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NORTH KOREA : EXPORTING ARMS AND TERROR

INTRODUCTION

On October 9, 1983, Republic of Korea President Chun Doo Hwan and members of his cabinet were to visit the Martyr's Mausoleum in Burma as part of a state tour. Shortly before the scheduled arrival of the presidential motorcade, a bomb exploded, destroying the mausoleum and killing seventeen South Korean officials, including four senior members of the Chun cabinet. Investigation revealed that the bomb was a command-detonated device, the terrorist apparently mistaking the arrival of the earlier vehicles for the presidential limousine.

Shortly after the bombing, two suspects were arrested, while another was killed trying to elude the Burmese police. Their capture, interrogation, and trial revealed that they were North Korean military personnel operating with the direct help of the North Korean government and its embassy in Rangoon.

This terrorist attack against the Seoul government is but one in a series of provocative and destabilizing actions intended to alter the present division of the Korean peninsula. Similar acts of terrorism have become a commonly used foreign policy tool by the dynastic regime of North Korean leader Kim Il Sung.

Indeed, North Korean support of terrorism now reaches throughout the world. This has become painfully clear in the last several years as more and more North Korean operatives have gone abroad to teach the tactics of terrorism and guerrilla warfare. North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea, DPRK) remains one of the very few states in the community of nations that condones the use of random violence as a component of its foreign policy. This is evidenced by the large amount of money and assets expended in the operation and maintenance of no less than ten training

installations in North Korea and around the globe for the purpose of teaching the art of terrorism.

It is estimated that over 2,000 terrorists and guerrillas have been trained in North Korea alone since the early 1970s.¹ The number who have received instruction in guerrilla-terrorist operations in Africa, the Middle East, and Central and South America far exceeds that figure.

For example, North Korean military advisors have provided instruction and training in paramilitary and terrorist operations to the Palestine Liberation Organization at their camps throughout the Middle East as well as to Libyan and Iranian military forces, both in those countries and at special facilities in North Korea. DPRK military advisors specializing in paramilitary and terrorist-type activities are active in Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, even Latin and Central America. Following the U.S. military operation in Grenada, twenty-four North Korean military advisors were discovered along with a secret treaty under which North Korea would have supplied automatic weapons and ammunition.²

In addition, North Korea is now a leading arms exporter to the Third World, particularly to nations in crisis. North Korean military hardware worth \$800 million has been shipped to Iran, accounting for over 40 percent of that country's total foreign military purchases.³ Pyongyang has shipped some \$400 million in arms to Zimbabwe, along with training and advisors in increasing numbers.⁴ Though there have been complaints about the reliability and servicability of North Korean military equipment sold to the Third World, arms transfer has become one of the most important sources of foreign currency for the Pyongyang regime.

Like Libya, Iran, and Syria and radical terrorist movements including the PLO, North Korea uses terrorist violence and furthers revolution as primary methods of conducting foreign policy. By so doing, Pyongyang has attempted to increase its own stature among the more radical elements of the Third World while at the same time launching its most direct and bloody attacks against the government and people of the Republic of Korea.

As long as U.S. combat and support personnel are stationed in South Korea, the possibility remains of U.S. involvement in a direct military assault from the North. A greater risk, however, is the chance of North Korean terrorist acts against U.S. soldiers.

¹ Nack An and Rose An, "North Korea Military Assistance," in John F. Copper and Daniel S. Papp, eds., Communist Nations' Military Assistance (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983), p. 173.

² Clyde Haberman, "North Korea Reported to Step Up Arms Sales and Training Abroad," The New York Times, November 24, 1983, p. A1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Hence, it is important that U.S. Asian policy take this threat into account.

NORTH KOREAN ARMS TRAFFIC

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) always has suffered a shortage of foreign exchange currency. Recently, a main source of hard currency for North Korea has become the manufacture and sale of light infantry and artillery weapons, such as rifles, handguns, ammunition, mortars, light howitzers and cannons.

Of concern to the West is the number and destination of these weapons. Though the extent of DPRK military aid is difficult to document, due to its classified nature, a picture of North Korean military support in the militant Third World has emerged over the past few years.

As a rule, military support from North Korea has been reserved exclusively for those nations and movements that are seeking to overthrow existing non-Marxist governments or to consolidate communist regimes in the Third World. For many years this security assistance from North Korea took the form of military training with an occasional modest cash payment. In most cases the training took place in North Korea at bases constructed especially for this purpose. However, the last ten years have seen more and more North Korean advisors going abroad, particularly to Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

It is estimated that North Korea has sent some 8,000 military advisors, instructors, and actual combat troops to some thirty-five different countries over the last fifteen years. With the surprise discovery of North Korean troops in Grenada, it may be assumed that these estimates are probably on the low side.

As early as 1966, Pyongyang sent military advisors to train the Vietcong and the army of North Vietnam: including some 300 psychological warfare specialists and 50 pilots who not only trained North Vietnamese airmen, but also flew combat missions themselves. More recently, Laos, Cambodia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have hosted North Korean military advisors and instructors in special operations and counterinsurgency warfare.

The Middle East has proved particularly hospitable to North Korean military advisors and instructors. From 1971 to the present, Egypt has had several groups of North Korean advisors, including pilot instructors and missile technicians. Though designated as instructors, North Korean pilots actually flew combat missions for the Egyptians during the 1973 war with Israel.⁵ Interestingly, North Korean military advisors probably remained in Egypt during its conflict with Libya in 1977, though intelligence sources believe that fellow North Koreans were operating

⁵ An and An, op. cit.

Current Status of North Korean
Military Presence Abroad (October, 1983)

Region	Country	Status
Middle East	South Yemen	140 military personnel
	Libya	240 military technicians
	Iran	300 military technicians
Africa	Algeria	38 military personnel
	Syria	27 artillerymen 16 arsenal technicians
	Uganda	35 military instructors
	Angola	military technicians (number unknown)
	Tanzania	30 military personnel
	Benin	5 military instructors
	Zambia	10 military personnel
	Somalia	10 military personnel
	Mozambique	50 military personnel
	Zimbabwe	134 military instructors
	Malagasy	35 military instructors
	Sudan	3 military instructors
	Asia	Pakistan
Latin America	Nicaragua	33 military instructors
	Grenada (expelled)	24 military advisors
Others	Malta	6 military instructors
Total	19 countries	1,151 men

Libyan tanks in combat throughout the conflict.⁶ Since that time, military advisors and air force personnel from North Korea have remained in Libya, with some speculation that DPRK pilots operating out of Libya have been involved in observation and harassment operations against the United States Navy operating in and around the Gulf of Sidra. Both Iraq and Iran have received DPRK advisors, though now Pyongyang is heavily committed to the Khomeini regime in Iran, with Iran making up a large percentage of North Korea's total weapons sales abroad. In addition, Syria, North Yemen, and South Yemen also have had large contingents of North Korean military advisors, especially South Yemen where North Korean instructors have trained terrorists and guerrillas from the region over the last several years, including the PLO and radical Muslim extremists.

Africa is also an area of North Korean involvement. Some twenty nations--including Angola, Mozambique, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Seychelles, Algeria, Tanzania, and Somalia--have had not only North Korean advisors and instructors in residence but active combat troops as well. The number of advisors in Africa grows appreciably when it also includes the large numbers of trainers and advisors who have operated with guerrilla forces in Angola, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Tanzania.

Of far greater importance to the United States is the level of involvement of the DPRK in Central America. In addition to the twenty-four military advisors found in Grenada, North Korea has trained units from Nicaragua, Cuba, and Guyana. North Korean pilots have operated in Nicaragua in support of Nicaraguan military flights in the region.

Though the use of trainers and advisors is the primary means of providing security assistance, North Korea has recently increased its sales of military arms and materiel abroad. During the Grenada operation, U.S. troops seized official government papers outlining a treaty between the newly installed Marxist government of Grenada and North Korea which would have provided for the purchase of \$12 million worth of automatic weapons and ammunition over the next several years.⁷

The radical regime of Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini has been a major purchaser of North Korean light infantry and field artillery weapons for use in its war against Iraq. Though the Iranians have complained to North Korea that a large number of these weapons are of an inferior quality, sales to Iran have continued. North Korea has also acted as a middle-man channeling a number of sophisticated weapons, including tanks and modern aircraft, from China

⁶Ibid.⁷Haberman, op. cit.

to Iran, as part of a \$1.3 billion agreement worked out between the two countries in April 1983 in Beijing.⁸

North Korea has also sent shipments of weapons to Syria, Egypt, and the PLO. Zimbabwe has recently been the purchaser of some \$400 million worth of arms from the DPRK, and hosted advisors and instructors to accompany the equipment.

In the early period of North Korean military aid and sales to the Third World, the DPRK limited its sales to ideologically similar communist-bloc countries. As its trade deficit skyrocketed and its ability to repay an ever increasing volume of international loans simultaneously declined, North Korea began to sell weapons strictly for profit.

The result has been that the North has concentrated its sales on those regions of the globe that are the most unstable and apt to be involved in military conflicts. Hence, Iran, like other renegade nations, has found a willing supplier of arms with which to continue its war with Iraq when more responsible nations had refused arms sales for fear that the war would spill over into other Middle Eastern nations.

The North Koreans view such trouble spots as potential markets to be exploited. Pyongyang has a direct financial interest in ensuring that conflicts of this nature continue. In the Middle East, Central America, and the Persian Gulf, this creates particular problems for the U.S. and its allies.

EXPORTING TERROR

North Korea maintains one of the most disciplined and well-trained armed forces in the world. Of primary importance to the DPRK battle strategy are its special force troops--crack units trained to operate behind enemy lines utilizing light infantry weapons and equipment to destroy lines of communication and important military and civilian targets deep in enemy territory.

To facilitate the training of these elite units, the North Korean Army has built a number of bases especially designed to train soldiers in sabotage, demolition, and suicide-type terrorist attacks against buildings and military equipment. Foreign guerrillas and terrorists are trained at similar, specially constructed installations.

In the early 1970s, the DPRK accelerated its direct support to guerrilla and terrorist movements world wide. North Korean activities in the Caribbean and Central America provide an example

⁸ Dilbo Hiro, "Iran Plays a China Card in the Gulf War," Asian Wall Street Journal, September 26, 1982. See also, Michael Weisskopf, "China Secretly Selling Arms to Iran," Washington Post, April 3, 1984., p. A1.

of a level of involvement which, surprisingly, has received little attention.

During the 1970s, the DPRK supplied over \$3.18 million in direct cash payments to leftist guerrilla movements, including the failed attempt to overthrow the Caracas government in Venezuela, The People's Liberation Army in Argentina, the Revolutionary People's Army of Argentina, the Fatherland Safeguarding Movement in both Argentina and Paraguay, and Latin America, a radical organization operating throughout the region.⁹

In addition, North Korea established training bases in Central and South America. Large facilities have been constructed in Nicaragua, Brazil, and Peru where leftist organizations receive instruction in military training and weapons familiarization and maintenance. In Chile, discovery of North Korean support of the organization, Leftist Revolutionary Chile, resulted in the expulsion of four senior members of the North Korean embassy.¹⁰

A large number of Latin American groups received training in guerrilla and paramilitary operations in North Korea during the past decade. According to reports by North Korean defectors, a sophisticated training facility designed especially for foreigners was constructed near Pyongyang in the early 1970s.¹¹

At this installation and others like it in North Korea as well as in Africa, the Middle East, and Central America, foreign "students" receive in-depth instruction in the modern art of terrorism and guerrilla warfare: demolition, communications, map reading, "cell-structure" organization, assassination techniques, sabotage, kidnapping, use of weapons (rifles, handguns and shoulder-fired grenade launchers), the use of poison and the effective employment of hit-and-run operations against conventional military forces. Courses generally last from two months to over eighteen months.

Since 1971, groups from the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, the Guatemalan People's Liberation Army, and members of the Movement for Revolutionary Action have attended courses in terrorism and guerrilla warfare lasting from several weeks to two years. Cuba has even sent a small number of its instructors to North Korea to learn guerrilla warfare tactics.¹²

Paralleling its numerous arms sales in the Middle East and Africa, the DPRK has been training radical groups in the region and at bases in North Korea. Korean instructors have been active in Libya, training Colonel Qaddafi's famed female bodyguards in martial arts and the use of small weapons. DPRK training bases

⁹ An and An, op. cit., p. 172.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

have been established jointly with PLO training bases in South Yemen as well as in Algeria, Chad, and Zimbabwe/Rhodesia. After the collapse of the Ian Smith government in Rhodesia, North Korean instructors remained to train Zimbabwe's army. The DPRK also has trained revolutionary groups from all over Africa at a terrorist camp located just outside of Tabora in Tanzania.¹³ Large radical contingents from the PLO, Angola, Uganda, Zaire, Somalia, and even Lebanon have spent a great deal of time in intense training at various bases around Pyongyang. It is believed that even members of the Japanese Red Army received instruction in weapons and demolition in North Korea.

North Korean terrorist training has victimized even the United States and Europe. It is believed that the West German Baader-Meinhoff gang and the more militant elements of the Italian Red Brigades have made clandestine trips to North Korea to receive terrorist-type training. Both organizations have been directly responsible for either taking hostage or killing Americans living in Europe over the past ten years. There remain unconfirmed reports that radical terrorist groups in the United States, like the Black Panthers and the Students for Democratic Society (SDS), have had contact and received instructional material from the North Koreans.

THE TERRORIST WAR AGAINST THE SOUTH

North Korea is unique among the community of nations as a result of its singularly consistent use of terrorism as a means of pursuing its foreign policy, especially destabilizing the government of the Republic of Korea. The past thirty years provide innumerable examples of North Korean acts of sabotage, espionage, infiltration, and murder resulting in the deaths of hundreds of South Koreans as well as a number of American servicemen stationed on the Peninsula. The 1968 attack on the Presidential Palace in Seoul by communist commandos, the seizing and detention of the USS Pueblo in 1968 with the death of several American crewmen, and the brutal ax-murder of two U.S. Army officers in the neutral zone along the DMZ are but a few of the most flagrant North Korean acts of terrorism. However, nowhere is the official policy of North Korean terrorism more evident than in the recent bombing of the Martyr's Mausoleum in Rangoon, Burma, which left seventeen South Korean government leaders dead.

Sources close to the Kim Il Sung regime in North Korea believe that the bomb attack was most likely organized by Kim Jung-rin, head of North Korea's Special Southern Operations Branch, charged specifically with covert political and para-military actions against the Republic of Korea. Kim has been intimately involved in a number of North Korean attacks against the South Korean government in Seoul, including the 1968 commando attack against the Presidential Palace.

¹³ Ibid.

Kim Jung-rin is very close to Kim Il Sung and his son, Kim Chong Il. Many believe that the latest bomb attack might very well have been organized and planned without the direct consent of Kim Il Sung by his son and Kim Jung-rin in an attempt to court the reactionary elements of the North Korean hierarchy.

Kim Jung-rin, however, was demoted at the last session of the Supreme People's Council of the Korean Worker's Party. Though once ranked tenth in the hierarchy of the Politburo, Kim Jung-rin has been demoted to reserve member status with no voting rights. It is believed his position in the Politburo was reduced as a result of his repeated failures in operations against South Korea, not because Kim Il Sung disagreed with his actions.¹⁴

Regardless, it is apparent the senior Kim has not seriously chastised those involved, which confirms Western suspicions that either Kim Il Sung was aware of the attack or sanctioned it after the fact. In any event, it presents the free nations of the West, and especially the Republic of Korea, with a perplexing problem: how to deal with a nation which has shown an official tendency toward terrorist violence and over which the West exerts little influence short of armed confrontation.

U.S. POLICY ALTERNATIVES

The United States cannot avoid the question of deterring North Korean adventurism. The U.S. maintains over 40,000 troops in South Korea, most of whom are deployed north of Seoul. U.S. servicemen may become targets of North Korean violence, as they have been in the past. In addition, establishment of a credible U.S. deterrence to North Korean terrorism against South Korea and other U.S. allies must be an integral component of the United States' Asian policy.

Deterring North Korean activities has traditionally proved extremely difficult, and this will likely continue. The United States does not maintain direct contact, either diplomatically or through third parties on a regular basis, with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Though the Chinese have acted as intermediary on a few occasions, the prospects for constructive contact are not encouraging.

North Korea has also successfully "played-off" its two major allies, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, against each other for the last thirty-five years. Consequently, both countries have tended to acquiesce to North Korean violence, rather than risk rupturing their relationship with the Kim regime. Following the Rangoon attack, the PRC registered its concern directly with Kim Il Sung, but stopped short of decrying the act in public for fear that North Korea would turn toward the Soviet

¹⁴ The Korea Herald, March 18, 1984, p. 3.

Union. As long as the tension between the Chinese and the Soviet Union continues, this situation will too.

The United States, however, still has several unilateral and bilateral options. The North Korean government has traditionally relied on Japan for economic aid in the form of loans and business investment. Though the Japanese have reevaluated their economic relationship with the DPRK, the United States should use its influence with the Nakasone government to insure that all forms of economic aid to North Korea are cut off.

Internationally, the United States should focus on its current policy of isolating North Korea in the world community. Many of the countries that play host to North Korean military advisors have no significant relationship with the United States and hence cannot be directly influenced. But concentrated U.S. attempts at indirect contact with sympathetic nations will ultimately bear fruit.

The People's Republic of China is perhaps the most influential nation with the Kim regime at present. With the continuing desire on the part of the PRC to upgrade its relationship with the United States, the question of deterring North Korean terrorist activities will surely be at the forefront of the U.S. agenda when President Reagan visits the PRC this month. Not only must the attacks against the South be stopped, but the entire specter of North Korean terrorism and arms trafficking must be quickly eliminated. Though the full extent of China's influence with the DPRK is unclear, China must be made to recognize the depth of the U.S. interest in curtailing North Korean activities and be encouraged to use that influence as a component of future U.S.-China relations.

CONCLUSION

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has become one of the most destabilizing regimes in the modern world. Through its worldwide export of arms and terrorist training, it has increased the level of violence between nations at war and instituted the practice of terrorism as a component of national policy.

For the United States, this is cause for concern. U.S. and North Korean objectives confront each other in the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, Africa, and Central America. As a result, U.S. attempts to reduce the level of conflict in these regions is hampered by North Korea's indiscriminate arms traffic for profit and the training of revolutionaries and terrorist groups active in the area.

The policy alternatives for the United States are limited. But they must be explored, especially with the People's Republic of China during President Reagan's visit late this month. Increased international pressure on the DPRK is vital if a reversal in North Korean attitudes toward international violence is to be realized.

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