3. The Evidence of Famine in China

As the Chinese Communist Party veiled the disastrous consequences of the Great Leap Forward campaign with denials and increased isolation of the country, the extent of the tragedies resulting from the widespread famine that followed continued

to be a source of speculation both within China and more so to foreign observers. As Jasper Becker argues in *Hungry Ghosts, Mao's Secret Famine*, the enormous scale of the famine was directly influenced and perhaps exacerbated by the secrecy that had surrounded it.⁹ Journalists and researchers from around the world were denied the opportunity of capturing the extent of the famine and portraying it to the outside world, as restrictions into the mainland were strictly imposed by the Peking regime: "(f)rom 1960 to 1963 they restricted the movements of resident journalists and diplomats to the main cities and halted the circulation of provincial papers outside the country."¹⁰ Thus, the highly secretive and controlled society manipulated by the Chinese Communist Party made it virtually impossible for the international community to assess the prevailing conditions of famine that gripped the mainland. It was not until the mid-1980s that demographers were able to examine population statistics to reveal that "at least 30 million people had starved to death, far more than anyone, including the most militant critics of the Chinese Communist Party had ever imagined."¹¹

Amid the obstacles, the American press reporting from Hong Kong did make it widely known that severe food shortages afflicted the Chinese mainland. By July 1959, *The New York Times* reported that the country was "plagued by widespread food shortages."¹² Once again, the actual degree of the food shortage remained unclear and the Chinese government persisted in denying the systemic failure precipitated the famine, while attributing the food shortage merely to inadequate distribution methods and weather-related problems.

The uncertainty surrounding the extent of the food shortage was perpetuated by disagreements between outspoken scholars and proponents of the press insisting that famine ravaged the Chinese mainland whereas others denied that such conditions existed. In retrospect, Becker claims that Washington columnist Joseph Alsop had been accurate in his assessments of severe famine on the mainland, and in attributing it to the policies of Mao Ze Dong rather than to the natural disasters which had been cited by most as the leading cause of agricultural difficulties in mainland China.¹³ The ensuing debate regarding actual conditions in Communist China, perpetuated by the discrepancies in media reports and mainland Chinese refugee interviews from Hong Kong, created confusion not only for the general public but also for the Kennedy administration.

4. Divergent Opinions on Sending Food Aid to China

With surplus food stocks bulging in US granaries, the inevitable question of whether the US should offer food to the starving Chinese people, enemy or not, was raised to the new President in his first press conference on January 25, 1961. Kennedy asserted that he did not want to make an "idle offer" to the Chinese Communists when there was no indication "direct or indirect, private or public, that they would respond favorably to any action by the United States."¹⁴ In addition,

he voiced concern regarding actual conditions on the mainland, as continued exports by Communist China made the need for food questionable. To appease those who would accuse the administration of inhumanity by denying the Chinese food aid, the door was left ajar regarding the possibility of future American aid, as Kennedy concluded that the United States would reconsider offering aid if a request for food was made by the Chinese Communists.

In the early 1960s, the moral obligation of the United States to help the starving millions was emphasized by organizations and individuals in favor of US food aid to Communist China. Organizations such as the Friends Committee for National Legislation appealed to the American tradition of showing special concern for the world's hungry.¹⁵ In a radio interview, Senator Hubert Humphrey (D-MN) suggested that "relief food shipments might be an effective way of letting the people of mainland China know that the American people continued to be their friends and were not enemies as pictured by their Communist Government."¹⁶ Nonetheless, due to the possibility of the Peking regime using US food aid for propaganda purposes, he suggested as an alternative to direct aid the use of an intermediary agency to deliver food to the starving Chinese. While Titles I and II of the Public Law 480 prohibited transactions with the "union of Soviet Social Republics or any of the areas dominated or controlled by the Communist regime in China," the President had the authority to make emergency grants of food overseas to help victims of natural disasters including famine, either directly or through agencies such as the International Red Cross, regardless of the recipient country's friendliness towards the United States. Thus, those in favor of US aid to Communist China encouraged donations via international relief agencies in the hope that a US offer of food could potentially counteract the intense anti-American sentiment in China and possibly be recognized by the moderates in the Peking regime as a gesture to lessen tensions with the PRC. However, it appeared unlikely that Communist China would acknowledge the need for donations from the United States or any relief agency -- such an acknowledgement would be tantamount to declaring to the world the failure of its communist system.

Despite the optimism displayed by those in favor of sending food aid to the PRC, in a reevaluation of US policy in late November 1961, Walter P. McCaughy, Assistant Secretary of Far Eastern Affairs, asserted that there was little change in conditions which would warrant a change in the US position regarding possible food aid to Communist China. In fact, McCaughy pointed to further evidence that the PRC would most likely reject any US offer in the first place: shortly after Kennedy's first press conference, the Communist Chinese Red Cross rejected an approach by the League of Red Cross Societies in Geneva; and PRC Ambassador Wang Ping-nan at the ambassadorial talks in Warsaw turned down a suggestion by US Ambassador Beam that the Chinese consider allowing privately-sent food parcels from the United States.¹⁷

According to McCaughy, it was crucial that the US did not take the initiative, for a rejection by Peking to a US offer of food would place the Kennedy administration

in an "intolerable position," that would give Communist China ample opportunity to accuse the United States of trying to dispose of an unwanted food surplus. Furthermore, McConaughy reminded Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, George W. Ball, that the "food situation in mainland China has arisen in part because of an effort by the Communist authorities to build a major power base at forced draft for the purpose, among others, of displacing the American presence from the Far East."¹⁸ At this juncture, the Kennedy administration was not inclined to determine that the humanitarian needs in China outweighed these "parent disadvantages."

5. Congressional Views of the Chinese Famine

As early as January 1961, the idea of using food aid as a political bargaining tool was introduced in Congress by Rep. Emilio Q. Daddario (D-CT). It was suggested that the United States donate surplus foodstuffs in exchange for the release of political prisoners held in Communist China. This would help the Peking regime not "lose face" as it would be giving something in return for food aid.¹⁹ Nonetheless, due to the fact that even neutral agencies, such as the International Red Cross had twice been rejected in the past by the PRC, which declared that it did not need outside assistance, there loomed considerable doubt as to whether Peking would accept food assistance under even such a face-saving plan.

In the following months, in response to the humanitarian call to help feed the starving Chinese, voices within Congress made clear their desire to differentiate between helping the Chinese people and the Chinese Communist Party. In early March 1961, Rep. Clement Zablocki (D-WI) rejected the idea of sending food aid to the PRC due to the possibility that the grain could be used to perpetuate the rule of the Peking regime:

There are some who criticize and say that we are unwilling to assist the poor starving Chinese. I am sure that we would be very happy to share our blessings, but when we see that the Communist regime in China is sending wheat out for military purposes, should we then support that regime by making up their shortages with our wheat? We would want to help the Chinese people, but we have no assurance that our aid would get to them. The critics say that our Government is waiting until the Chinese stretch out their hands. This is not true. We are ever willing to help the Chinese people, but we will never aid the Mao Tse-tung government.²⁰

With evidence that the PRC was sending quantities of grain out of the country in order to acquire military equipment, questions arose as to the direct beneficiaries of US food aid: the Communist military or the starving Chinese people? Evidence seemed to indicate that the former was more likely to reap the bulk of the benefits and this possibility was further highlighted by the fact that the Peking regime

would not allow the US to verify the recipients of food aid. The inability to monitor the path of donated food grains posed a serious obstacle to the idea of sending food aid to Communist China.

During the early months of 1961, in efforts to block potential support for Communist China's admission to the United Nations, members of Congress pointed to the insistence of the Peking regime that the enemy of the Chinese state remained the United States, thus emphasizing the visible hostility of the PRC toward the US. On May 29, 1961 Rep. Donald C. Bruce (R-IN) released for the Congressional Record an article from the *Indianapolis Star* arguing that "(e)very American should firmly realize that the Red Chinese regard the United States as their No.1 enemy and have as their major objective to drive the United States out of the Orient."²¹ Not only was Communist China responsible for the growing propaganda against the United States found in Japan and the military preparedness in North Korea, but more importantly, the PRC had the potential to cooperate with the Soviet Union based on the two Communist states' mutual feelings of enmity against the US. It was warned in Congress that the PRC "is a dedicated and aggressive Communist power enjoying the full support and cooperation of Soviet Russia and openly, daily, and loudly broadcasting its hate for the United States."²²

A statement by Senator Frank Lausche (D-OH) captured the growing concerns over the possible deleterious use of US aid by the hostile Chinese state: "When we give them aid in solving their problems, we relieve them of the responsibility of growing food and we help them in their purpose of producing guns, possibly to be used against our American youth."²³ In a testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, the president of the Chinese Refugee Relief Committee also urged against American inclinations to send US food aid to the starving millions on the Chinese mainland, as those desiring to help the hungry by sending food to the PRC government would only "consolidate the power of Red China in denying freedom to its people."²⁴ It was further claimed that "Communist army guards are well fed, well clothed, and well armed," which added to the lasting images of US food aid potentially helping maintain the well-being of the Chinese Communist military rather than the people. Thus, humanitarian instincts were to a certain extent suppressed in Congress by the overriding possibility of American food aid being used by the Peking regime to develop and sustain its military that was posed inimically against the United States.

III. THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION AND NORTH KOREA: 1993-2000

1. US Policy for North Korea

The US policy dilemma regarding food aid to North Korea in the 1990s was

similar to that regarding the PRC in the 1960s. However, the responses of the respective US administrations were profoundly different. In the case of North Korea, since the end of the Korean War in 1953, the main objective of the United States has been to deter further North Korean aggression. Hence, since 1994, the relationship between North Korea and the United States revolved primarily around the DPRK's nuclear and ballistic weapons program and the resulting security concerns posed to the United States and its interests in Northeast Asia.

In 1994, upon evidence that the North Korean government had covertly developed a nuclear weapons program and possessed enough plutonium for at least two nuclear weapons at a site in Yongbyon, the United States, Japan, and South Korea attempted to convince the DPRK to relinquish the facility and to terminate its nuclear program. After several months of negotiations, the US effort to halt the development of nuclear weaponry in North Korea finally reaped substantive success as the United States and North Korea conceded to an arrangement known as the Agreed Framework, signed on October 21, 1994. The bilateral agreement focused on the eventual resolution of the nuclear issue and has as its ultimate objective the peace and security of a nuclear-free Korean peninsula.

In early December 1994, Robert Manning, a former senior State Department official on Asian affairs, pointed out in his testimony that the agreement with the North Koreans was indeed an attempt "to accommodate them, bring them into the community of nations, engineer a kind of soft landing, if you will, and a gradual reunification process."²⁵ Indeed, the Clinton administration took a fundamentally different stance toward the "enemy state" from that of the Kennedy administration, as it chose to engage the DPRK towards cooperation through the Agreed Framework, rather than pursuing the alternatives of further isolation of the hermetic nation or possible confrontation. Thus, the decision of whether to send US food aid to North Korea was also couched in terms of attempting to accommodate the weakened state, rather than to confront or to promote its further demise.

2. A Regime in Crisis

The early 1990s had ushered in an era of crisis for the state of North Korea. The demise of the Soviet Union and subsequent breakdown of the Cold War led to drastic reductions in subsidized food, oil, and equipment to North Korea from its former patrons, China and the Soviet Union, which directly impacted the agricultural and industrial output of the North Korean regime. As external trade reached its lowest levels in history, the massive decline in the production of goods and poor harvests, coupled with successive floods and droughts, precipitated the plummeting of the North Korean economy.²⁶ It was becoming increasingly clear that North Korea neither had the adequate resources to feed its population nor the necessary funds to purchase needed provisions from other countries.

Meanwhile, during this time of crisis, North Korea was widely perceived by the international community as one of the most reclusive, inaccessible, and highly controlled police states. For the past thirty years, North Korea has pursued a state policy of extreme self-reliance, *juche*, which mandates strict adherence to a uniquely socialist approach to political, economic, and social policies dictated by the state. Yet, "despite the illusion of self-sufficiency, or *juche*, the North is increasingly dependent on outside help to sustain itself."²⁷ Since its inception following the Korean War, North Korea had in fact been heavily dependent upon subsidized oil, grain, machinery, and military equipment from both the former Soviet Union and China, in ironic contrast to the *juche* theory propagated by the regime. However, while North Korea's imports from the Soviet Union totaled more than US\$1.7 billion annually between 1987 and 1990, they fell to less than US\$600 million, in 1991, and by 1993, the figure was a mere one-tenth of the products coming from the Soviet Union during 1987-1990.²⁸ By 1993-1994, China's own natural conditions had worsened to the point that China stopped subsidizing oil to North Korea and placed a ban on the exports of rice, corn and soybeans.²⁹

Thus, with external trade plummeting, the shortages of food, energy, and raw materials within North Korea had reached crisis proportions by the mid-1990s. By 1994, the isolated state was short a half million tons of grain and, furthermore, lacked the necessary hard currency to purchase needed foodstuffs from the international market. When the harvest was discovered to be 33% short of the necessary food to feed its population, the DPRK could find neither the requisite hard currency nor the effective political ties that could provide the much-needed assistance.

3. Evidence of Famine in North Korea

Despite North Korean attempts to disguise the extent of the food shortages, the United States and South Korea had acquired intelligence information as early as 1993 that verified suspicions of acute shortages of food. In January 1994, prompted by evidence of a covert North Korean nuclear weapons program, two US senators visited South Korea and released a detailed report of their findings. The report outlined the increasingly debilitating conditions in North Korea and highlighted the spiraling number of North Koreans attempting to cross over into China to escape dire circumstances surrounding the food crisis.³⁰

Although North Korea hesitatingly allowed a selected group of humanitarian aid officials access into the country (unlike the PRC of the 1960s, which allowed very few foreigners into its territory during the time of its rampant famine), the actual conditions afflicting the North Korean masses were nonetheless difficult to unveil. The governing ideology of the state prevented Pyongyang from accurate disclosure of the prevailing circumstances of the country and stifled efforts by various aid agencies in the necessary monitoring and distribution of much-needed food.

The regime's efforts were clearly causing discrepancies in on-site reports by relief

workers and resulted in an overall debate on the exact conditions prevailing in North Korea. Contrary to what humanitarian aid officials expected to see in North Korea, reports by various relief agencies told of conditions that were nowhere near crisis proportions. There appeared to be few signs suggesting acute food shortages, to the extent that some relief officials wondered whether famine existed at all in North Korea. In fact, numerous reports coming from observers within the country "adamantly rejected the idea that the country as a whole was facing mass starvation."³¹ The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies estimated that only 130,000 people were starving and several hundred in need out of the total population of twenty-three million.

Meanwhile, information regarding widespread famine and devastating social conditions in North Korea surfaced through refugee accounts from those who had crossed into China to escape the ravages of acute food shortages and also from the growing number of defectors into South Korea. Interviews with several hundred refugees at the North Korean-Chinese border, which did not begin until mid-1997, nearly two years after North Korea's request for international aid, revealed a picture of the DPRK which contrasted vastly from the reports of humanitarian aid workers who were in-residence in Pyongyang.³² Refugees told of a country with mass starvation, where people were suffering from severe malnutrition due to the lack of food.³³ The discrepancies between reports from the humanitarian aid community and personal accounts of the hundreds of refugees and defectors from the country fueled intense debate worldwide regarding the genuine situation in North Korea.

4. The Request for Food Aid

Unlike Communist China in the 1960s, North Korea did make a formal request for food to the United States as early as 1994 during negotiations related to the DPRK's nuclear program. After the floods during the summer of 1995 destroyed nearly three million tons of emergency grain reserves, it was estimated that nearly 5.2 million out of a population of approximately twenty-three million were affected and that several hundreds of thousands were left homeless.³⁴ Thus, against strong inclinations to disguise the extent of damage in order to uphold its *juche* ideology, the severity of the food emergency forced the North Korean government to appeal to the international community for assistance.

Despite the DPRK's request, however, significant international aid was not offered to North Korea until late 1996. The UN World Food Programme's October 5, 1995 appeal for US\$8.8 million in food to help cover the anticipated shortages due to the extensive flooding was largely ignored by the international community. It was not until the *Washington Post* highlighted the lack of international aid given to the UN World Food Programme (WFP) in a December 1995 report that the international society recognized the potential severity of the North Korean situation. Thus, when severe floods hit North Korea again in the summer of 1996, the

country was once again devastated as an estimated US\$1.7 billion in damages to the harvests and infrastructure left nearly 2.5 million women and children "at serious risk of starvation."³⁵

5. The US Response to Food Aid

In spite of early indications that severe food shortages existed in North Korea, the United States did not react to the brewing crisis until October 1995. The initial North Korean request for a million metric tons (MT) of food aid in 1994 was unequivocally rejected by the United States, the decision being based on Public Law 480.³⁶ However, in response to the UN World Food Programme's worldwide appeal for US\$8.8 million in aid to the DPRK, the United States pledged US\$25,000 to the United Nations children's agency, UNICEF, and an additional US\$200,000 to the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) in 1995. Considered to be relatively insignificant, token amounts of aid, the Clinton administration indicated that US aid was limited due to resistance from Republican congressional members who opposed any form of aid to North Korea.³⁷ Senators, including many Democrats, remained skeptical of the US ability to ensure proper enforcement of the Agreed Framework. One of the most outspoken proponents against US involvement with North Korea, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole (R-KS), openly criticized the Clinton administration for negotiating any deal with North Korea as it would be "propping up an odious regime that is closer to full collapse than at any time in the past forty years."³⁸ Hence, the Clinton administration's policy of engaging the reclusive DPRK faced substantial congressional opposition from the very outset.

In late January 1996, the United States, South Korea, and Japan held high-level discussions regarding the future course of action to take regarding the North Korean food crisis. While both the South Korean and Japanese governments opposed further aid on the basis that circumstances of famine were being exaggerated by the North Korean government and by claims that food aid was being diverted to feed the DPRK's military, the United States, believing that aid was an effective inducement to lead North Korea towards peace talks and discussions of peninsular security, proposed to provide US\$2 million in US food aid, and in February 1996, proceeded to donate US\$2 million to the WFP's October 1995 appeal.³⁹ A US policy of engagement was distinctly emerging. Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord claimed that US aid was a "symbolic, humanitarian gesture" in response to the dire circumstances confronted by the North Korean people.⁴⁰ In this way, the Clinton administration launched itself on a significantly different path toward dealing with a possible "enemy state" than that taken by the Kennedy government.

6. The Politicization of Food Aid

Food aid became a political tool to be utilized by both the US and the DPRK

in their mutual course of improving relations. In April 1996, President Clinton and South Korean President Kim Young Sam initiated a proposal inviting the North Korean government to participate in peace talks involving the United States, North and South Korea, and China. Anticipating North Korean resistance, US food aid was directly linked to the DPRK's participation at these talks, signaling the clear politicization of food aid. In the summer of 1996, Charles Kartman, the principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, indicated to UN officials that negotiations with North Korea regarding its participation at the four-party talks revolved around the issue of food aid.⁴¹ Essentially, if North Korea agreed to participate in the four-party talks and progress was visible, the DPRK would receive US food aid. This linkage of food aid to the behavior of the DPRK demonstrated that humanitarian considerations were only part of the basis for the granting of humanitarian aid.

On the other hand, months later in September, North Korea demonstrated its continued stance as a "rogue" state in an unsuccessful espionage mission which provoked international outrage and adversely affected future food aid commitments by both the United States and South Korea. As a North Korean submarine ran aground onto South Korean territory, the incident represented the DPRK's continued intransigence, despite its need of international food aid. As part of the heated response by the US and South Korean governments, food aid was immediately suspended. In fact, tense relations did not subside until late December 1996 when North Korea expressed regret for the incident, which signaled its desire to continue discussion of further food aid.

The possibility of further instability in North Korea also prompted a response from the United States in mid-February 1997. With CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency estimates that acute food shortages in the DPRK could lead to a potential military coup against the Kim Jong-il regime, the United States confronted the possibility of a desperate, underfed, and chaotic North Korea. Consequently, on February 19, 1997 the United States pledged 27,000 MT of grain to a recent WFP appeal. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright partially justified the increase in US aid by stating that "instability in North Korea is not to anybody's advantage."⁴²

In April 1997, North Korea blatantly politicized the food aid issue by insisting that unless it received 1.5 million tons of food aid from the United States and South Korea, it would not participate in the four-party peace talks. Initially unwilling to concede to North Korea's demands, the United States and South Korea refused to accept the conditions set by the DPRK; yet by mid-July, the United States had pledged another 100,000 MT of grain to the WFP's early July appeal for aid.⁴³ While the State Department denied any linkage with the impending four-party talks scheduled to begin three weeks later, editorials in the *Washington Post* suggested that US aid was undeniably linked to progress made towards the upcoming talks.

Against a backdrop of significant increases in US food aid beginning in January 1998 with the pledging of 200,000 MT of emergency humanitarian aid from

P.L. 480 Title II, North Korea launched a Taepodong missile on August 31, 1998 over Japanese airspace, again bringing about great international condemnation. This attempt to test the DPRK's ballistic missile capability represented a direct threat to American soil, as it demonstrated that North Korean missiles could potentially reach the western and central regions of the United States. Yet despite this incident, the Clinton administration committed an additional 300,000 MT of grain to North Korea. Not surprisingly, the surprise launch by the DPRK and the subsequent lack of change in the administration's position again ignited the fermenting opposition against further US aid to North Korea. The incident was considered an "egregious affront" which prompted the possibility of terminating US aid to North Korea indefinitely.

7. Heightened Criticism in Congress

The Taepodong missile launching opened up room for more compelling and aggressive Congressional opposition against the increase of US food aid to North Korea. Opposition to further aid was heightened as suspicions arose in Washington due to unexplained construction in North Korea. The White House produced aerial photographs suggesting the development of massive tunnels that intelligence analysts suspected to be a new facility for the production of nuclear weapons. To many members of Congress, substantial evidence that North Korea had resumed its building of nuclear weapons would prove Pyongyang's violation of the Agreed Framework, which would ultimately provide ample justification for the termination of food aid. Yet, amid these suspicions, the launching of the Taepodong missile, and accumulating opposition to the government's policy, the US on September 21, 1998 responded unhesitatingly to a WFP appeal by pledging 300,000 MT of food assistance.⁴⁴

Despite the unwavering stance of the Clinton administration, the Congressional response to the recent events was to capitalize on the cumulated evidence of the DPRK's continued belligerent posture vis-à-vis the outside world in order to launch a more effective opposition campaign. Republican Congressman Christopher Cox (R-CA) utilized the negative sentiments of recent events to propose an amendment to the foreign affairs budget that would stop all US government food aid to the DPRK. It was insisted that food assistance was being diverted to the North Korean military, "the apparatus of repression that keeps Kim Jong Il in power."⁴⁵ Furthermore, Cox suggested that the Clinton administration was in fact responding to nuclear blackmail by North Korea, and demanded closer monitoring of aid distribution as a prerequisite to any future considerations of aid.

Congressman Benjamin Gilman (R-NY), chairman of the House International Relations Committee and a key signatory of the congressional letter to the Clinton administration condemning the US policy approach to North Korea, also dispatched a bipartisan team of congressional staffers to investigate the status of the famine

and the impact of food assistance in the DPRK.⁴⁶ If the findings confirmed congressional suspicions of aid being diverted to those other than the intended recipients, US aid would most likely be terminated.

8. The Commissioning of a Policy Review on North Korea

The Clinton administration responded to increasing congressional criticism by appointing former Defense Secretary William J. Perry as a special coordinator on issues related to the DPRK. The North Korea policy review team, commissioned in November 1998 to conduct a comprehensive review of US policy toward North Korea, was an attempt by the Clinton administration to enhance the legitimacy of US policy regarding the DPRK.

Yet, as the North Korean government again linked politics with food aid in mid-November 1998 by demanding increased aid in return for allowing US officials to inspect the underground construction of a suspected new nuclear facility at Kumchangri, the congressional response was to seize the opportunity to highlight the DPRK's continued hostility and suggest the need for the Clinton administration to alter its policy direction.⁴⁷ Despite increasing congressional outrage, the Clinton administration was able to reach an agreement with North Korea to allow US inspection of the Kumchangri nuclear facility. It was later announced, however, that just days prior to the reaching of the agreement, the United States had pledged 100,000 MT of grain to a recent WFP appeal that could only be perceived as the inducement for North Korean cooperation.

Soon thereafter, Congressman Benjamin Gilman asserted that the US response of providing increased food assistance, in effect, represented a "food for access" deal. In a *New York Times* article, former US Secretary of State James A. Baker also criticized the tradeoff made by the United States vis-à-vis the DPRK, warning that "North Koreans may well conclude that their bad behavior will continue to be rewarded."⁴⁸ Unwavering in the face of escalating criticism, on March 22, 1999 the Clinton administration announced that the United States would donate US\$30 million to the WFP for an additional 100,000 MT of corn and rice to help fill the shortfall in the WFP's latest appeal. The claim that the Clinton administration was running a "food for access" deal was further reinforced as the Department of Agriculture announced the additional supply of 400,000 MT of food aid one day prior to the arrival of US inspectors in North Korea. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, however, explained the large-scale commitment as a means to help alleviate the growing grain surplus while engaging in a humanitarian gesture towards North Korea. Meanwhile, North Korea publicly announced through its foreign ministry that the US-North Korea agreement regarding the inspection of sites at Kumchangri had been established based on the DPRK's belief that the US "should properly compensate us in order to end their suspicions."⁴⁹

Critics of Clinton's policies toward North Korea condemned what appeared to

be a massive payoff by the United States to gain access for inspection of the suspected nuclear facility. Nonetheless, US inspectors arrived in Pyongyang on May 18, 1999 – amid reports from Seoul emphasizing that it was unlikely that any evidence of a nuclear weapons program would be found at the Kumchangri site. In fact, a senior researcher at the Korean Institute of National Unification asserted, "The cave is vacant. There's nothing there. It's only a bargaining chip for the North."⁵⁰ With this in mind, Republican Congressman Benjamin Gilman led the opposition in voicing pointed criticism to a deal that would remain as an uncomfortable precedent for future US-North Korea negotiations:

The Kumchangri visit is not the success story the Administration has been playing it up to be. The need for a visit to Kumchangri is actually a failure... of North Korea to keep its end of the Agreed Framework. The significance of this event is further diminished by the \$180 million in food aid the United States gave to North Korea for entrance to this sure to be empty facility. Are we going to have to cough up \$200 million every time we find a suspicious North Korea site that may violate the Agreed Framework? The Agreed Framework is no model of modern arms control and we are sure to pass this way again with Pyongyang. The question is what will the price be next time?⁵¹

Congressman Gilman (1999a) proceeded to introduce the "North Korea Threat Reduction Act of 1999," which was supported by other opponents of the Clinton administration's policies toward North Korea. As it pertained to food aid, the bill focused on the "fulfillment of conditions designed to ensure that food is not diverted to the North Korean military and that North Korea is taking steps to regain self-sufficiency in food production."⁵² Gilman in his subsequent address at the Asia Society suggested that the Clinton administration had become the DPRK's "main benefactor" through large aid packages despite the fact that North Korea was "the country most likely at this point to involve the United States in a large-scale regional war over the near term."⁵³ Later at an International Relations Committee hearing, Congressman Gilman accused the Clinton administration of engaging the United States in a "successful cycle of political blackmail and extortion" while the DPRK continued to develop ballistic missiles capable of reaching the United States.⁵⁴

9. The Perry Report: Continued Engagement and Aid

In light of mounting opposition, on September 15, 1999 former Secretary of Defense William J. Perry met with members of Congress to present his report on US policy toward the DPRK.⁵⁵ Although most of the Perry Report remained

classified, his message to Congress highlighted his overall view that the United States should engage in a "comprehensive and integrated approach" toward the DPRK, ultimately resulting in the establishment of diplomatic relations with North Korea. Two days later, the White House announced that the Clinton administration, influenced by Perry's recommendations as well as by recent US-North Korean negotiations, would ease several sanctions against the DPRK administered under the Trading With the Enemy Act, Defense Production Act, and the Department of Commerce's Export Administration Regulations, with the purpose of improving overall relations with North Korea under the Agreed Framework.⁵⁶

In fact, the Perry Report signaled the beginnings of an increasingly receptive posture to improved relations by both the United States and North Korea. With discussion of a potential visit by a top North Korean official to Washington and the possible visit by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to North Korea, the Clinton administration's policies of engagement seemed to be bearing fruit in terms of having the rogue state comply with the terms of the Agreed Framework and participate in the four-party talks. As the Clinton administration continued to pursue "constructive dialogue" with the DPRK, Washington moved to "provide some immediate and tangible support" for the inter-Korean summit by pledging an additional 50,000 MT of grain to the WFP on June 15, 2000, just days after the talks commenced in North Korea.⁵⁷ Although Washington continued to deny links of US food aid to political developments, it was announced by the State Department that the United States expected to finish providing by the end of June 2000 the 400,000 MT of food shipments pledged to the WFP in July of the previous year.

As North Korea displayed "a pattern of behavior" that signaled the DPRK's desire to join the international community, the Clinton administration pursued a dual "carrot and stick" approach toward North Korea. On the one hand, the United States continued to plan a national anti-missile defense system to guard against potential DPRK missile development, while on the other it fostered further improvements in North Korea's posture vis-à-vis the international community. Among the advocates for national missile defense, Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) argued that the DPRK represented the "enemy du jour" and that the United States needed to take necessary precautions as a means of maintaining national security. On the other hand, in favor of continuing engagement with the DPRK, Senator John Kerry (D-MA) argued that "(t)he threat from rogue missile programs is neither as imminent nor as immutable as some have argued. We have time to use the diplomatic tools at our disposal to try to alter the political calculation a rogue nation will make before it decides to use its ballistic missile capability."⁵⁸

In the month prior to the US presidential elections, the visit of the Vice Chairman of the DPRK's National Defense Commission, Cho Myong-nok, to Washington and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's sojourn to North Korea represented the zenith in a series of mutual efforts to further improve relations between the

United States and the DPRK. Despite outstanding issues related to military matters, the first high-level visit by a North Korean official to Washington indicated to observers the DPRK's desire to further enhance relations with the United States before a new administration came to office. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's October 23, 2000 visit to Pyongyang to meet with DPRK leader Kim Jong-il represented the final courtesy by the Clinton administration before leaving office, demonstrating US willingness to interact with North Korea in an attempt to bring the DPRK into the community of nations. During the Albright visit to North Korea, the DPRK country director for the World Food Programme, Douglas Broderick, stated that US food aid had played an important part in the movement toward possible rapprochement between the United States and North Korea. Broderick asserted that "(t)he food aid has opened the door. It has established trust."⁵⁹ Thus, food aid, used as a political tool, had effectively functioned as the mediator between the US and an "enemy state." However, despite the progress made in relations between the United States and the DPRK, the sustainability of improved relations remained in question as uncertainty loomed regarding the next administration's approach to the DPRK.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Kennedy and Clinton administrations confronted remarkably similar scenarios with respect to the widespread famines in the socialist states of China and North Korea – both were faced with the policy dilemma of providing humanitarian aid to actively belligerent "enemy states" amid heavy Congressional opposition. Upon examination of their responses to these situations, however, significant differences can be found resulting from the contrasting nature of the security framework of the US at the time and the attitude of the "enemy state" in question for each administration.

Though it appeared that Kennedy was interested in the idea of using food as a means to promote change in Sino-American relations, potentially destructive political ramifications ultimately led the administration to withdraw from its offer of aid to Communist China. Whereas the PRC's obstinate refusal to acknowledge its failure by accepting aid and continued threats of domestic reprisal from Congress and the China Lobby constituted ample justification for the Kennedy administration to suspend possible advances toward mainland China, the most destructive factor militating against a change in Sino-American relations was the increasingly belligerent posture assumed by Peking, evidenced by continued meddling in Southeast Asia and ultimately in China's attack on the northeast border of India in October 1962. Convinced that the Peking regime was not interested in joining the international community in peace, the Kennedy administration eventually acquiesced to domestic pressure to deny American food aid to Communist China.

Nevertheless, through the discussion of possible US food aid to the Chinese mainland in the early 1960s, it was reinforced that the United States could not dismiss Communist China as merely a temporary irritant in its foreign policy. In fact, policymakers recognized that the United States would inevitably be forced to interact with the Peking regime, and thus, some relentlessly continued to advise more flexibility in US policy toward China. Kennedy, at one of his last press conferences on November 14, 1963, clearly left the door ajar regarding future Sino-American relations as he declared that the United States was not "wedded to a policy of hostility to Red China," and that when the latter indicated a desire to live at peace with other countries, the US would reappraise its policies toward Communist China.⁶⁰ Hence, improvement in Sino-American relations always remained a possibility, although it was not attained during the Kennedy administration.

In the discussion of food assistance to North Korea during the Clinton administration, Congressional opposition to providing US aid repeatedly placed emphasis on the threat posed by the DPRK to its neighboring nations, due to the nuclear and ballistic missile developments as well as the belligerent behavior exhibited by North Korea. Despite the demise of the Cold War, for those opponents who had adamantly opposed the Clinton administration's attempts to engage North Korea, the Cold War context still prevailed on the Korean peninsula. Therefore, the offering of US aid was equated with "feeding the enemy," a concept that prevailed over the Kennedy administration's decision regarding food aid for Communist China during the 1960s.

Interestingly, however, the United States in this case fulfilled the position of being one of the largest donors of aid to North Korea despite its continued status as an "enemy state" of the US, a contradiction which can largely be attributed to the engagement policy of the Clinton administration. However, as the Clinton administration's term came to an end, US policy toward the DPRK remained precarious. Despite progress made toward improved relations between the United States and North Korea, there was no doubt that the DPRK still retained its status as one of the last remaining "enemy states" from the Cold War. In view of the potential threat posed by North Korea, not only to the Korean peninsula, but to surrounding nations such as Japan, as well as to the United States and its allies at large, the perplexing question of how to best deal with the rogue state was left to the incoming George W. Bush administration.

Similar to the case of widespread famine in Communist China during the 1960s, the lack of sufficient data and the continued impenetrability of the North Korean state make it impossible to verify how many died as a result of the widespread food shortages in the mid-1990s, when the famine was suspected to be at its height. Nonetheless, the opportunity to respond to North Korea's requests for food assistance allowed the Clinton administration to pursue a posture that was decidedly different from Kennedy's decision to deny food aid to Communist China. As to the long-term effects of following such a different policy course vis-à-vis

an "enemy state," it should be noted that they can only be determined well after history has taken its course.

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