



INTERNATIONAL RISK ASSESSMENT

North Korea Update

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North Korea

While the world's attention has been focused on the dramatic events in Iraq, the situation in North Korea, another part of President Bush's "axis of evil", has escalated. This locked-up Stalinist state has been indulging in one of its periodic fits of nuclear sabre-rattling. Does the "Dear Leader" Kim Jong Il really mean to provoke a confrontation with Japan and the United States? Will his brinkmanship win him the respect and economic aid he so desperately needs? Will the United States attack North Korea once they have dealt with Saddam Hussein?

International Risk has produced an assessment of what is likely to happen and the potential effects of a confrontation both regionally and around the world.

Current Situation

The present crisis emerged last October when U.S. officials said that North Korea had admitted to running a secret nuclear weapons programme based on enriched uranium in breach of a nuclear safeguard agreement reached in 1994. America then suspended oil shipments to North Korea which is desperately short of electricity. The North Koreans pulled out of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, expelled the UN monitoring team and resumed work on their plutonium reprocessing factory at Yongbyon.

Throughout this crisis the North Koreans have insisted on face-to-face discussions with the Americans, but the U.S. government has been equally insistent on multilateral talks, arguing that North Korea's nuclear ambitions concern the rest of the world not just the U.S. To make their point both sides ratcheted up their military positions. The U.S. sent an aircraft carrier to the region and announced that Stealth fighters sent to South Korea on training exercises would remain when the exercises ended. North Korea threatened to test-fire ballistic missiles and intercepted a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft in international airspace.

Something had to give. On 12 April Kim Jong-Il wavered. Perhaps the swift defeat of the Iraqi army and the downfall of Saddam Hussein had brought home to him the power of the American military machine. Perhaps he considered that he had taken his brinkmanship as far as it could be profitable. Certainly the Chinese, his only remaining friend, had put pressure on him and he announced: "If the US is ready to make a bold switchover in its Korean policy for a settlement of the nuclear issue, North Korea will not stick to any particular dialogue format". Washington was willing to accept China's presence at talks as proof of their "multilateral" nature and on 23 April talks hosted by China in Beijing began between North Korea and the United States.

The following day they broke up, apparently in disarray, with the Americans announcing that the North Koreans had claimed that they already possessed nuclear weapons and had threatened to "prove" it soon while the North Koreans claimed they had put forward a "new bold proposal". Both sides retreated to seemingly intransigent positions with President Bush telling NBC that North Korea "was back to the old blackmail game".

However, all - as in most things to do with North Korea - was not as it seemed. In an unprecedented diplomatic move on 28 April the Chinese Foreign Ministry in Beijing called in twenty Western diplomats and gave the Chinese version of what had happened at the talks. The North Koreans had indeed offered a deal which included dismantling its nuclear programme, suspending ballistic missile tests and halting missile exports. In return the United States would be required to change its "antagonistic attitude" towards North Korea. No more talk of regime change?

Caught off guard by this Chinese announcement, US Secretary of State Colin Powell confirmed that North Korea had indeed proposed a deal. "They put forward a plan that would ultimately deal with their nuclear capability and their missile activities, but they, of course, expect something considerable in return".

This is the crux of the current dilemma. Washington has made it plain that it will not pay for the elimination of a nuclear weapons programme which should never have begun in the first place. And what else does Pyongyang want? Completion of the light water power stations, oil for its industry, food for its starving millions, anything and everything to hold the crumbling country together and keep the Stalinist regime in power. It is not a programme which will find much favour in a Washington much emboldened after the victory over Saddam.

American officials say this means that the Pyongyang regime could produce nuclear weapons in months rather than years. Seeking to cool the situation, the US has said it will not call - yet - for UN sanctions against North Korea, a move

the North Koreans say will be tantamount to "a declaration of war". They are insisting on face-to-face discussions with the Americans but the US government is equally adamant that only multilateral talks will suffice because North Korea's nuclear ambitions concern the rest of the world not just the U.S.

Meanwhile the crisis is ratcheting up with the US sending an aircraft carrier and bombers to the region and North Korea is threatening to test fire ballistic missiles.

International Risk's assessment is:

- 1. A war remains unlikely. The crisis would appear to have been cooked up by Pyongyang, just as on previous occasions, to squeeze financial concessions out of the developed world and North Korea's frightened neighbours. US officials argue that the original leaking of the news that Pyongyang was resuming work at its nuclear facility was done purely for financial blackmail and that there is still no proof that the North Koreans have nuclear weapons. However the possibility that it already has or can soon make them remains North Korea's ace in the hole. Others suggest that Kim Jong Il is trying to prove himself as tough as his late father.*
- 2. A significant danger is that war could erupt from a miscalculation. President Bush has named North Korea along with Iraq and Iran as his "Axis of Evil" and has made it plain that once he has finished with Iraq, North Korea is next on his list. Mr Bush may well believe he can deal with that impoverished, starving country without going to war but he may inadvertently push the "Dear Leader" into a situation where the North Korean will attempt to unleash his "Weapons of Mass Destruction".*
- 3. In another scenario, he may defy the Americans and start up his nuclear production line, forcing the U.S. to use their smart bombs to destroy his nuclear facilities. This would, of course, incur the danger of spreading nuclear contamination to neighbouring countries or outright war. There is little doubt that is what the North Koreans are gambling on - that George Bush and the Japanese will pay up rather than run these risks. This is beyond poker, it is Russian Roulette played to the extreme.*
- 4. Whilst the current crisis has been triggered by Pyongyang's nuclear sabre-rattling, the harsh reality remains that even if the current crisis is contained in the short term, one way or another; that North Korea remains a potent threat through chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction. This is an issue that has yet to be addressed. It is doubtful that the U.S. & Japan will let this situation continue for much longer and Kim Jong Il's regime will come to an end – the question is not if, but when.*

The Military Balance

North Korea has a huge army, one million strong, but much of its equipment is fifty years old. It has 3,000 battle tanks, a large number of various sized artillery pieces, 500 combat aircraft, mainly ageing Mig fighters, and 22 attack submarines. Its main strength lies in its arsenal of Scud-C and medium range Rodong missiles and its threat lies in the Taepodong ballistic missile which can already reach Japan. Shigeru Ishiba, the Japanese Defence Minister, has warned Pyongyang that Japan would launch a pre-emptive strike if it found evidence that the North Koreans were about to launch a missile attack.

CIA Director, George Tenet, says the North Koreans have developed but not yet tested a three-stage version of the Taepodong capable of hitting America's West Coast. What is not known is the state of morale of the North Korean soldiers. They certainly look good in their serried ranks and they fought well in the 1950 war. What might be questioned is their loyalty. The regime rules by fear and indoctrination. It might not be enough in the face of superior firepower.

Although the present crisis has sprung from North Korea's apparent determination to produce nuclear weapons it is known that Pyongyang already has large stocks of the other two branches of "Weapons of Mass Destruction" - weaponized chemical and biological agents. The exact size and scope of the CBW programme is not known but a report by the South Korean Defense Ministry last September put the north's chemical weapon stockpile at between 2,500 and 5,000 metric tons. The U.S. Center for Defense Information says that the majority of the chemical weapons are filled with Mustard gas, Phosgene, Sarin and other agents. North Korea is also known to have produced quantities of the equally deadly Soman, Tabun and Hydrogen Cyanide. Their estimated annual capacity for producing biological agents is thought to be 1,000 metric tons of various germ weapons including Anthrax, Cholera and Bubonic plague. Exact information is hard to glean because Pyongyang refuses to sign the Chemical Weapons Convention - no doubt because it entails strict international inspection.

These chemical and biological agents have been successfully fitted to Scud rockets, artillery and mortar rounds and multiple rocket launchers and it is feared that in any conflict the North Korean army would launch chemical attacks on Seoul using long range artillery from dug-in positions just north of the demilitarized zone while special forces will carry biological agents into the city. North Korea and Iraq are known to have exchanged information on their CBW programmes over the years and there would be a certain lethal irony if Kim Jong-Il succeeded in using his weapons of mass destruction where Saddam Hussein failed.

There is no doubt that South Korea and the United State are well aware of the dangers posed by Kim's chemical and biological weapons. They carry out regular decontamination exercises and it must be assumed that plans are already made for destroying or attempting to destroy the guns threatening Seoul before they could unleash their deadly barrage. What is strange, however, is that during the current crisis, nothing has been said about the threat of the North's other Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Facing them is the relatively modest South Korean army of 560,000 well-equipped men along with 37,000 US troops stationed in South Korea. The Americans have 90 modern combat aircraft with others on aircraft carriers. They also have several nuclear submarines armed with cruise missiles on patrol. The Americans can also reinforce quickly. The U.S. would almost certainly prevail in any war but the cost would be great. The swift success of US-led forces in Iraq will not have gone unnoticed in Pyongyang.

The Background

No assessment of today's problems can be made without reference to the invasion of South Korea by the Soviet trained and armed North Koreans in June 1950. The "Great Leader", Kim Il Sung, had travelled to Moscow to obtain Stalin's reluctant approval for his adventure and Mao Zedong, had also agreed - even more reluctantly. The North Koreans swept away the South Korean army and the few badly trained and poorly armed Americans who remained in the country as advisors. In a move which has strange resonances today, the United States called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council. It seemed certain that whatever the Council decided, the Russians would veto any resolution calling for action. And so they would have done except that the Soviet delegate, Yakov Malik, had walked out of the Council in protest against the UN's refusal to seat communist China. Without his veto the council voted 9-0 in favour of condemning the North Korean invasion. The UN, consisting mainly of American soldiers, then went to war in defence of South Korea. It was to last four years and cost the lives of some five million people.

When the fighting petered out, the two countries remained tied together like twins, joined together physically and biologically but suspicious of each other, leading lives as separate as possible. South Korea trod a rocky path to democracy and prosperity but the North, first under Kim Il Sung and then his son, Kim Jong-Il, retreated into a sullen isolation, more Stalinist than Stalin. Now, with the Soviet

Empire broken up and China becoming increasingly westernised, the North Korean regime remains defiantly independent - what Kim Il Sung called "chuche sasang", meaning self reliance or national pride.

This defiance has expressed itself over the years in a series of aggressive, seemingly pointless acts. They have launched forays across the border, they captured the American spy-ship USS Pueblo - which they still refuse to hand back. They have dug invasion tunnels under the border. The prospect of war has constantly lurked in the background of North-South relations. None more so than when the North Koreans blew up a South Korean airliner in 1988 with a time-bomb, killing 115 people. The nuclear threat first emerged in 1994 and was bought off with two civilian reactors and supplies of oil to fuel their decrepit power grid. When Washington asked to inspect a suspected nuclear site in 1998 the North Koreans asked for a further £180 million "in compensation".

The Economy

At the heart of the crisis is the appalling state of the North Korean economy. Run on outmoded Communist lines and beset by natural calamities, the once prosperous rural landscape is a disaster and horrific stories seep out about starving people dying of hunger in the streets. Many try to escape to the relative prosperity of China; one estimate is that 300,000 have made the dangerous journey. Those that escape the Chinese guards who push them back across the border say that 70 per cent of prison inmates die of starvation. Factories are shut, fields deserted. Wages are less than a pound a month, probably the lowest anywhere in the world.

Most of the food provided by international aid agencies is diverted to the army, to the officials of the North Korean Workers' (Communist) Party and to members of the "Dearest Leader's" family and entourage. It makes a nonsense of Kim Il Sung's policy of "chuche sasang". The country relies on a trickle of oil and food from China - paid for in hard currency rather than on "friendship terms" - and on aid from the West which North Korea vilifies with such ferocity.

The EU maintains a Humanitarian Aid Office in North Korea to administer the aid - food bought in China with EU funds. Washington has pledged to donate 40,000 tones of food this year and to send another 60,000 tons if the monitoring of the aid distribution is improved. South Korea has promised to supply rice on credit for the next three years. Germany and Britain are also helping.

Curiously, it is Japan, under threat from North Korea's missiles, which is the largest importer of North Korean products. Figures compiled by the Korean Trade Investment Promotion Agency in South Korea show that Japan imported \$225.62 million of North Korean products in 2001. Seafood - as might be expected - and gourmet mushrooms figured largely. Another survey by the Japan Textiles Importers' Association showed that Japanese men bought 650,000 Korean suits last year.

A less welcome import from North Korea is methamphetamines, better known as Ice, a potent, illegal stimulant favoured by Japanese drug users. Fishing boats smuggle it into Japan to get a slice of the multi-billion dollar market. Another way the North Koreans benefit from Japan is by the \$85 million sent by the 200,000 Koreans living in Japan to their relatives in North Korea. These may seem small amounts to a nation run by modern economic methods but they are vitally important to a nation run by such mediaeval methods as North Korea.

The Rocket Economy

It is a paradox which infuriates the American that North Korea's rocket programme which eats up so much of its money is, at the same time, one of its biggest money earners. Starting with basic Scud missiles made by the Soviet Union, its scientists have developed effective weapons sought by nations anxious to make themselves members of the weapons of mass destruction club. Egypt provided North Korea with Scuds in the 1980s and the North Koreans reworked them into the longer ranged Scud-C. They have helped Pakistan and Iran with their missile programmes and have supplied the Yemeni army with working Scuds. According to unidentified US security sources reported in a Japanese daily paper, Sankei Shimbun, claimed in early April that North Korea shipped about 10 Scud-B missiles to Pakistan in late February on a Pakistani freighter after they were loaded at a North Korean port the same month.

The Yemeni connection led to embarrassment all round in December 2002 when a Spanish frigate, acting on US intelligence, intercepted an un-flagged North Korean freighter in the Arabian Sea in the belief that it was carrying contraband to Iraq. The Spanish boarding party discovered 15 Scud missiles and their warheads hidden under sacks of cement and the ship with its cargo was handed over to the US Navy. The North Korean and Yemeni governments promptly protested: it was a legitimate arms sale. The US had to hand over the ship and its cargo.

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfield commented: "North Korea doesn't like to hear me say it, but they continue to be the largest proliferator of missiles and ballistic missile technology on the face of the earth. They are putting in the hands of many countries technology and capabilities which have the potential for destroying hundreds of thousands of people."

Regional Effects of the Crisis

China originally adopted a hands-off approach. Beijing would rather the United States and North Korea sorted out their problem without involving China. It would also have raised no objections if the United Nations Security Council became involved. But, as we have seen, it is being forced to play an increasingly important role in the negotiations. The threat of a nuclear war on her frontier could not be ignored.

It has also said that it does not oppose the UN Security Council becoming involved in efforts to resolve the problem. If, however, it all goes sour, China would, of necessity, become involved. The threat of a nuclear war on her frontier could not be ignored.

Japan's warning that it would make a pre-emptive strike if it was threatened by the launch of a North Korean ballistic missile may well mark the end of its post-war pacifism. Defence Minister Shigeru Ishiba said that Japan could boost its military strength in order to reduce dependence on America for its defence: "there is nothing like a free ride in the post Cold-War era".

South Korea, anxious to maintain its standard of living and its new-fledged democracy, but at the same time longing to be reunited with its troublesome twin can do little except hope that all will come right in the end.

Sunshine Policy

The current crisis has dashed the hopes of South Koreans who, despite their suspicions of their troublesome twin, are anxious to become one nation again. For a time under the "Sunshine Policy" of the last South Korean President, Kim Dae Jung, it seemed that at long last there was a chance that reunification might be brought about. His policy was one of sweetness and light towards the North

rather than antagonism. In June 2000 he travelled to Pyongyang on what was then seen as an historic three-day visit to Kim Jong Il.

The two leaders, one in a smart business suit and tie, the other in a zippered bomber jacket, flares and high Cuban heels greeted each other warmly and agreed that there should be no conflict between them; there would be no more acts of violence and no more mutual denunciations. They also agreed to open military hotlines across the heavily armed ceasefire line to defuse confrontations. "We will not allow reunification by force and we have no desire to attack North Korea", said Kim Dae Jung.

There were many questions left unaddressed; nothing was said about a peace treaty ending the 50-year-old war or dismantling the fortifications along the demilitarised zone. What did emerge however was a vision of a loose confederation of separate states with independent defence and foreign policies." We will help build North Korea's infrastructure: railways, power stations and ports", said Kim Dae Jung. In return the North would provide cheap, highly skilled labour.

Kim Dae Jong returned to Seoul a hero. Could this really mean the reunification of families, no more fear of incursions from the North, and, for businessmen, the opening up the rest of the world by road and rail? They hoped so and the rest of the world was so impressed by the Sunshine Policy that Kim Dae Jung was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Alas, it has all gone sour, leaving Kim Dae Jong's successor, Roh Moo Hyun with a dangerous mess to clean up. Accusations have been made that the summit between the two Kims took place only because a huge bribe of up to US\$500 million was paid to Kim Jong Il. It is claimed that the summit was delayed by one day because the last tranche of the bribe had not arrived. The money is said to have come from the huge, but financially troubled, Hyundai conglomerate which has been involved in projects in North Korea. In January of this year Chung Mong Hun, head of Hyundai, and 14 others were barred from leaving the country while the allegations were investigated.

The fall-out from the accusations has now involved Kim Dae Jung. On March 14, 2003, South Korean President Roh reluctantly agreed that a special counsel should investigate whether Kim approved illegal transfers of money to a shadowy North Korean bank account - known to be controlled by the North Korean leader - to buy his participation in the North-South summit. However, President Roh stated that he will institute curbs on the investigation so as not to "disrupt" the North-South Korean relations.

(Hyundai Merchant Marine executives and officials of the previous South Korean government acknowledged in February (2003) the secret transfer of US\$500 million to North Korea, much of it just days before the summit of June 2000.)

All this leaves the Sunshine Policy shrouded in storm clouds. The South is in political turmoil. And Kim Jong Il is thought to be \$500 million better off. He has also threatened to freeze relations between North and South if any investigation is conducted into secret payments to his accounts.

A Criminal Regime

It has been reported in South Korea that the Hyundai Sunshine Policy payments were made through the Macao-based North Korean firm, Cho Kwang Trading Company which is described in intelligence circles as a front for "Room 35" the name given to the North Korean external secret service. Apart from its espionage activities this service is notorious for money laundering, forgery, drug trafficking, cigarette smuggling and kidnapping.

In the most recent international incidents, the Royal Australian Navy captured the North Korean freighter, Pong Su, in April after a five-day chase. Twenty six North Koreans were charged with drug smuggling after 50 kgs of high-grade heroin, worth more than US\$50 million, was found on a beach in the state of Victoria. This suggests the North Korean government maintains contact with some of the world's most unscrupulous crime syndicates - possibly potential customers for fissile material. Also in April, a freighter loaded with uranium enrichment equipment destined for North Korea was intercepted by Egypt at the request of the German government.

Defectors report that Kim Il-sung ordered the cultivation of opium in 1992 and set aside state-run pharmaceutical plants to process it into heroin. The regime used foreign aid donations of fertiliser to boost the opium crop.

North Korean agents have regularly abused the use of the "diplomatic bag" since the 1970s. In the 1990s, as well as vast amounts of heroin and counterfeit US\$100 notes, they also smuggled large quantities of rhino horns from Africa to China through front companies in Macau.

But since opening a consulate in Hong Kong in 2000, in spite of US concerns to local authorities, there have been few reports of such crimes. However, it seems unlikely that the country's criminal activities have stopped as the need for hard

cash is still pressing. More likely is the rationale that China has warned its Stalinist neighbour not to abuse its diplomatic standing in the SAR.

All illegal profits go into the North Korean armed forces, and to financing the lavish life style of brandy and blonde - loving Kim and his entourage.

The extent to which the regime uses kidnapping as a weapon was revealed by Kim Jong Il himself in a face-to-face meeting with Japanese Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi last year when he admitted the abduction of 13 Japanese men and women in the 70s and 80s. Grabbed from beaches and fishing boats, they were used to train North Korean spies in Japanese language and culture. Only now have the survivors been allowed to go home.

Kim Jong Il also has people seized for his own pleasure. An avid Hollywood film fan, he ordered the kidnapping from Hong Kong in 1978 of the South Korean director Shin San Ok and his actress wife Choi En Hui in order to make films for him. Mr Shin spent four years in prison before he agreed. The couple escaped six years later.

Terrorism

North Korea has been heavily involved in state terrorism ever since Japanese Red Army hijackers wielding samurai swords and pipe bombs forced a Japanese airliner to divert to Pjongyang in 1970. The hijackers were greeted as revolutionary heroes, given medals, a personal audience with Kim Il Sung and housed in the "Village of the Revolution". This was the first of the international acts of terrorism carried out by the JRA. Many of them are now dead, some are still serving long prison sentences and the survivors have become an embarrassment to the North Koreans.

North Korea's own acts of terrorism have been directed almost solely against the South. In 1983 a North Korean sabotage squad set off a remote controlled bomb in Rangoon killing 17 members of a South Korean delegation. The dead included four Cabinet ministers. The then South Korean President, Chun Dwoo Hwan, escaped the bomb only because his car was stuck in a traffic jam. The bomb squad consisted of three regular army officers. One signed a full confession and it became apparent that the plot must have been approved by Kim Il Sung.

Four years later another bomb squad, consisting of an attractive 25-year-old former child actress, Kim Hyon Hui, and a man, Kim Sung Il, posing as her father, put a time-bomb on a South Korean Boeing 707. Hours later the bomb exploded

over the Indian Ocean destroying the jetliner and killing all 115 people on board. When they were traced and captured, Kim Sung Il bit into a cyanide capsule and died immediately but a policeman grabbed Kim Hyon Hui's capsule as she tried to bite into it. At her trial she confessed to everything and gave details of her training as a terrorist at the Kumsong Political-Military College in Pyongyang. She revealed that the orders for her mission were signed by Kim Jong Il. It was his operation. His aim was to prevent the Olympic Games being held in Seoul. He failed.

There have been other acts of terrorism, most of them carried out below the border. In one of a number of attempts to assassinate South Korean presidents a squad of commandos got within 800 yards of the Blue House, the Presidential residence in Seoul, before they were stopped.

In recent years these terrorist activities have become less frequent but the infrastructure of terrorism is still in place and if hostilities were to break out and the Pyongyang regime thought it could obtain an advantage - or revenge - by waging a war of terrorism it would not hesitate to do so. It is also possible that organisations such as al Qaeda would carry out their own terrorist operations hidden by the "fog of war".

In the light of these circumstances International Risk recommends that it is critical that corporations have, at the very minimum, the following in place:

- Corporate headquarters Crisis Incident Management Plans;
- Local office Crisis & Emergency Plans;
- Emergency Evacuation Plans;
- Simulated Incident Training Programmes;
- Travel & Security Plans;
- Updated Corporate Security Plans.

Japan & the North Korean Crisis

Kim Jong Il is a dictator whose rule is only threatened by the US but whose “life line” lies in nuclear weapons. Therefore he will push very hard to acquire them. The US war on Iraq will increase Kim’s conviction that he has to go nuclear and fast if he is to assure his own survival.

Should a pre-emptive US strike against North Korea’s nuclear sites result in the Korean peninsula blowing up into war, we will see a meltdown in the markets. But if a US military strike was successful, and Kim fell, Japan will have to fund the huge cost of rebuilding North Korea. Japan will have to agree to do so in order to avoid floods of North Korean refugees and to preserve its ‘special’ relationship with the U.S.

International Risk analysts assess the cost of North Korean reconstruction to be a total of US\$400 billion for the initial years of which Japan’s share could well be US\$100 – 150 billion, or 5% or more of its GDP.

The other option is that Kim Jong Il wins out and North Korea becomes a nuclear power and the US does not attack him. This would spark a dangerous Asian arms race led by Japan with China closely following.

For Japan the cost of re-arming could be at least 8% of GDP per year. That would radically affect the budget deficit.

Rebuilding North Korea

Even if conflict is averted this time and if the "Dearest Leader" brings off his game of Russian roulette successfully, it is hardly likely that North Korea can continue to hold the world to ransom. Sooner or later it will collapse or be forced to join the community of nations. In any case it will need rebuilding from top to bottom and will need all the expertise and resources of the developed world. There will be legitimate profits to be made and International Risk would advise any companies wishing to take part in what could be one of the world’s great development projects to start their planning now.

Summary

In this document, International Risk has set out the latest analysis of military, political and economic intelligence available - with reference to relevant historical factors. International Risk will continue to assess events and to provide crisis management advice.

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