

Australia and DPRK: A Story of Strange Relationship

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The record of relations between Australia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or simply North Korea) is one of the oddest and most chequered in diplomatic history. A short period of diplomatic recognition and cultural cooperation took place in the mid-1970s but was suddenly and mysteriously broken off. Twenty-five years later, encouraged by the improved climate of inter-Korean and US-DPRK cooperation, Australia and North Korea resumed diplomatic relations. However, the resurgent nuclear crisis and the Pongsu drug-smuggling ship incident in Victoria proved to be hard tests for this shaky relationship. The recent closure of the DPRK's embassy in Canberra once again left the public confused and the pundits guessing about the true reasons behind this quiet *démarche*.

This paper examines the major ups and downs in the history of Australia-DPRK relations and offers some clues as to what might have been wrong in Australian policy and attitudes toward the isolated communist nation. Australian involvement in the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative and the ban on the supply of "luxury goods" to North Korea will be discussed. Interviews with serving and veteran diplomats, declassified DFAT archival material and international media reports provided the basis for this research.

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