# PROLIFERATION FOR PROFIT: NORTH KOREA IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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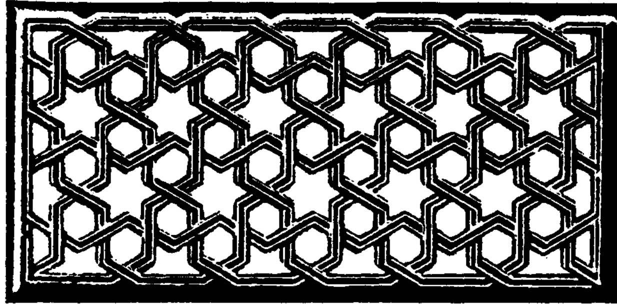

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the 1955 Bandung conference of non-aligned countries, North Korea has based its foreign policy on the concept of *chu'che* (self-reliance) and has sought to establish an independent position in the developing world so as to acquire international legitimacy. Its motivations for involvement in the Middle East have gradually shifted over the past forty years from a desire to gain legitimacy and recognition to punishing the United States for its leading role in the Korean War to boosting the sagging North Korean economy. Pyongyang's activities in the region represent a significant foreign policy challenge for the United States.

In the late 1950s North Korea began providing political, financial, and minor military assistance to a number of terrorist and revolutionary groups in the Middle East. Its frequent use of radical regimes as conduits and surrogates for supporting terrorism and revolutionary movements throughout the world has frustrated U.S. efforts to combat international terrorism.

The expansion of the North Korean economy in the late 1960s allowed President Kim Il Sung to adopt a more confrontational policy with South Korea and the United States. North Korea dramatically increased military aid to many terrorist and revolutionary groups. It continues to support rogue and rejectionist regimes opposed to the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Since 1980, however, North Korea's economy has teetered near collapse, prompting its leadership to adopt an activist policy to earn foreign currency abroad. Pyongyang provided tremendous military assistance to Iran during its war with Iraq. As the former Soviet republics and China have scaled back on sales of nonconventional weapons to the region in the face of international pressure, North Korea has become the leading proliferator of ballistic missiles, weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and related technology. This poses a serious threat to regional and global security.

North Korea has provided short-range ballistic missiles (based on the Soviet Scud-B) and/or related technology to Egypt, Iran, Libya, and Syria and has cooperated with them in the development of more modernized versions. Having tested its medium-range Nodong I missile, North Korea is expected to offer to sell it to Middle Eastern countries once it is in production. In addition, there is evidence that it played a crucial role in Syria's acquisition of a chemical warhead production capability for ballistic missiles in the late 1980s.

In the nuclear field, North Korea's most significant regional partner is Iran, and there is a high probability that Pyongyang will seek to sell nuclear weapons technology to Tehran.

As part of the overall U.S. strategy for dealing with North Korea, it is important to close Pyongyang's outlets for arms sales by influencing its primary Middle East clients, Iran and Syria. This will require close coordination with key U.S. allies in the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Israel), Europe (particularly Germany), and Asia (particularly Japan).

# PROLIFERATION FOR PROFIT: NORTH KOREAN INVOLVEMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

## OVERVIEW

There is a common perception that the involvement of North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea or DPRK) in the Middle East and North Africa is a relatively recent phenomenon focused on sales of short-range ballistic missiles. In fact, North Korea's activities in the region date to the mid-1950s, when it began providing political, financial, and military assistance to the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) in its anti-colonial struggle against France. The Algerian revolution was a high-water mark in a period that witnessed dramatic regional changes and the ideological challenges of Ba'athism, Arab socialism, and militant nationalism. Several Middle Eastern regimes succumbed to these philosophies and adopted militantly pro-Communist, anti-imperialist, and anti-Israeli stances that encouraged Pyongyang to increase its involvement in the region.

North Korea's activities in the Middle East can be broadly divided into three chronologically distinct periods, during which the nature and scope of its involvement have undergone significant changes. From the late 1950s to the early 1960s, it provided political and financial assistance to revolutionary groups; in the late 1960s and 1970s, it offered political and military support to revolutionary and terrorist groups as well as technicians and combat troops to the so-called Arab "confrontation states;" and since 1980, it has engaged in large-scale arms sales and the proliferation of ballistic missiles, weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and related technology.

### 1955-67: Non-Alignment and Revolution

Following the 1955 Bandung Conference, North Korea broke away from its exclusive Communist bloc orientation and initiated an independent foreign policy toward Third World countries. This new independence was politically and ideologically motivated by President Kim Il Sung's philosophy of *chu'che* (self-reliance), which employed military assistance as a primary means of winning international recognition, acceptance and support.

Pyongyang's involvement in the Middle East initially focused on the provision of political, financial, and minor military assistance to the various terrorist and revolutionary groups emerging in the region. Its objective was to establish itself both as a dominant factor in the Third World and a leader within the non-aligned movement.

For a variety of reasons, however, North Korea's involvement remained at relatively minor levels throughout this period. First, it was still recovering from a devastating three-year war with the United Nations and was in no

position to provide significant levels of assistance to anyone. Second, Kim Il Sung was preoccupied with consolidating his power base by eliminating internal threats to his leadership. And finally, the Soviet Union and People's Republic of China (PRC)—North Korea's primary allies—were also expending significant efforts in the region at the time, and as a result guided and in a few cases directed North Korean foreign policy initiatives.

### 1967-80: Expansion and Participation

By the mid-1960s, North Korea's economy had grown tremendously and was arguably at its peak. A significant portion of the economy was dedicated to military-related production, which enabled Pyongyang to begin exporting weapons and military equipment. In the late 1960s, Kim Il Sung initiated an aggressive policy of confrontation with South Korea (the Republic of Korea or ROK) and the United States under the banner of "coupling the potential for international revolution with the revolutionary potential of the Korean people." Although this policy clearly failed on the Korean peninsula, the political climate in the Middle East and indeed around the world was such that revolution, radical nationalism, and terrorism appeared to be in ascendance. As a result, North Korea dramatically increased military assistance to a broad range of terrorists, revolutionary groups, and anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist governments.

This assistance included transfers of military equipment, training (both in North Korea and third countries), and political support. Pyongyang initially funneled most of it directly through the PLO, with Egypt, Libya, and Syria functioning as minor conduits. This arrangement remained essentially unchanged until the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the resulting disintegration of the PLO, when Libya and Syria became the primary conduits of DPRK assistance to various Palestinian militant organizations and other Middle Eastern terrorist groups.

From 1967-80, North Korea also provided conventional military assistance—including small contingents of combat troops and technical advisors from the Korean People's Army (KPA)—to a number of Arab confrontation states. Pyongyang dispatched KPA troops and pilots to Syria after the 1967 War and a squadron of fighter pilots to Egypt prior to the 1973 War. Both countries received additional pilots, combat troops, and technical personnel (primarily air defense specialists) immediately after the 1973 ceasefire. Several years later North Korea dispatched pilots to Libya to fly combat missions in support of Libyan operations in neighboring Chad.

Unlike its earlier involvement in the region, the overwhelming majority of North Korean efforts in the 1970s were undertaken primarily on the basis of its independent foreign policy objectives, and not at the direction of China or the Soviet Union. This resulted in several incidents in which North Korean initiatives actually ran counter to those of the Soviets. A prime example of this occurred in the mid-1970s when, as a result of Egypt's increasingly pro-Western stance, the Soviet Union withheld critical military assistance from the Egyptian armed forces. President Sadat then turned to both North Korea and China for help (mostly spare parts) to keep the Egyptian military running, albeit at much reduced levels.

This emergency aid to Egypt was also important for Pyongyang. By the mid-1970s, North Korea's rapid economic growth had stalled and begun a

decline from which it has yet to recover. The Egyptian contracts for weapons, military equipment, and spare parts—though modest by U.S. or Soviet standards—were the largest North Korea had received up until that time and provided critically needed foreign exchange. More significantly, Egypt sowed the seeds of much of the current concern regarding North Korean military assistance to the region by providing it with a number of Scud-B ballistic missiles that subsequently formed the basis of Pyongyang's missile development program.

**1980-Present: Missiles for Money**

By the end of the 1970s, the North Korean economy had experienced an almost total collapse due to incompetent central management and a global economic recession. Pyongyang defaulted on its international financial commitments and was declared bankrupt by the International Monetary Fund. To help alleviate its economic crisis, North Korea directed great efforts into foreign arms sales. What few political and ideological restraints under which it may have previously been operating were quickly brushed aside by the desperate need to earn foreign currency.

In 1980, Iraq invaded Iran and inaugurated the region's longest and bloodiest conflict. The threat of militant Islamic fundamentalism spreading outward from Iran alarmed most of the Arab world, the Soviet Union, and significant segments of the West and led them to side with Iraq. Iran, on the other hand, was able to secure significant support from only China, North Korea, and Syria. During the eight-year war, North Korean military assistance to Iran increased dramatically to the point that it constituted approximately 40 percent of Iranian military hardware requirements. And when North Korea's ballistic missile program entered the production phase in the mid-1980s, it delivered approximately 100 indigenously-produced Scud missiles to Iran that were used to great effect during the so-called "War of the Cities."

With the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, the focus of North Korean military assistance to the region changed considerably. Much of the market for conventional weaponry dried up, since neither Iran nor other "friendly" countries were investing as heavily in conventional arms. At the same time, however, the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in significant changes in the military assistance and arms export policies of the newly independent republics, most notably a general reluctance to sell any items that would violate international agreements (e.g., the Missile Technology Control Regime and Non-Proliferation Treaty) and jeopardize Western economic aid. Similar international pressure has temporarily neutralized China's efforts to supply ballistic missiles (e.g., M-9s and M-11s) and so-called "dual use" nuclear technology to its friends and clients in the Middle East. Consequently, North Korea has partially filled this void by concentrating its efforts on the sale of ballistic missiles, weapons of mass destruction, and related technology, most notably to Iran, Libya, and Syria.

The resounding defeat of Iraq in Operation Desert Storm had little perceptible effect on North Korean activities in the region. Although the changing political environment induced a considerable reduction in its military assistance to revolutionary and terrorist groups, Iraq's use of modified Scud missiles in the Gulf War actually heightened interest in North Korea's modified Scuds, particularly its Nodong I.

## North Korean Motivations

Why has such a small, isolated country committed so much of its limited physical and political resources to the Middle East?

To begin with, North Korea relentlessly strives for legitimacy and acceptance *vis-à-vis* South Korea. It firmly believes that its aid program will persuade recipients to recognize Pyongyang as the sole legitimate government on the Korean peninsula, and thereby facilitate reunification with the South on its terms. An integral and concurrent aspect of this policy is its attempts to isolate South Korea. Although this policy was particularly successful during the 1960s, it suffered a distinct reversal in the 1980s, with many countries in the region pursuing political recognition of both North and South Korea. As a result, North Korea's goal now appears to be to win aid recipients' political support in its various international struggles, such as the current dispute with the United States and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Second, Kim Il Sung and the older North Korean leadership possess an unbridled hatred for the United States, which—through the UN—defeated their attempt to unify the Korean peninsula by force. They have neither forgotten nor forgiven the bitterness of that defeat. North Korea's anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist stance and support for various Third World governments and movements since the late 1950s are in part an indirect means of striking at the United States and its allies whenever possible.

The final and most significant factor was the precipitous decline of the North Korean economy in the 1970s. Few countries (e.g., the Soviet Union and China) were willing to extend any economic assistance, and the only source of hard currency became arms sales in the Middle East, particularly during the Iran-Iraq War. At their peak in 1982, North Korean arms exports—primarily to the Middle East, and there, mostly to Iran—amounted to some $700 million annually.[1] The end of the war, the collapse of the Soviet Union and China's decision to demand strictly cash transactions further eroded the North Korean economy in the 1990s. Building on the legacy of the Iran-Iraq war, North Korea focused heavily on missiles, WMDs, and related technology, which are currently its primary revenue-generating exports to the region, although U.S. sources estimate that these revenues have declined to around $50 million annually.[2]

## The Influence of the Soviet Union and China

One of the more intriguing aspects of North Korean involvement in the Middle East is its relationship with Russia and China. Most sources, if they discuss this subject at all, incorrectly conclude that Pyongyang has routinely served as a surrogate for both countries. While it has certainly acted at their direction on numerous occasions, it has only done so in situations in which it is politically expedient and its independent, *chu'che*-based foreign policy objectives have coincided with those of Russia, China, Cuba, or Libya. At the same time, there have been occasions when Pyongyang has competed with one

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1 *North Korea: The Foundations of Military Strength* (Washington, D.C.: Defense Intelligence Agency, 1991).

2 "U.S.-Korea," Associated Press, June 15, 1994.

of its ostensible allies. In the Iran-Iraq War, for example, the Soviets supported Iraq while China and North Korea were the primary supporters of Iran.

# NORTH KOREA'S MILITARY AID AND SUPPORT FOR TERRORISM: COUNTRY-BY-COUNTRY ANALYSIS[3]

## Algeria[4]

Although North Korea maintained close political ties with the FLN leadership that governed Algeria after the war of liberation, there is no evidence of any significant military assistance until the late 1960s, when, at the request of Algerian leader Houari Boumedinne, North Korea began providing training, arms, and other support to a number of revolutionary groups based in Algeria. These included the Chad National Liberation Front (known by its French acronym FROLINAT) and, more significantly, the POLISARIO movement seeking the independence of the Western Sahara. North Korean assistance to the POLISARIO, funneled through Algeria, is believed to continue today, although the current civil strife between the Algerian government and Islamic fundamentalists may have affected this situation.

## Egypt[5]

North Korea has maintained comparatively close relations with Egypt since establishing ties in August 1963. This is particularly true of economic exchanges and traditional military assistance. Pyongyang's initial contacts with the PLO are believed to have been managed through the Egyptians, as were those of many future leaders of various Middle Eastern terrorist movements. Due to the rapidly changing political scene in the Middle East in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, Lebanon soon superseded Egypt as the primary base for terrorist operations, prompting North Korea to transfer its support operations to Beirut, where it functioned with notable success until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

Aside from the PLO connection, North Korea's relationship with Egypt initially included political and economic exchanges and limited arms sales. In March 1973, however, Egypt requested direct military assistance in an effort to strengthen its weak air force and to internationalize the Arab-Israeli conflict. North Korea responded by sending a squadron of KPAF pilots. There are

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3 Portions of this section are excerpted from the author's book, *Terrorism: The North Korean Connection* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1990).

4 Interview data. See also Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), pp. 403-406; and Byung Chul Koh, *The Foreign Policy of North Korea* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), pp. 170-72.

5 Interview data. See also "Data on North Korea's Terrorism Exports," *Kunkje Munge (KM)* September 1983, pp. 123-33; *Some Facts About North Korea* (Seoul: Naewoe Press, 1984), pp. 60-65; and Jae Kyu Park, Byung Chul Koh, and Tae-Hwan Kwak, *The Foreign Relations of North Korea* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), p. 402.

conflicting reports whether these troops participated in combat missions against the Israeli Air Force during the subsequent October 1973 War.[6]

The Egyptian-North Korean relationship has not always gone smoothly, however. In 1972, Egypt deported North Korean diplomat Kim Young Soon on charges of instigating and aiding anti-government student demonstrations at Cairo University, and conducting operations against Israel from Egyptian territory. In November 1975, Egypt deported a North Korean military attaché, Colonel Han Ju-kyung, on charges that he had been a significant participant in the Shukri espionage scandal that provided intelligence to Communist military attachés in Cairo. There have also been several episodes in which North Korean officials have been reprimanded or quietly asked to leave Egypt because of their involvement in smuggling.

The Egypt-Israel peace treaty and the Iran-Iraq War fundamentally affected North Korean military cooperation with Egypt. In making peace with Israel, Egypt secured a reliable source for advanced military hardware in the United States and no longer needed to rely on its North Korean connection. In addition, Egypt and North Korea backed opposing sides in the Iran-Iraq War. These events struck at the foundations of the relationship—maintaining the "revolutionary struggle against imperialism" and Egypt's inventory of obsolescing Soviet-bloc military equipment. Nonetheless, both parties were quite pragmatic and negotiated mutually acceptable changes to the nature of the relationship.

North Korea maintains low-level military cooperation with Egypt, such as regular exchanges of military delegations, but it is not clear whether the two countries maintain any substantial cooperation in ballistic missile technology (see below).

## Iran[7]

North Korean involvement in Iran is believed to have begun in the late 1960s with the funding and training of a number of revolutionary groups opposed to the Shah. These included the Iranian Communist Party, the People's Fedayeen, and the People's Mujahideen. This assistance is believed to have been provided through Palestinian organizations based in Iraq and Libya.

In 1972, a significant number of the roughly 120 terrorists brought to trial for anti-government activities in Iran stated that they had traveled to North Korea via Moscow for ideological and guerrilla warfare training. Although these groups never posed a serious military threat to the Shah, they were quite active—particularly the People's Mujahideen, which assassinated a number of Iranian political and military officials, as well as U.S. military

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6 Saad El Shazly, *The Crossing of the Suez* (San Francisco: American Mideast Research, 1980), pp. 83-84. See also "Jets Flown by North Koreans Are Reported in Clash with Israel Over Mideast," *New York Times (NYT)*, October 19, 1973; *The Foreign Relations of North Korea*, pp. 402-403; "North Koreans in Egypt," *Jerusalem Post (JP)*, March 26, 1974; "North Korea to Aid Arabs," *NYT*, October 18, 1973; and "Peled: N. Koreans Never Left the Ground," *JP*, April 6, 1983.

7 Interview data. See also *KM*, pp. 123-33; *Some Facts About North Korea*, pp. 60-65; and David Rees, *North Korea: Undermining the Truce*, Conflict Studies no. 69 (London: Current Affairs Research Services Centre, 1976), pp. 9-10.

personnel stationed in Iran.[8] North Korean assistance never approached that of the Iranian opposition's primary benefactors, Iraq and the Soviet Union, but rather was an adjunct to assistance being provided to the Palestinians, and is believed to have been phased out in the late 1970s.

In January 1979, the Shah and his family left Iran for an "extended vacation." On February 1, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini assumed power and ushered in a new era of militant Islamic fundamentalism. Shortly thereafter, North Korea embarked upon an ever-increasing diplomatic and military relationship with the new Islamic Republic, which culminated with Pyongyang providing approximately 40 percent of Iran's military requirements during its war with Iraq. The vast majority of this assistance consisted of ammunition, small arms, self-propelled artillery and tanks. Beginning in 1987, however, it also included Scud missiles.[9]

Aside from conventional military assistance and ballistic missiles, there have been a number of military-related incidents that highlight the broad dimensions of the cooperation between the two governments.[10] In the summer of 1987, for example, North Korean ships operating in the Persian Gulf were reported to be providing "early warning, long-range reconnaissance and targeting data to the IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps]." This information was subsequently used in planning IRGC speedboat attacks on ships transiting the Gulf.[11]

A by-product of military support for Iran has been cooperation with Iranian-sponsored terrorist organizations. In 1986, there were reports that a small number of the estimated 300 North Korean advisors in Iran were engaged in training Iranian terrorists.[12] During this same period, Pyongyang is alleged to have initiated its support for the Iranian-backed Hezbollah terrorist group in Lebanon, which is believed to continue today and is funneled through both Iran and Syria.

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8 "Murder in Iran," *Newsweek*, June 2, 1975. See also "Terrorist in Iran Kills U.S. Advisor," *NYT*, June 3, 1973; "Iran Vows Action against Assassins," *Washington Post (WP)*, June 6, 1973; "Police Slay Suspect in Iran Killing," *WP*, June 17, 1973; Timothy Severin, "To the Valley of the Assassins," *Horizon*, no. 10 (Spring 1968): p. 112; and "Perils of Reform: Attempted Assassination of the Shah," *Time*, April 23, 1965.

9 "The North Korean 'Scud B' Programme," *Jane's Soviet Intelligence Review*, vol. 1, no. 4, April 1989, pp. 177-81.

10 For example, in October 1984, Iranian businessman Babeck Seroush and Soviet émigré Yuri Geifman were indicted in New York on charges of conspiring to smuggle sophisticated electronic components used in missile guidance and night-vision systems to North Korea. See United States of America v. Babeck Seroush, U.S. District Court, Southern District of New York, Indictment 84 Cr. 767, October 10, 1984; and "Iranian Indicted in Plot to Send North Korea Restricted Equipment," *Wall Street Journal (WSJ)*, November 6, 1984.

11 "Iran Exercised Confrontation with U.S. Forces," *Jane's Defense Weekly (JDW)*, August 1, 1987, p. 168.

12 "North Korea Aids Iran's War of Terror," *WP*, February 3, 1986.

**Libya**[13]

North Korea and Libya are both ardent supporters of terrorism and national liberation movements around the world, but the extent to which Pyongyang has supported these activities through Libya, or with Libyan assistance, is unclear. There is a tremendous body of information that can be interpreted as indicating such involvement, but little is verifiable.

The Qadhafi government has provided substantial military and financial aid to radical regimes and virtually every terrorist organization and disaffected group that has requested it. This has included money, equipment, and instruction in the use of explosives, hijacking, basic psychological operations, assassination, various commando and guerrilla techniques, and more. Libya's aggressive terrorism policy has increasingly focused on undermining U.S. and other Western interests in the Third World.

North Korean involvement is believed to have begun almost immediately after Libya declared itself an independent republic in 1969. These initial contacts expanded to the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries on January 1, 1974. Since that time, Pyongyang has become increasingly involved in both conventional military assistance and Libyan-sponsored terrorism.

North Korea began providing minimal assistance to Libya in early 1970, but it was not until 1978 that significant military aid began to flow. This initially consisted of small arms sales but quickly grew to include DPRK-manufactured mortars, anti-tank guns, artillery (e.g., BM-11 multiple rocket launchers), and military support equipment (radios, cots, uniforms, etc.). In 1979, North Korea began providing small contingents of pilots to fly Libyan aircraft and train Libyan pilots.[14] This gave the KPAF pilots an opportunity to evaluate and train on the MiG-23, which they did not then possess. In July 1983, these pilots took an active part in the Libyan bombing of Faya Largeau in Chad.

Since concluding a treaty of alliance and cooperation in November 1982, North Korea has stationed a permanent military assistance group in Libya that has varied in size from twenty to 400 men. This group has not only performed traditional military assistance functions like coordinating arms sales, but has also conducted training for various terrorist groups and participated in Libyan combat operations.[15]

North Korean advisors are believed to have accompanied Libyan troops that entered Chad in June 1983. They were also present in 1981 when U.S. Navy jets shot down two Libyan fighters over the Gulf of Sidra, and in 1986 when the United States attacked military and "terrorist-related" targets in retaliation for

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13 Interview data. See also "Text of the State Department Report on Libya Under Qaddafi," *NYT*, January 8, 1986; *Some Facts About North Korea*, pp. 60-65; "North Korea in Africa," *Africa Now*, no. 40, August 1984, pp. 28-30; *KM*, September 1983, pp. 123-33; and Ray S. Cline and Yonah Alexander, *Terrorism: The Soviet Connection* (New York: Crane, Russak & Company, 1983) for an excellent view of Libyan involvement in terrorism.

14 "North Koreans Piloting for Libya," *NYT*, February 12, 1979, p. A6. It appears that these pilots initially replaced Pakistani contract pilots who had fulfilled the terms of their contracts.

15 "North Korea's Military Involvement in Africa," in *Some Clues for Understanding North Korea* (Seoul: Naewoe Press, 1986), pp. 100-107.

Libya's involvement in the bombing of the LaBelle discotheque in West Berlin. However, reports that North Koreans participated in air and air defense operations have not been confirmed.

By the mid-1980s, North Korean assistance to FROLINAT, which had been channeled through Algeria, was being delivered through Libya to its successors—first the Common Action Front (FAC) and later the Popular Armed Forces (FAP). However, this assistance is believed to have ended after Libya's 1987 defeat in Chad and the peace treaty between the two countries that followed two years later. Libya and North Korea have also cooperated militarily and supported revolutionary organizations in Somalia in the late 1970s and in Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, and other countries in the 1980s.[16]

Libyan-sponsored terrorism, which became significant in the late 1970s, has provided Pyongyang with a unique opportunity to expand its connections with radical organizations throughout the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. North Korean advisors in Libyan-operated camps have provided training to large numbers of foreign terrorists and guerrillas, including members of Fatah and dissident PLO groups such as the PFLP and Abu Nidal's Fatah Revolutionary Council, Spain's Basque ETA, the Common Action Front and Popular Armed Forces from Chad, FRELIMO, the Irish Republican Army, Italy's Red Brigades, the Japanese Red Army, the Philippines' Moro National Liberation Front and Islamic Liberation Front, Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front, Angola's SWAPO, New Caledonia's Kanak National Liberation Front, guerrillas in the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya, the Pattani United Liberation Organization in southern Thailand, and others.

The two countries maintain a significant level of military cooperation through the regular exchange of military delegations and the North Korean military assistance group stationed in Libya. Military assistance currently consists of varying numbers of training teams, pilots, and technical advisors. Cooperative support for terrorist and revolutionary groups has diminished somewhat since the 1986 U.S. air raids, but continues at low levels.

### The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)[17]

The earliest known reference to a North Korean relationship with the PLO dates to 1963, when Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad), who founded Fatah along with Yasser Arafat and Salah Khalaf, traveled to Asia for several months of training in the DPRK, China, and North Vietnam. These ties gradually expanded, with Pyongyang providing limited financial assistance and training to a small number of PLO activists in North Korea. The initial relationship is believed to have been managed through the Egyptians, and remained essentially low-key until the early 1970s, when the PLO was forced out of Jordan and established itself in Lebanon. North Korea rewarded the PLO's violently anti-American stance with a dramatic increase in military assistance, which was funneled directly to the PLO through Beirut until the 1982 Israeli invasion

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[16] Ibid. See also *Africa Now*, pp. 28-30; *KM*, September 1983, pp. 123-33; *Some Facts About North Korea*, pp. 60-65; and Park, Koh, and Kwak, p. 402.

[17] Since it is often difficult, if not impossible, to determine which PLO factions were actually receiving North Korean assistance at any specific time, the term PLO is used here in a more generic sense.

of Lebanon. Support for the PLO soon became a major component of Pyongyang's policy in the Middle East.

A steady stream of radical Palestinian leaders, including Sabri al-Banna (Abu Nidal) and Muhammad Da'ud Awda (Abu Da'ud), were soon on their way to receive training in North Korea. Although some sources indicate that DPRK-Palestinian contacts suffered a significant decline in late 1972, available evidence suggests that they were merely overshadowed by support from the Soviet Union.[18] In 1973, North Korea is believed to have dispatched its first significant military advisory teams to train PLO personnel in Lebanon, with a total of seventy to eighty advisors visiting Lebanon that year.

Following Syria's intervention in Lebanon in 1976, the nature of North Korean support for the PLO began to change. It was still channeled primarily through Beirut, but now only with the approval of Damascus. In addition, much of the training was now in conventional military subjects such as military engineering, artillery tactics, and air defense.

During their 1982 invasion of Lebanon, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) reportedly killed twenty-five and captured twenty-four of the roughly 300 North Korean personnel stationed in the country. Also captured were large numbers of DPRK-manufactured weapons, from hand grenades to BM-11 rocket launchers. It is interesting to note that during this period Yasser Arafat's personal bodyguard included at least two KPA Special Forces troopers.

The 1982 Lebanon War was severely disruptive to the PLO in general and to Fatah in particular. A large number of PLO fighters were forced to leave Lebanon under the terms of a UN-sponsored ceasefire, and the internecine fighting that followed split the organization apart. North Korean assistance being funneled through Syria now went primarily to PLO dissidents (e.g., the PFLP-GC) and the Iranian-backed Lebanese Shi'i group Hezbollah. Assistance channeled through Libya was also kept from Fatah. Other aid went directly or through third countries to Fatah. This confusing situation is believed to continue today. In March 1989, North Korea recognized the PLO office in Pyongyang as the embassy of the "State of Palestine," with Yasser Arafat as its president.[19] Later that year, a fifteen-member DPRK advisory team reportedly arrived at a Hezbollah base in the Bekaa Valley.[20]

North Korean financial and military assistance to Fatah and the new "State of Palestine" continues, as does aid to various other Palestinian groups that oppose Arafat, mostly through Syria and Libya. Small groups of PLO members have been identified as having received training in North Korea as late as 1992. It is presently unclear how the recent Israel-PLO accords will affect North Korea's support for the PLO. If joint statements and agreements are any indication, however, the relationship will likely remain strong.

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18 "Lebanon Is Said to Have Set up Liaison Unit With Commandos," *NYT*, September 23, 1972.

19 "PLO Office in P'yongyang Upgraded to 'State Embassy'," *North Korea News*, March 13, 1989, p. 466.

20 "In the Beqaa, Hezbollah Finds Unlikely Allies," *Insight*, January 1990, p. 29.

**Syria**[21]

North Korea initiated political exchanges with Syria in the early 1960s and established full diplomatic relations in July 1966. Their relationship grew to include high-level diplomacy, significant conventional military assistance, and support for international terrorism.

Pyongyang is believed to have sent a small number of military advisors and pilots to Syria in 1966. Along with technical specialists, they continued to travel to Syria in small numbers throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. During the 1973 War, North Korea began sending large contingents (estimated to eventually total some 2,000) of KPA air defense specialists, pilots, and tank crews to Syria. Some reports indicate that these pilots flew defensive patrols over Syria and suffered casualties at the hands of the Israeli Air Force.[22] After the war, North Korea also began to supply conventional weapons to the Syrian army, consisting primarily of spare parts, ammunition, and artillery systems like the BM-11 and ZPU-4.

By 1976, the majority of these military contingents had returned home. The few that remained served primarily as observers or advisors to terrorist groups. A small number of KPA observers are believed to have been on hand for Syrian operations against the Muslim Brotherhood in the city of Hama in the early 1980s.

Both countries are classified as "state sponsors of terrorism" by the U.S. State Department.[23] Unfortunately, very little detailed information has come to light concerning their cooperation on terrorist activities, which reportedly dates back to the late 1960s, when both countries became involved in supporting the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and later the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). This consisted primarily of ammunition, weapons, and financial assistance, although there were unconfirmed reports of advisors being dispatched during the early 1970s. This aid continued until 1977, when Pyongyang switched sides in the Ethiopian insurgency after the Soviet Union announced its support for the new government under Mengistu Haile Mariam.

In the early 1970s, North Korean advisors in Lebanon began providing assistance and training to a number of non-Palestinian terrorist and revolutionary organizations, including the Japanese Red Army, Baluch People's Liberation Front, and the Front for the Liberation of the Somali Coast. The majority of this assistance was funneled through Syria. In June 1972, North Korean instructors in Syria also conducted several training courses for an unknown number of Turkish Worker's Party (TWP) and Turkish People's Liberation Army (TPLA) members. By the early 1980s, support for these groups, which had been coordinated through Syria, is believed to have ceased.

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21 Interview data. See also *KM* pp. 123-33; *Some Facts About North Korea*, pp. 60-65; "N. Korea Sends Military Aid Abroad," *WP*, February 23, 1976, p.C18; "Foreigners Boost Syrian Buildup," *WP*, January 30, 1976; "North Korea to Aid Arabs," *NYT*, October 18, 1973; and "Arab Arms Aid Revives Eritrea Insurgency," *NYT*, September 1, 1969.

22 Yong-won Yu, "Comparison of North and South Korea's Air Power," *Wolgan Choson*, March 1991, pp. 378-91, as cited in *FBIS-EAS*, May 7, 1991, p. 16. See also "Foreigners Boost Syrian Buildup", *WP*, January 30, 1976, p. A1; and "N. Korea Sends Military Aid Abroad," p. C18.

23 *Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1993* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, April 1994), p. 21.

Following the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the PLO became increasingly fragmented and Syria firmly allied itself with the more radical and anti-Arafat factions. North Korean assistance to various terrorist groups in Lebanon, which was seriously disrupted by the war, is believed to have resumed by the beginning of 1983, although now directed primarily to Syrian allies within the PLO rather than the small remaining Fatah faction in Lebanon. Pyongyang's assistance for Fatah was now routed through other countries. In the early 1990s, North Korean advisors in Lebanon and Syria are believed to have begun providing training to members of the Turkish Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK) and the Iranian-sponsored Hezbollah. Joint support for terrorist organizations in Lebanon and Syria continues but is apparently strictly controlled by Damascus. The primary recipients appear to be pro-Syrian Palestinian groups, Hezbollah, and the PKK.[24]

North Korea and Syria continue to maintain a moderate level of military cooperation, based primarily on the regular exchange of military delegations and the transfer of ballistic missile and WMD technology (see below).[25]

**Yemen**[26]

North Korean relations with the strife-torn Republic of Yemen pre-date both the establishment of a united Yemen in May 1990 and that of one of its predecessor states, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY or South Yemen) in November 1967. In the mid-1960s, North Korea established a working relationship with the National Liberation Front (NLF), the precursor of the PDRY government. This relationship quickly developed into joint support for terrorist and leftist revolutionary organizations. Sometime during 1969-70, North Korea began to utilize South Yemen as a distribution point for its military assistance to the ELF and later the EPLF. This aid continued until Pyongyang switched sides in the Ethiopian insurgency in 1977.

During this period, North Korea, along with Cuba and the Soviet Union, began to play a significant role in South Yemen's support for many of the Palestinian and leftist revolutionary organizations in the Middle East and eastern Africa by providing instructors and weapons. From 1970-72, a team of approximately ten to thirty North Korean guerrilla warfare instructors stationed in South Yemen are believed to have provided training to a number

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24 There is some evidence to suggest North Korean involvement in the early 1990s in training members of the PKK at a camp in the Lebanese village of Halwa, three miles west of the Syrian border. The PKK has maintained this base since coming to Lebanon in 1984, and an estimated 1,000 PKK fighters have received military training there and in other Syrian-controlled areas of Lebanon.

25 *KM*, pp. 123-33. See also *Some Facts About North Korea*, pp. 60-65; and Park, Koh, and Kwak, p. 402.

26 Interview data. See also "Kim Il-song Cables President of Yemen," Korean Central News Agency, October 13, 1992, as cited in *FBIS-EAS*, October 15, 1992, p. 23; "Yemens Merge," *Los Angeles Times (LAT)*, May 23, 1990, p. A12; *KM*, pp. 123-33; "The Selling of Terrorism: Profit from a Lucrative Export," *Insight*, July 20, 1987, pp. 30-31; *Some Facts About North Korea*, pp. 60-65; "U.S. Says Libya, Somalia, Iraq and South Yemen Aid Terrorists," *NYT*, May 9, 1977; Rees, pp. 9-10; and "Aid Pledges Given to Southern Yemen," *NYT*, August 7, 1968.

of terrorist and revolutionary organizations, including the Japanese Red Army, PLO, PFLP, ELF, and others. Available evidence suggests that some of the instruction was conducted in isolated areas on the island of Socotora. By early 1977, these activities had expanded to the point that they aroused the concern of the U.S. State Department, which accused South Yemen, as well as Libya, Iraq, and Somalia (all supported by North Korea) of supporting terrorist organizations.

Relations between the DPRK and South Yemen continued to expand during the late 1970s. After concluding a military cooperation treaty in 1978, the North Korean presence in South Yemen increased to include a 100-150 member military training team responsible for both conventional military assistance and training foreign terrorists and revolutionaries. In 1984, the two countries signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Thereafter, North Korea maintained a large military advisory team in South Yemen. Special Purpose Corps instructors from this team provided instruction in the use of explosives, bomb and boobytrap construction, clandestine organization and communication, kidnap and assassination methods, and the use of weapons.

In May 1990, after years of friction, the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) and South Yemen merged to become the Republic of Yemen. North Korea's close relations with the former PDRY quickly followed to the successor country. There is some evidence to suggest, however, that shortly before the merger its military advisory team (as well as their Soviet and Cuban counterparts) was either withdrawn or significantly reduced.

It is unclear what position North Korea has taken concerning Yemen's current internal strife. It would seem reasonable, however, to assume that it will support the members of the Yemen Socialist Party, the dominant party in the former South Yemen.[27]

[27] "North Korea to Arm South Yemen, North Yemeni Says," Reuters, June 8, 1994. See also "North Korea Denies Yemen Arms Deal," Associated Press, June 12, 1994.

# NORTH KOREAN PROLIFERATION OF BALLISTIC MISSILES AND WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION: COUNTRY-BY-COUNTRY ANALYSIS

Pyongyang's greatest success in penetrating the Middle East has been through the sale or transfer of ballistic missiles and related technologies. This has its roots in the late 1970s, when Egypt and North Korea agreed to cooperate in the field of ballistic missile development. Today, Egypt, Iran, Libya, and Syria are engaged in various degrees of cooperation with the DPRK in this field. North Korea currently produces a variety of ballistic missiles based on the old Soviet Scud-B. To date, it has sold only two versions of these missiles to the Middle East, the modified Scud-B and -C. It is currently in the final development stage of a third missile, the Nodong I, which has a range of more than 1,000 km and in which Iran and Libya have shown considerable interest.

**North Korean Ballistic Missile Characteristics**

| | SCUD R-17E | SCUD-B | SCUD-C | NODONG I |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| OTHER NAMES | ——— | ——— | Scud PIP | Scud-D |
| RANGE (km) | 280-300 | 320–340 | 500 | 1,000-1,300 |
| WARHEAD (kg) | 1,000 | 1,000 | 700-800 | 800 |
| YEAR IN SERVICE | 1981 | 1985 | 1989 | 1994 (est.) |

## Egypt[28]

In the 1950s and 1960s, Egypt unsuccessfully pursued several indigenous programs in an attempt to develop a ballistic missile capability. It was not until the early 1970s, however, when the Soviet Union provided a small number of Scud-B systems, that it finally attained that goal. Egypt became the first nation to fire ballistic missiles in combat since World War II when it launched three Scuds at Israeli positions in the Sinai during the 1973 October War.[29]

After the war, Egypt initiated a modest program to maintain and upgrade its Scud inventory by replacing Soviet parts with indigenously-

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[28] This section is excerpted from William C. Potter and Harlen Jencks, eds., *The International Missile Bazaar: The New Suppliers Network* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

[29] "Ballistic Missiles in Egypt," *Jane's Intelligence Review (JIR)*, vol. 4, no. 9, September 1992, pp. 452-58.

produced or foreign-purchased components. By the early 1980s, this modest program evolved into an effort to develop three ballistic missile systems: the RS-120, the Condor II/Vector, and an improved Scud.

The RS-120 program began in 1986, when Egypt approached IFAT, a member of an international consortium of missile technology companies known as CONSEN, seeking assistance in developing a new ballistic missile. IFAT sub-contracted with the German firm Messerschmitt-Boelkow-Blohm (MBB) and Italy's SNIA. The initial goal of the project was to develop a missile with a range of 120 km. There are, however, indications that the ultimate goal was to develop a much longer-range missile. Little progress had been made on the project when, due to international pressure on MBB and SNIA, it was canceled in 1988.[30]

The Condor II/Vector project began in late 1982 and was intended to produce a ballistic missile with a range of 800-1,000 km in cooperation with Argentina, the CONSEN Group, and Iraq. For a variety of reasons, most notably U.S. and British political pressure on Egypt, the program was canceled in mid-1988. Although the cancellation of the Condor II was a significant blow to Egypt's ballistic missile development program, it was not a complete loss. The project provided Egypt with practical experience and a large body of missile technology that it applied to the modernized Scud-B program.[31]

The Egyptian improved Scud program (variously identified as "Scud-B100" or "Project T") dates back to the late 1970s, when North Korea and Egypt concluded an agreement to exchange missile technology and personnel. More significantly, Egypt, in violation of its agreement with the Soviet Union, transferred a small number of Scud-Bs to the DPRK.[32]

After North Korea attained its own Scud-B production capability in 1987, published reports began to surface that it was assisting the Egyptian improved Scud-B program. These accounts were followed by unconfirmed reports in 1988 and 1989 that it was directly involved in assisting the establishment of an improved Scud production facility in Egypt. North Korea is currently believed to have provided Egypt with liberal access to its Scud-B and -C programs, including technical documentation and engineering drawings. In late 1991 and 1992, reports suggested that Egypt would soon commence local production of an improved Scud. The Egyptian program is not expected to produce a copy of the North Korean Scuds, but instead is concentrating on its own derivative of the Scud-B (possibly incorporating some of the DPRK modifications). To date there is no confirmed evidence that

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30 Alan George, "Saddam's Secret Weapons," in *The Middle East*, June 1989, p. 21. See also Alan George and Herben Lansinger, "Rocket Merry-Go-Round," in *Profil*, March 20, 1989, pp. 36-38, as cited in *JPRS-TND*, May 5, 1989, pp. 31-34; and George and Herben, "Death Through DOT," in *Profil*, April 24, 1989, pp. 38-42, as cited in *JPRS-TND*, May 5, 1989, pp. 34-36.

31 "Condor Project to Continue," *DYN*, October 5, 1989, as cited in *JPRS-TND*, October 26, 1989, p. 21. See also "The Flight of the Condor," *Financial Times*, November 21, 1989, p. 10; "3rd World Missiles Linked to German, Italian Firms," *LAT*, February 8, 1989, p. 1; and "CIA Chief Cites Firms' Weapons Aid to 3rd World," *LAT*, February 10, 1989, p. 13. Among the more significant documents available concerning Egypt's involvement in the Condor II project are United States of America, Plaintiff v. Abdel Kader Helmy, et. al., Defendants, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California, Cr. No. S-88-201-RAR [corrected to read S-89-201-RAR], November 17, 1989; and Affidavit of David E. Burns, Customs Investigator, June 24, 1988.

32 "Increase in Egypt's 'Scuds' leads to BAe pull-out," *JDW*, September 5, 1992, p. 31.

Egypt has either produced an improved Scud-B based on North Korean technology or purchased any Scud-Bs or -Cs.[33]

Although ballistic missile cooperation has been significant and unquestionably beneficial to both countries, the current status of this cooperation is uncertain. The two countries continue to exchange high-level political and military delegations, but Egypt currently deploys only Soviet-supplied Scud-B missiles, and its improved Scud-B program is believed to be frozen at an advanced design stage. Given its current relationship with the United States, it is unlikely that Egypt would attempt to produce an improved Scud-B missile.

## Iran[34]

When the Iran-Iraq war began in 1980, Iran possessed virtually no ballistic missile capabilities. By the end of the eight-year war, the situation had changed dramatically. Iran could design and produce simple battlefield support missiles (ranges of less then 300 km) and assemble and maintain foreign-supplied ballistic missiles (e.g., North Korean Scud-Bs and Chinese 8610s). It had also established the basic infrastructure to design and manufacture short-range (300-1,000 km) ballistic missiles. These capabilities, however, were achieved at tremendous financial cost and with considerable assistance from China and North Korea. The war also provided Iran with considerable combat experience in the use of ballistic missiles. It was the target of approximately 350 Iraqi Scud-B and al-Hussein missiles, and launched approximately 120 of its own Scud-Bs and modified Scud-Bs during the War of the Cities.

In the early 1980s, Iran approached both North Korea and China seeking Scud missiles and technology. In late 1983, it agreed to provide long-term financing for North Korea's modified Scud-B program. In exchange, Pyongyang agreed to provide Iran with modified Scud-Bs as soon as they became available and to assist Iran in establishing the infrastructure required to first assemble and later manufacture components of the missile. Apart from the Egyptian transfers of Scud-Bs, the Iranian financing proved to be one of the primary factors contributing to North Korea's ability to achieve a meaningful indigenous missile production capability in the 1980s. The first modified Scud-Bs arrived in Iran in late 1987 and a total of approximately 100 missiles were delivered by February 1988.

With the end of the Iran–Iraq war in August 1988, Iran re-doubled its ballistic missiles efforts. Agreements were soon concluded with North Korea for continued Iranian funding of its Scud program and the supply of additional modified Scud-Bs. In 1990, these agreements were amended to include the purchase of modified Scud-Cs and North Korean assistance in the conversion of an Iranian missile maintenance facility into a modified Scud-C

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[33] "Korea Helps Egypt Build Scud-B," *Flight International,* July 16, 1988, p. 19. See also "Israel-Missiles," *Associated Press,* December 29, 1989; and "Egypt And Argentina In Long-Range Missile Plan," *Financial Times,* December 21, 1987, p. 28.

[34] This section excerpted from *The International Missile Bazaar: The New Suppliers Network.* See also "Ballistic Missiles in the Third World—Iran's Medium-Range Missiles," *JIR,* vol. 4, no. 4, April 1992, pp. 147-52; and "Iran's Growing Missile Forces," *JDW,* vol. 10, no. 3, July 23, 1988, pp. 126-31.

assembly (and ultimately manufacturing) plant. The first shipments of modified Scud-Cs and related equipment arrived in Iran in early 1991.

Iran currently deploys both the modified Scud-B and -C, has the capability to assemble and maintain both missiles, and is developing the ability to manufacture the modified Scud-C. More significantly, Iran and North Korea have apparently concluded agreements that provide for both the future purchase of the 1,000 km Nodong I and DPRK assistance in converting the Iranian modified Scud-C facility to assemble and produce the Nodong I. An Iranian delegation was present at North Korea's May 1993 test launching of a Nodong I and three modified Scud-Bs or -Cs in the Sea of Japan.

Reports appearing in December 1993 and January 1994 suggest that Iran's purchase of the Nodong I had been postponed indefinitely as a result of Japanese economic pressure on Iran.[35] It is not clear whether these reports are true or the Nodong I is simply not yet ready for deployment.

**Libya**[36]

Having acquired its first ballistic missile system, the Scud-B, from the Soviet Union in the 1970s, Libya has persistently sought to attain an indigenous ballistic missile capability, an effort that has continued spasmodically and with little success. Reports in 1987 indicated that Libya was developing a 500-700 km ballistic missile code-named Ittisalt. In the early 1990s, it was also reportedly working on a missile known as the al-Fatah. When nothing concrete came from these efforts, Libya apparently turned to North Korea for assistance.

Published reports suggest that sometime in 1991, Libya and the DPRK concluded an agreement for the future purchase of Nodong I missiles and/or related technologies. In return, North Korea received an immediate infusion of foreign capital that has facilitated its missile development program. Libya currently deploys the Scud-B, is continuing work on its indigenous al-Fatah ballistic missile, and is cooperating with North Korea. It is not known to have received the modified Scud-B or -C.

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35 "Israel-Missiles," *Associated Press*, January 4, 1994, is an example of these reports.

36 Interview data. See also "Libya May Buy N. Korean Missiles," *Washington Times (WT)*, June 4, 1991, p. 4; "Libya is Developing SSM," *Flight International*, May 23, 1987; "Libyan Scud-B Attack on Lampedusa Island," *JDW*, April 26, 1986, p. 739; "OTRAG Ends Libyan Launch Work," *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, December 14, 1981, p. 22; "OTRAG," *Omni*, June 1981, p. 68; and "Libya Reported to Sign Contract to Buy Missiles," *NYT*, March 13, 1981.

## Syria[37]

Syria also received its first ballistic missiles (Scud-Bs) from the Soviet Union shortly after the 1973 October War. Following its dramatic defeat in Lebanon in 1982, Damascus requested a number of sophisticated weapons systems from the Soviets, including the SS-23. The Soviets refused to provide the SS-23, but did provide the shorter range SS-21 and SSC-1B coastal defense cruise missile instead.

In 1986, Syria made another, more emphatic request for the SS-23. The Soviets apparently gave this request serious consideration and had possibly even concluded a tentative agreement. In mid-1987, however, probably as a result of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with the United States, they publicly stated that they would not supply Syria with the SS-23. Angered by the Soviet decision, the Syrians concluded an agreement with China for the purchase of the M-9 in 1988. This purchase was to be funded in part by aid received from Iran, Libya, and Saudi Arabia.

Following a December 1989 visit to Beijing by U.S. National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, the Syrian-Chinese missile agreement was abruptly canceled. In its wake, a series of interrelated programs and agreements based around North Korea were established to provide Syria with an indigenous ballistic missile production capability. It was agreed that instead of delivering M-9 missiles to Syria, China would provide increased technical assistance to Iran's ballistic missile program. Tehran, in turn, would fund and provide technical support for the construction of a Syrian facility to produce the North Korean modified Scud-C.

In addition, North Korea would provide Syria with long-term technical assistance with the facility and supply a small number of modified Scud-C missiles and launchers until Syria established indigenous production. China would then provide technology and technical assistance for the new Syrian ballistic missile program. In addition to the Iranian backing, financing was provided both directly and indirectly from Libya and Saudi Arabia. With the money received from these programs, North Korea would continue its Nodong I development program, access to which would be provided to Iran, Syria, and Libya.

Deliveries to Syria of an estimated sixty modified Scud-Cs and twelve launchers began in April 1991 and continued through 1993. Syria has achieved the capability to assemble modified Scud-Cs from components. It is presently unclear when it will attain a modified Scud-C production capability, although it has entered into a number of agreements with Iran concerning joint production. Based on Syria's past behavior, there is a reasonably strong possibility that it will seek to acquire and/or produce North Korea's Nodong I missile when it enters production.

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[37] Interview data. See also "Syria's Acquisition of North Korean Scuds," *JIR*, vol. 3, no. 6, June 1991, pp. 249-51; "China-Syria Missile Deal Concluded, Officials Say," *LAT*, July 14, 1988, p. 26; "Syria is Studying New Missile Deal," *NYT*, June 22, 1988, p. A6; "China Missile Sale Report Concerns U.S.," *WT*, June 23, 1988, p. A33; "Arab Lands Said to Be Turning to China for Arms," *NYT*, June 24, 1988, p. A3; "Syria Said to Have Offered Chemical Weapons to Iran," *WT*, December 9, 1985, p. 4A; "Syria 'Is Producing Chemical Weapons'," *JDW*, November 29, 1986, p. 1255; and "Soviet's Chemical War Chief Alerts West with Syria Visit," *WT*, April 8, 1988, p. 9.

### Weapons of Mass Destruction

Very little "open source" information is currently available concerning North Korean involvement in the development of nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons in the Middle East. Most reports in this area should be viewed with healthy skepticism.

North Korea currently maintains minor civilian/academic connections with Egypt, Libya, and Syria in the nuclear field. This is due primarily to the state of nuclear development in these countries and what the DPRK has to offer.

The reported links to the Iranian nuclear program are apparently more involved. North Korea has sold Iran significant quantities of mining equipment that is being utilized to mine uranium. Since the early 1980s, the two countries have also concluded a number of science and technology exchange agreements. In addition, unconfirmed reports suggest that there have been exchanges of both civilian and military personnel in the nuclear field.

Recent revelations concerning the North Korean nuclear program and the possibility that it has already produced a small number of nuclear weapons have prompted concerns about the transfer of these weapons to the Middle East. These concerns take two main forms: fear of a direct transfer (i.e., sale) of an "off-the-shelf" nuclear weapon, and fear of the sale of nuclear weapons technology, which the recipient could use to quicken the pace of its own bomb-making program. Given North Korea's need for hard currency and past record of exporting top-of-the-line technology, both threats should be viewed with great seriousness by U.S. officials.

The threat of an actual sale of a nuclear weapon to a rogue regime like Iran is somewhat less likely than the threat of technology transfer, if only because the possession of such weapons is so valuable to North Korea in the context of its military doctrine, foreign policy, and the political-military situation in East Asia. The probability of selling nuclear technology, however, is very high.

In addition, North Korean assistance is believed to have been a key component in Syria's attainment of a chemical warhead production capability for ballistic missiles in the late 1980s. Some sources suspect that they may now be assisting Iran in the same area. There is no evidence of a North Korean connection to any other chemical warfare programs.

At present, there is no evidence of a DPRK connection to any biological warfare program in the region.

# CONCLUSIONS

North Korea's military involvement in the Middle East raises a number of significant policy concerns for the United States. Prior to the 1980s, Pyongyang's role was that of a troublesome yet minor interloper whose actions were predominantly motivated by its political philosophy of *chu'che* (self-reliance). For the last fifteen years, however, its activities have been those of an unstable wildcard motivated primarily by the need to generate foreign currency.

Throughout both periods, North Korea has actively supported Middle East terrorism. Its cooperation with radical groups and governments in the region has hampered U.S. efforts to monitor and combat terrorism internationally. Although its support for these activities has diminished somewhat in the past decade, it still contributes to the overall threat.

North Korean sales of conventional weapons in the region have had their greatest impact with regard to Iran. Although Iran is generally considered to have lost its eight-year war with Iraq, massive quantities of military assistance from both China and North Korea made it possible for Tehran to resist the Iraqi offensive and avoid a catastrophic defeat. This assistance continued after the war, albeit at a much reduced rate.

The most immediate threat posed by North Korea is its proliferation of ballistic missiles, WMDs, and related technology. Pyongyang has already provided short-range missiles (modified Scud-Bs and -Cs) to Iran and Syria, and ballistic missile technology to Iran, Syria, and Egypt. It is now discussing the sale of intermediate-range missiles (e.g., the Nodong I) and related technology with Iran, Syria, and Libya. (Whether Egypt is holding similar talks with Pyongyang is unclear.) Moreover, preliminary evidence suggests that North Korea has assisted both Iran and Syria in developing chemical weapons.

These activities are a destabilizing factor in ongoing Arab-Israeli peace efforts and place additional obstacles in the path of achieving meaningful security in the region.

Potentionally more menacing, however, is North Korea's relentless drive to produce nuclear weapons—if it has not already done so. Although Pyongyang is unlikely to transfer ready-made nuclear weapons to its allies in the Middle East, there is a very real possibility that it would provide sophisticated nuclear weapons technology to radical regimes in the region. Indeed, North Korea appears to already be involved in Iran's nuclear program. The prospect of rogue states such as Iran and Libya using DPRK-supplied ballistic missiles or missile technology to deliver non-conventional warheads—developed with North Korean technology—to targets in the Middle East, Europe, or South Asia creates a genuine cause for concern.

**U.S. Policy Options**

The primary U.S. policy objective regarding North Korea's activities in the Middle East should be to put an end to its role as a proliferator of intermediate-range and short-range ballistic missiles, nuclear and chemical weapons, and related technology. Several crucial U.S. allies in the region—including Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey—face a potential threat from one or both of North Korea's arms and technology customers in the Middle East, Iran and Syria.

In addition, the United States should endeavor to disrupt Pyongyang's support for terrorist and revolutionary groups, constrain its conventional arms sales, and—until North Korea agrees to act as a responsible member of the community of nations—limit its political influence in the region.

In response to the escalating threat posed by North Korea, the United States is working to develop a diplomatic coalition of its major allies, particularly South Korea and Japan, who have the ability to apply the greatest direct and indirect pressure on North Korea. With an eye to the Middle East dimension of the larger North Korea problem (and in order to restrict Pyongyang's market), the United States should bring other countries into this coalition. Pressure should be brought to bear on North Korea's Middle East clients, Iran and Syria, to cease arms purchases.

Although the United States has little direct influence on Iran, some key U.S. allies—notably Germany and Japan—have considerable leverage. German companies and banks, for example, currently provide significant trade and loans to Iran, allowing Tehran to free up funds for military purchases. If Washington cannot convince Bonn to cease its economic support for the Islamic Republic, Germany should at least be persuaded to use its leverage to try to limit Iran's missile and WMD activities, including acquisitions from North Korea. Japan has already taken steps along these lines, successfully pressuring Tehran to cancel a test firing of the Nodong I in Iran by reportedly threatening to withhold funding for a $1.2 billion dam project.[38]

The United States may be able to influence Syria more directly. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union—and through the medium of the peace process—Syria has sought improved ties with Washington. Damascus no doubt views the development of a ballistic missile and WMD production capability as a counterbalance to Israel's military superiority. These efforts, however, are not consonant with Syria's participation in the peace process. Nevertheless, the United States should sharpen its focus on this problem in its dialogue with Syria, and make clear that its general concern about proliferation is very specific when it comes to North Korea.

In this context, it is important for the United States to coordinate closely with Egypt, which has had a long-term relationship with North Korea at the military level. Washington should press Cairo to disclose—and, if necessary, cease—any program of ballistic missile development or acquisition it may be pursuing with Pyongyang. Given the high priority the United States places on stemming the tide of North Korea proliferation, it is essential for the two allies to work hand-in-hand in confronting this threat.

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[38] *U.S. News and World Report,* June 20, 1994, p. 26. Japan also sought a pledge from Iran not to build a nuclear reprocessing plant that could be used to produce material for nuclear weapons. Iran reportedly has not provided such assurances.

Israel has a great stake in stemming North Korean proliferation in the Middle East, and Washington must coordinate closely with Jerusalem to maintain a unified front against this common threat. Early in the Clinton administration, Israel tried to pursue its own avenues to influence Pyongyang, evidently offering to invest in North Korean industry in exchange for a commitment not to transfer the Nodong I missile to Iran. The United States objected to the Israeli initiative, arguing that it would detract from international pressure on Pyongyang to allow inspections of its nuclear facilities. In response, the Israeli government announced that it would suspend its contacts with North Korea.[39] If these discussions are reactivated in the context of a policy of greater diplomatic efforts with Pyongyang, Washington should seek assurances of full coordination from Israel.

At the same time, U.S. allies in the Middle East should be encouraged to use their influence with North Korea's key supporter, China. Although Beijing has a certain degree of leverage with Pyongyang, it is generally unwilling to apply it at the behest of the United States. It might be induced to do so, however, if there were a concerted effort by U.S. and Chinese trading partners in the region (e.g., Saudi Arabia and Israel). In short, all U.S. allies should be made aware of the priority Washington places on the North Korea issue and, to the greatest extent possible, play a role in its resolution.

Finally, Western policymakers should remember that, while North Korean leaders are consummate masters of the arts of obstruction and brinkmanship, and though it might seem somewhat trite to point out, they understand and respect power and strength in negotiations (although they are contemptuous of those who directly threaten it). Moreover, it is important to recall that the United States and North Korea have very different perceptions of conflict on the Korean Peninsula: while Washington views it in the context of a challenge to vital regional security concerns and the goal of non-proliferation, Pyongyang regards it as part of its struggle for national survival. That framework provides both opportunities and obstacles for resolving the current confrontation.

39 *NYT*, August 15, 1993, p. A3. Recent reports indicate that low-level Israeli-North Korean contacts have resumed. See "North Korea Threatens More Than Asia," UPI, June 3, 1994; and "Allegations of Secret Contacts with DPRK on Missiles to Iran," Galei Zahal (IDF Radio), March 22, 1994, as cited in *JPRS-TND*, April 1, 1994, p. 34.

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