

## **NORTH KOREA: EXPORTING TERRORISM**

### **INTRODUCTION**

**A**fter extensive investigation, the government of the Republic of Korea has concluded that communist North Korean agents had planted the bomb that exploded aboard a Korean Airlines plane last November, killing all 115 passengers and crew. This act of terrorism appears to have been an attempt by North Korea to destabilize the Republic of Korea — ROK or South Korea — and to disrupt this summer's Seoul Olympic Games.

Responding to a joint request from the South Korean and Japanese missions to the United Nations, the U.N. Security Council convened in special session last week to consider South Korea's charges. Twelve of the 15 Council members condemned the North Korean action, with only the Soviet Union, China, and Zambia refusing to admit Pyongyang's responsibility for the bombing. Calling the incident "a grave challenge to international peace and security," Japan's U.N. ambassador demanded that North Korea "refrain from repeating such criminal acts." South Korean Foreign Minister Kwang-soo Choi insisted that Pyongyang "renounce terrorism once and for all as an instrument of state policy."

**High Stake Competition.** The terrorist attack by North Korea against South Korea and last week's confrontation before the U.N. Security Council typifies the tension on the Korean Peninsula. Since the division of the peninsula in 1948, the rival governments in Seoul and Pyongyang have been involved in a high stakes competition to eclipse one another and emerge as the legitimate government of the entire peninsula. Throughout these years of struggle, the North consistently has shown its willingness to use violence and military force. In June 1950, North Korea invaded the South, launching a three-year war which cost an estimated one million Korean and over 50,000 American lives.

More recently, North Korea has sought to strengthen its diplomatic hand through aggressive support for international revolutionary movements. Using special training camps in North Korea as well as its own military personnel stationed abroad, Pyongyang has offered its terrorist skills to developing nation allies around the world. It has trained more than 5,000 terrorist recruits from 25 countries. North Korean military "advisors," meantime, have operated in some 30 nations; to Angola alone, Pyongyang has sent 1,000 advisors and 3,000 regular troops, while another 250 advisors are at work in Libya and 300 in Nicaragua. And North Korea's terrorist allies have included Italy's Red Brigades, West Germany's Baader-Meinhof Gang, the Japanese Red Army and, predictably, the Palestine Liberation Organization.

**Attempting Murder.** Sponsorship of terrorist attacks against the ROK has been part of Pyongyang's campaign to destabilize the South. The recent airliner bombing was not the first time that the North Koreans have used terrorist violence against their rival to the south. Twice in the last twenty years, agents from Pyongyang have tried to murder ROK presidents.

While America has no diplomatic relations with the regime led by aging North Korean dictator Kim Il Sung, the U.S. government should use all means available to encourage economic and diplomatic sanctions to press North Korea to cease its state sponsorship of violence. Also, the U.S. should urge its allies and Eastern bloc nations alike to take similar measures. Finally, Washington should urge the United Nations' International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to act against North Korea's terrorism.

## **PYONGYANG'S MAJOR EXPORTS: ARMS AND REVOLUTION**

Article 16 of North Korea's constitution calls for unity with "all the people of the world opposed to imperialism" and support for the "struggles for national liberation and revolution." In the early 1970s, Pyongyang began to put this principle into practice. The result: the North is training and arming terrorists and revolutionaries in Africa, Latin America, Middle East, and Asia.

The North has sought to bolster its international standing by forging new alliances. With its economy in shambles, however, economic ties with North Korea offer little rewards. Hence, Pyongyang has sought to use the export of revolution and terror as an instrument of its foreign policy and a source of revenues. These efforts also work to the advantage of the North's main communist ally, the Soviet Union, and Moscow's desire to recruit communist proxies around the world.

Over the last twenty years, North Korea has built some 30 special training camps within its borders which specialize in terrorist and guerilla warfare training. Intelligence sources report that over 5,000 recruits from some 25 nations have visited these camps to take part in various courses lasting from 3 to 18 months.

Pyongyang also exports terrorist skills. Over the past two decades, the North Koreans have dispatched some 8,000 military personnel to train thousands of soldiers in more than 30 countries.<sup>1</sup> According to *Jane's Defence Weekly*, "North Korean training is the cheapest available."<sup>2</sup>

## **Africa**

Pyongyang's principal target has been Africa, where, as two experts on Korea recently observed, "North Korea should be seen as the new relay in the execution of the African strategy of the USSR."<sup>3</sup> Pyongyang now is assisting the Soviets in their campaign to recruit clients on the African continent.

Angola is the largest North Korean base of operation in Africa. The Marxist regime in Luanda faces a formidable challenge from the freedom fighters of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). Indeed, only the presence of over 40,000 Cuban combat troops backed by several thousand Soviet and East German military advisors has prevented a UNITA victory. In 1984, North Korea provided further backing to Luanda by sending 3,000 regular troops and 1,000 advisors.<sup>4</sup>

Angola also is the site of North Korean training camps for guerrillas of the African National Congress (ANC) and the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO). Operating from bases in Southern Angola, SWAPO uses terrorist tactics to destabilize Namibia, and the ANC uses terrorism to bring down the South African government in Pretoria.

Zimbabwe has been Pyongyang's largest arms customer in Sub-Saharan Africa. Since taking power in 1980, the government of Prime Minister Robert Mugabe has received over \$400 million in North Korean equipment, including tanks, armored personnel carriers and artillery. Mugabe also has requested North Korean military assistance for his fledgling army. In 1980, Pyongyang responded by sending 150 trainers to Zimbabwe. North Korean military advisors organized and trained the now notorious Zimbabwe 5th Brigade, which massacred 2,000 civilians in Metabeleland during a 1983 campaign against Mugabe's erstwhile political rival Joshua Nkomo.

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1 *Vantage Point*, Naewoe Press, Seoul, South Korea, March 1986, p. 11.

2 *Jane's Defence Weekly*, April 4, 1987, p. 587.

3 P. Chaigneau and R. Sola, "North Korea as an African Power", Institute for Strategic Studies, University of Pretoria, South Africa, December 1986, p. 11.

4 *Vantage Point*, p. 13.

The North Koreans are making inroads elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa. Uganda has purchased \$40 million to \$50 million in North Korean rifles, ammunition, tanks, and military training since 1980. In the Seychelles, 80 North Korean soldiers "have de facto been controlling the [country's] defense force of 1,000 men."<sup>5</sup>

About 150 troops dispatched by Pyongyang serve in the Ethiopian Presidential Guard of Ethiopian dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam and, in late 1984, North Korea pledged to help construct a small arms factory in Ethiopia. Last year, Zambia concluded an agreement allowing for its armed forces to receive three years of North Korean military training.

Not surprisingly, Pyongyang has maintained close ties with fellow terrorist nation Libya. Since the mid-1980s, military advisors from Pyongyang have worked with Libya to assist the rebels in northern Chad. Tripoli has been an important North Korean arms client, having purchased \$430 million in tanks and anti-aircraft guns since 1978. About 250 military advisors from Pyongyang serve in Libya, some of whom are flight trainers at the Libyan Air Force Academy.

### **Middle East**

Pyongyang has dispatched military trainers to South Yemen, Iran, and Syria and has sold BM-11 multiple rocket launchers to Cairo, Damascus, and Tehran.<sup>6</sup> By far the largest recipient of North Korean arms and training in the Middle East has been Iran.

Since the Iran-Iraq war began in September 1980, North Korea has sold an estimated \$1 billion in weapons to Iran, including fighter jets and tanks. Pyongyang also has served as a Chinese proxy by reselling arms to Tehran which originally were supplied by Beijing. These Chinese weapons shipments to Iran via North Korea are known to have included *Silkworm* missiles. About 300 North Korean military advisors currently are stationed in Iran, many of whom are involved in pilot training.<sup>7</sup>

### **Latin America**

North Korean adventurism in the Western Hemisphere received world attention in October 1983 when the U.S. forces liberating Grenada discovered 24 North Korean

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5 Chaigneau and Sola, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

6 *Jane's Defence Weekly*, November 7, 1987, p. 1059.

7 *Insight Magazine*, July 20, 1987, p. 31.

advisors on the island. Also discovered was a secret document detailing a "free offer" of \$12 million in military assistance from Pyongyang to the People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada "for the purposes of further cementing and developing the friendship and solidarity between our peoples and armies."<sup>8</sup>

North Korean strongman Kim Il Sung's closest ally in the Western Hemisphere is Fidel Castro, who visited Pyongyang in March 1986 and signed a twenty-year defense treaty with North Korea. The two leaders pledged their support for "the non-aligned movement and national liberation movements...in Asia, Latin America, Africa and the rest of the world." Castro thanked Kim Il Sung for selling the Cubans "100,000 automatic rifles and tens of millions of rounds of ammunition."<sup>9</sup>

Since Castro already receives some \$4 billion in annual economic assistance from the Soviet Union, it is strongly suspected that these weapons from Pyongyang are being funneled to Nicaragua. It is estimated, meanwhile, that 300 North Koreans advisors have been sent to Managua to train Sandinista troops.

## **PYONGYANG'S TERRORIST TIES**

Over the years, North Korea has been linked to numerous international terrorist and revolutionary networks, including Italy's Red Brigades, West Germany's Baader-Meinhof Gang, and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Some analysts see Pyongyang's hand in the resurgence of the Japanese Red Army. A European intelligence report recently claimed that the Japanese Red Army, while relatively inactive for over a decade, has resumed action in international terrorism.<sup>10</sup> The report also claims that some Red Army terrorists have been trained at camps in North Korea and, in turn, have trained Philippine communist insurgents at a base in Lebanon. And according to other intelligence reports, the Red Army is suspected of masterminding the rocket attacks on U.S. Embassies in Jakarta and Madrid in 1986 and in Rome last year.

## **TERRORISM AGAINST THE ROK**

Kim Il Sung's regime has been implicated directly in several attempts to assassinate South Korean presidents. In 1968, some 31 North Korean commandos infiltrated the South and assaulted the Blue House, the presidential compound near central Seoul. The ensuing

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8 *Grenada Documents*, U.S. State and Defense Departments, Washington, D.C., September 1984, document #20.

9 *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report (Asia)*, March 12, 1986, p. D 10.

10 *The Washington Times*, January 13, 1988, p. 8.

battle ended only after all but one of the commandos had been killed by South Korean defenders.

In October 1983, the North attempted to murder ROK President Chun Doo Hwan during his state visit to Rangoon, Burma. A powerful bomb exploded during a wreath laying ceremony at a national shrine for Burmese war victims, killing four Burmese officials and 17 South Koreans. Four of the dead were ROK cabinet ministers. After two North Korean army officers were found guilty of the bombing by a Rangoon court, Burma severed diplomatic relations with Pyongyang.

## **KAL FLIGHT 858**

Last November 29, Korean Airlines (KAL) flight 858 en route from Baghdad to Bangkok via Abu Dhabi vanished with 115 passengers aboard. The speed with which the airliner disappeared from radar screens immediately suggested foul play. Because the disappearance occurred after a scheduled stop in Abu Dhabi, South Korean authorities focused attention on the 15 passengers who deplaned there. Two of them, identified as a father and daughter traveling under Japanese passports, already had flown on to Bahrain.

When the two attempted to board another flight in Bahrain, Japanese officials on the scene examined their passports and found them to be forgeries. While awaiting further questioning in an airport office, the couple attempted suicide by swallowing poisoned capsules concealed in cigarette filters. The elderly man died but the young woman survived and was extradited to Seoul.

On January 15, the ROK announced the result of its investigation. The two agents were identified as Mr. Kim Sung Il, 70, and Miss Kim Hyun Hee, 26, both North Korean citizens. The woman's confession produced a startling and sober series of revelations about her own involvement in this terrorist act and Pyongyang's involvement in terrorism directed at the ROK. Her testimony revealed:

- ◆ That she and her accomplice had planted explosives on the KAL jet under orders from Kim Jong Il, the son and heir apparent of North Korean strongman Kim Il Sung.
- ◆ That her father was a North Korean Foreign Ministry Official who currently is the fisheries attache at Pyongyang's embassy in Angola.
- ◆ That both she and her deceased partner, with whom she had worked as a "father-daughter" team since 1984, worked for the Research Department of the North Korea Communist Party's Central Committee, and she had been schooled as a covert operations officer for seven years.
- ◆ That, after receiving a month of explosives training, the pair departed North Korea for Baghdad via Moscow, Budapest, Vienna, and Belgrade.

Kim Jong Il reportedly hoped that the disappearance of the South Korean airliner would accomplish two political goals. First, the incident would raise worldwide suspicions about the ability of the South Koreans to provide security during this summer's Seoul Olympic Games; second, coming just two weeks before the first open ROK presidential election in sixteen years, the plane's downing might cause a domestic crisis and derail the ongoing democratization process.

## **NORTH-SOUTH COMPETITION**

Despite North Korea's almost constant efforts to destabilize the ROK, Pyongyang is losing the competition with the ROK. Seoul is outstripping its rival in economic performance and international recognition and has grown increasingly confident in its standoff with the North. *The Wall Street Journal* recently reported that "Seoul has replaced Pyongyang-bashing with a world-wide diplomatic offensive to achieve dominance over the North."<sup>11</sup>

The diplomatic scorecard is revealing: Seoul leads Pyongyang by 128 to 102 in official relations with foreign governments. On the economic front, the South's well known successes are wooing even staunch North Korean allies such as the People's Republic of China (PRC) into unofficial trade ties. Last year, ROK-PRC trade is reported to have reached \$1.5 billion. South Korean exports to the Third World consist of genuine economic assistance rather than arms and terrorist training. By 1992, the ROK's new Overseas Cooperation Fund, similar to the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), will offer loans to Korean companies seeking to invest in developing markets.<sup>12</sup>

**Giving Up the Goal.** Later this year, Seoul will host the 1988 Olympic Games, an important milestone for the ROK. For three weeks in September Seoul will be at the center of the world's attention. Despite its acts of violence and attempts to organize a boycott, North Korea has failed to derail the Games. On the contrary, because the Soviet Union, China, and other major Eastern bloc nations have officially accepted the Olympic invitations, this year's Games will be the first to be free from a political boycott in twelve years. Only North Korea, Cuba, Libya, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, Albania, and the Seychelles have turned down the invitations.

The South Koreans hope that the boost they receive from the Olympics will propel them into a pre-eminent position on the Korean peninsula, force the North to give up its goal of eventually conquering the South, and compel Pyongyang to bargain on Seoul's terms.

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11 Fredrick Kempe, "Olympics is Giving South Korea an Edge in Battle to Woo North Korea's Friends", *The Wall Street Journal*, January 13, 1988, p. 16.

12 *Ibid.*

## **CONCLUSION**

For the past several years, foreign observers have suggested that a generational change is underway in Pyongyang and that a new era of North Korean moderation and pragmatism, similar to the reform movement in mainland China, is at hand.<sup>13</sup> Sensing the political and public relations value inherent in such an image, the North Korean leadership has sought to promote this perception. In truth, the North seems to be growing more desperate and aggressive in the face of Seoul's successes.

The Reagan Administration has begun to recognize the danger posed by North Korean terrorism. In the wake of the KAL bombing the State Department declared that Pyongyang's actions "just don't live up to the standards of civilized behavior" and announced on January 20 that North Korea had been placed on the official U.S. list of nations which engage in international terrorism. The other countries on that list are Iran, Libya, Syria, and South Yemen. The State Department also tightened travel restrictions on North Korean visitors to the U.S. and revoked last year's relaxation of "contact policy," which for the first time allowed American diplomats to engage in unofficial and informal conversations with North Korean counterparts.

The U.S. should take other steps aimed to punish Pyongyang for its involvement in state-sponsored terrorism. Among them:

- ◆ Washington should support Seoul's plan to raise the bombing incident during the upcoming meeting in Montreal of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). At the February 29 ICAO Executive Council session, South Korea will introduce a resolution condemning North Korea for the grave threat it poses to international aviation.
- ◆ The U.S. should encourage its allies to condemn the North's terrorist actions and apply appropriate diplomatic and economic sanctions against Pyongyang.
- ◆ Washington should press North Korea's communist allies, particularly China and the Soviet Union, to condemn the North's brutality and use their private channels to warn the Kim Il Sung regime against using such tactics in the future.

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13 For an example of this analysis, see Selig Harrison, "North Korea Floats a Revolutionary Idea: Realism," *The New York Times*, November 22, 1987, p. E3.



- ◆ The U.S. should offer the ROK appropriate assistance to guarantee security during the Seoul Olympic Games.

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