On 21 October 1994 negotiations finally came to fruition between the United States and North Korea on the latter’s nuclear programme, which, especially after Pyongyang refused to permit full inspection of its facilities by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1992, was feared to have a military character. The essence of the agreement reached was that Pyongyang would freeze its nuclear programme, accept full inspection of its nuclear facilities within five years, and resume the dialogue with South Korea on the implementation of a de-nuclearization agreement signed in 1991. In return, the United States and its allies (notably Japan and South Korea) would provide technical and financial support in order to help the North build safer reactors, provide free crude oil as an alternative energy source in the interim, and permit progress in the normalization of US–North Korean diplomatic relations via an exchange of representative offices. This important agreement undoubtedly reduced the very high level of tension on the peninsula generated when Pyongyang announced its withdrawal from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in March 1993. As a result, and notwithstanding inevitable hiccups in implementation and a resurgence of psychological warfare on the peninsula during 1995 and 1996, it has brought a measure of relief not only to the citizens of the two Koreas but to their near neighbours, notably China and Japan, and indeed to the world at large.

The US–North Korea agreement was signed in Geneva, which had been the preferred setting for high-level negotiations between the parties after July 1993. In the period immediately prior to this they had been conducted chiefly at United Nations headquarters in New York, where North Korea had been admitted to full mem-

bership on 17 September 1991, and the Security Council had been seized with the question of Pyongyang's nuclear programme since early April 1993, following referral by the IAEA. Clearly, UN settings were an important form of pressure on the North Korean leader, Kim Il-sung, underlining as they did the American claim that its nuclear programme was 'of concern to the entire international community' (emphasis added). What is now largely forgotten, however, even by the State Department's own spokesmen, is that these talks started in quite a different setting, that is, in the context of the diplomatic corps in Beijing. It is the chief purpose of this chapter to explore the significance of this fact. We shall in the process make brief comparisons with an earlier negotiation between the United States and another communist power, the People's Republic of China itself, which extended over the period from 1954 until 1972 and also began in the diplomatic community of a third state. And we shall conclude by making some observations about the significance of this research for existing ideas about the usefulness of the diplomatic community for communication between hostile states. It is true, of course, that this technique, though generally neglected by scholars, is not a recent diplomatic innovation. However, its refinement, perhaps stimulated by the extent of the recent resort to it which we note in our conclusion, may be another matter.

BACKGROUND

Korea had emerged from the Second World War divided along the 38th parallel, with Russian forces occupying the northern and American forces the southern zone. Following the failure of a UN commission to effect the unity of the country in elections in 1948, Washington recognized as the government of Korea the 'Republic of Korea' (ROK) which was established under Dr Syngman Rhee in the south, while Moscow recognized instead the government established under Kim II-sung in the north, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). As a result, the United States never entertained diplomatic relations with North Korea until Henry Kissinger proposed the 'cross-recognition' formula in 1975. This proposal, which entailed recognition of the North by the United States in return for recognition of the South by China, was rejected by Pyongyang on the grounds that it would legitimize the division of the peninsula. The consequence was that, until recent years, the