Dramatic changes in East Europe and the Soviet Union resulted in North Korea's doubling its effort to shield and defend itself from disturbances emanating from the outside. Yet, President Kim Il Sung of North Korea has also opted for new diplomatic moves of realignment in existing ties with China and the Soviet Union and is also seeking new relations with Japan and the United States. North Korea's diplomatic adaptation in 1990-91, such as its balancing diplomatic acts vis-à-vis the major allies and adversaries, is examined, and so is the North Korean dilemma of reconciling national interest and ideology. While Pyongyang's nonaligned nations diplomacy is temporarily stalled, its UN diplomacy is likely to be activated as a result of the simultaneous entry into the United Nations with South Korea in 1991.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), or North Korea, struggled in 1989-90 to stem the tidal wave of perestroika that swept the Communist world and hit the shore of the Korean Peninsula as well. Short of the success in its attempt to erect the barrier, so as to resist external pressures, the North Korea of President Kim Il Sung was compelled to adjust itself diplomatically to the outside world. Included in these corrective measures for adaptation are the cooling of relations with the Soviet Union, an increased reliance on China, especially on matters of economic assistance, a desire to establish diplomatic relations with Japan as well as its continued efforts to seek normalized relations with the United States.

All of these diplomatic moves of adaptation, however, may not succeed unless North Korea is able to overcome the more serious political and economic crises at home. These challenges of political transition and succession from Kim Il Sung to his son Kim Jong Il, and of resuscitating a stagnant economy have, in turn, been aggravated by adverse impacts from outside. At this time of the dawning of the new post-cold war era, North Korea is confronted with one of the most critical challenges and serious threats to the system since its founding in 1948. This article examines North Korea's response to the external challenges and impact of Perestroika by analyzing

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Pyongyang's diplomatic maneuvers and adjustments vis-à-vis its allies of the Soviet Union and China, its adversaries of Japan and the United States, and the rest of the world including the Nonaligned Nations diplomacy.

**PYONGYANG'S RESPONSE TO THE IMPACT OF PERESTROIKA**

President Kim's New Year messages typically set the tone for North Korea's foreign and domestic policies for the year. His 1990 and 1991 messages are particularly revealing in terms of ascertaining the extent to which North Korea was prepared to cope with the external disturbances, those resulting from the "new thinking" and "domestic reform" agenda of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of perestroika. After witnessing the drastic political changes in Eastern Europe, including the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the downfall of President Nicolai Ceauşescu of Romania, one of Kim's closest allies, President Kim in his New Year message of 1990 refrained from making any direct reference to perestroika or the political turmoil in Eastern Europe. The last time Kim paid official visits to these socialist countries in Eastern Europe was June and July of 1985.

**Kim's Rhetoric of "Juche" Socialism:**

In an attempt to shield North Korea from disruptive external shocks, however, Kim stressed the "superiority of socialism" over capitalism and called upon his people to safeguard North Korea as the "eastern outpost of socialism." (Incidentally, Kim used the same expression during his official visit to Moscow in 1984 at a Kremlin meeting with then-Soviet leader Konstantin Chernenko.) Kim stated that "the road to socialism is the path untrodden by any predecessor, and therefore, we may face various difficulties in the course of advancing along this road. However, the unchanging truth is that mankind must not submit to imperialism."¹

Kim Il Sung sought to find an outlet to his dilemma of confronting external pressures in the form of improved inter-Korean relations. In his 1990 New Year message, Kim proposed holding an inter-Korean high-level conference for discussing not only "free travel" but what he termed "an open door policy" for inter-Korean exchange of people as well as "the removal of a concrete wall" in the area south of the Military Demarcation Line. Obviously, Kim's strategy was to exploit public opinion by equating South Korea's anti-tank obstacles south of the Demilitarized Zones (DMZ) with the Korean version of "the Berlin Wall," a tactical move that soon proved ineffective and was, therefore, abandoned.

One year later, in his 1991 New Year message, Kim continued to defend North Korea's Juche-oriented socialism as the "unique and the most superior system in the world." Kim stated, "despite the boisterous allegation of the