

February 4, 1968

"Information about the Situation in Korea"

Citation:

"Information about the Situation in Korea", February 4, 1968, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Czech Foreign Ministry Archives. Translated by Adolf Kotlik.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/114572>

Summary:

A wide ranging Czech government report on the causes, consequences, and potential resolutions to the USS Pueblo Incident.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Czech

Contents:

Translation - English

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense Ministry of the Interior to the KPCZ CC Presidium and the Czechoslovak government

File no.: 020.873/68-3

4 February 1968

Information about the situation in Korea

Attachment III a/

Tension in the Far East has escalated seriously as of late in connection with the detention by the Korean People's Army patrol boats of the American spy ship Pueblo along the DPRK coast and in connection with armed actions of Korean patriots in South Korea. These events have brought the situation on the Korean Peninsula to a head and have threatened to create another center of military conflict in this area.

Development of the situation on the Korean Peninsula is characterized in the presented information.

I.

The main source and cause of persistent tension on the Korean Peninsula is the fact that Korea remains a divided country, and strong American and South Korean armies with state-of-the-art weapons are positioned in the South. This circumstance has a profound influence on all life in the DPRK and is reflected in the political direction of the Korean Worker's Party. The leadership of the KWP is following with growing anxiety the development in South Korea where younger, more flexible state leadership has been able to bring the country [back] from the brink of total collapse after the fall of Syngman Rhee and has been successful in more-or-less stabilizing conditions in the country with the help of foreign capital, mainly from the U.S., Japan, and West Germany. It seems that this relative stabilization of the South Korean regime, accompanied by strong anti-communist propaganda and police terror, has paralyzed revolutionary sentiments in the country and is skillfully discrediting the authority of the DPRK and diminishing her influence among South Korean population. This is also somewhat supported lately by a more tactful behavior of U.S. troops towards the South Korean public. On the other hand, the initial political but mainly economic supremacy of the DPRK, still noticeable at the beginning of the 60's, has been gradually eroding due to economic stagnation, characteristic of the period of close cooperation of the DPRK with the PRC (People's Republic of China). With no less anxiety, the DPRK is following also the extensive foreign affairs and military activity of the South Korean regime, which is gaining international authority and sustaining and strengthening the positions of world imperialism in Asia, pointed mainly against socialist countries.

The latest development in South Korea is also connected with many visits in Seoul of representatives of world capitalism, culminating with the trip of President Johnson in 1966. Most of these visits contributed to the further stimulation of the South Korean economy, to the buildup and modernization of the South Korean army, and to the strengthening of "Asian-Oceanic Alliances" under the sponsorship of the U.S..

All this is increasing restlessness on the Korean Peninsula and diminishing chances for a peaceful unification of the country in the near future. The leadership of the DPRK is concerned about aggression from the South, and even expects it, and is preparing the Korean people for a unification of the country by an armed struggle of the Korean people.

This process in the policy of the KWP CC has taken shape during the last year. In the declaration of Kim Il Sung during the nationwide conference of the KWP in October 1966, a thesis was put forth that the unification of the country will be a long-term

process requiring, mainly, the creation of a Marxist party in South Korea and establishing close cooperation with non-selective organizations. In conflict with that, the current doctrine of the KWP calls for a liberation of the southern part of the country by force as soon as the conditions are favorable. This new feature is manifested even in the slogan, coined in January 1967 by Kim Il Sung, about the necessity to unify Korea during the life of this generation. The expression "peaceful and democratic unification of the country" disappeared from [North] Korean propaganda. Even the [North] Korean press does not deny that [the country] is preparing for the defeat of American imperialists. The inescapability of war is theoretically explained, its consequences are played down, and the fear of war is countered as a display of bourgeois pacifism and revisionism.

While the doctrine of a parallel build-up and defense of the country was declared during the October conference of the KWP in 1966, it is more and more obvious that the defense has gained priority. This was reflected even in the last year's budget of the DPRK, which appropriated more than 30% of expenditures for defense (excluding the free of charge soviet military assistance). The real nature of military measures of the DPRK is discussed in many essays, like, for instance, in an article in the periodical Korean People's Army, from November 1967, where it is written: "The military course of our party, drawn by Marshal Kim Il Sung, enables us to reliably protect our socialist homeland by way of preferential strengthening of the defensive military power, and to handle, based on our own initiative, the great revolutionary event - unification of the country."

The [North] Korean propaganda makes every effort to convince the citizens of the DPRK as well as the world's public that the situation is quite similar to that just before the outbreak of the Korean War. Military training of civilians, including women and children, was justified by the thesis of "turning the DPRK into a steel, impregnable fortress" and reached unprecedented magnitude in the DPRK.

We cannot also underestimate the fact that the spreading of military psychosis had other functions, like distracting people from the existing economic difficulties, "justifying" stagnation of the standard of living, demanding the strictest discipline and obedience, and preventing any criticism.

Especially in the last year, the personality cult of Kim Il Sung reached unprecedented magnitude. Attributes attached to his name often run several lines. Kim Il Sung is credited with all successes and victories past and present without regard to historical facts. Even his parents and grandparents are becoming the objects of celebrations. [North] Korean propaganda places an equal sign between Kim Il Sung and Korea, while Korea is presented as an example for other countries. The intensification of Kim Il Sung's personality cult is inseparable from two other issues, namely, - the importance of the DPRK example for the struggling nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and the embellishment of Kim Il Sung's role in the context of the international communist and workers' movement.

Excerpts from the Cuban press, which continually publishes his addresses, are mainly used as evidence supporting the importance of his theoretical works.

Collected writings of Kim Il Sung also constitute the basic and, today actually, the only source for study of Marx-Leninism. [North] Korean citizens get only very limited information about life in other socialist countries or about the situation in the world since all news in the press and radio are bent to the line of the KWP. This practice results in increased isolation of the DPRK from the outside world.

Displays of the personality cult in the DPRK are enhanced by a strong nationalism. All problems involving the DPRK are exaggerated and placed before other international problems.

The personality cult is also supported by personnel policy of the KWP. In the summer months of 1967, a number of influential and mid level party officials were removed. According to some information, members of the Politburo Pak Geum-cheol and Ri Hyo-sun were arrested during last year's June conference of the KWP CC. Pak Geum-cheol allegedly asked Kim Il Sung for a more realistic domestic policy, including improvement in the standard of living and a more realistic approach to the problems of South Korea where the most decisive factor was supposed to be an upsurge of the internal revolutionary forces. According to an assessment of his friends, Pak Geum-cheol was considered as one of the most capable functionaries of the KWP and the DPRK, and Ri Hyo-sun was engaged in the Politburo of the KWP CC with South Korean issues for a number of years. During the same period, other deputies and officials of the KWP CC and non-selective organizations were removed, such as a chairman of the (Workers) Unions CC, a leader of the YO (Youth Organization) of the KWP CC, a chairman of a youth organization CC, a director of the DPRK press agency, and many others. Demoted functionaries are sometimes replaced with graduates of military institutes.

The leadership of the KWP and DPRK differs in its opinions from the position of most of the fraternal parties, especially in the most pressing current issues - war and peace.

The difference in opinions among [North] Korean comrades is the most pronounced in the approach to fighting world imperialism. The KWP calls, in this case, for a frontal drive for final and immediate destruction of capitalism. According to the [North] Korean concept, the fight against imperialism can be done only by strong verbal attacks or war.

Positions of the KWP on issues of war and peace, peaceful coexistence, and approach to struggle with imperialism are very strongly influenced by the problems of the unification of the country. Naturally, these positions also shape the attitude of the KWP towards the international communist movement. The leadership of the KWP expresses support for the unity of the ICWM (International Communist Workers Movement) in the struggle with imperialism and for coordination of aid to Vietnam from fraternal countries, but the leadership expects the building of this unity only on the foundation of its own approach to the fight against imperialism and from the point of view of its own interests and goals. Fraternal parties are indirectly reproached for attacking imperialism only verbally, while in reality, they are afraid of it and are giving ground to it. The [North] Korean comrades put their positions forth as the only correct interpretation of Marxism-Leninism.

Countries of the Third World are considered especially important for their pivotal role in increasing the authority and prestige of the DPRK in international affairs. At the same time, the DPRK strives to promote its own example for these countries and to exert influence there by doctrines of "building with own resources," of "independence from big countries," and by radicalism of the [North] Korean positions.

So far, the DPRK did not take its position to the consultative meeting of fraternal parties, held in Budapest in February of this year. According to the opinion of Pak Seong-cheol, member of the KWP CC, Deputy of the Council of Ministers and the DPRK Minister of Foreign Affairs, as expressed to the Ambassador of the GDR (German Democratic Republic), conditions for meetings of fraternal parties are worse now than a year ago. In the situation where the rift between the CPSU (Communist Party of Soviet Union) and the CP of China has grown wider and there are not even any diplomatic contacts between the USSR and the APR (Albanian People's Republic), meetings are said to contribute to the worsening of the discord. So far the only published reference in the DPRK press about planned meetings is the information taken from the central body of the CP of Cuba about the latest session of the Cuban CP CC plenum and its decision not to attend the meeting in Budapest.

Moreover, it is quite usual that in the relations of the DPRK to fraternal parties and countries, the [North] Korean comrades strive to have their opinions fully accepted and supported. The DPRK is also issuing to socialist countries imperative instructions on what they can and cannot do in their politics and in relations with imperialist countries. The article "Let Us Point Our Fight Against the American Imperialism," published in the journal Nodong Sinmun on 16th October 1967 in commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the Moscow meetings, calls for a tougher stance against the American imperialism, for active support of the struggle of the nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and warns that socialist countries must be aware, as well, of the danger of Japanese militarism in Asia and fight against it. At the same time, the wish of the KWP to achieve unconditional support for the [North] Korean course by all socialist countries is expressed, as well, in the request that "each socialist country must respect the policy of the Cuban CP and is obligated only to support the struggle of the Cuban people."

Similar practices are also characteristic of the approach of the [North] Korean comrades towards international organizations where they often try to push unrealistic requirements and, on top of that, demand that their socialist partners support them thoroughly without regard to the common interests of the whole socialist community.

II.

By pressing forward with the current doctrine, the KWP is also contributing to the increase of restlessness especially in the Demilitarized Zone and to the dangerous escalation of tension there, which was quite noticeable last year. Incidents in the zone and to the south of it have, so far, reached an unprecedented number. Incidents result in many casualties. Official sources in the DPRK accuse the Americans and the South Korean regime of importing new kinds of weapons into South Korea and of shooting from the Demilitarized Zone at the North, and they assert that incidents on the territory of South Korea are the result of the growing struggle of South Korean patriots for national liberation. Contrary to that, Americans and South Koreans accuse the DPRK of continuously and increasingly infiltrating the South and of supplying new kinds of weapons.

In a memorandum from October last year on the situation in Korea, submitted to members of the political committee of the UN, the DPRK government pointed out the danger of a new Korean war flaring up as a consequence of American provocations and the necessity to withdraw U.S. troops immediately from South Korea. A letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the South Korean regime, containing a number of attacks against the DPRK and its policy (especially in connection with an "infiltration from the North"), was distributed amongst the committee as well.

According to the opinion of the Czechoslovak delegation with the Supervisory Commission of the Non-Aligned States, as well as to the opinion of our Embassy in Pyongyang, a number of circumstances indicate that the incidents in the Demilitarized Zone and to the south of it are intentionally and purposefully provoked mostly by the DPRK, although it is difficult to judge which side is to blame in such cases. However, increasing tensions on the 38th parallel of latitude and the growing number of incidents corresponds with the [North] Korean concept of the fight against imperialism and with the support of the revolutionary struggle of the people of South Korea. Officials of the DPRK strive to attract the world's attention to the Korean problem and try to gain support from socialist countries for their policies.

The rapidly deteriorating situation in the Demilitarized Zone and the danger of a possible new conflict was reflected in the negotiations of the Military Commission for Truce in Panmunjeom. At the Commission's meetings, both sides accused each other of violating the treaty, and the negotiations lead to nowhere. For the [North] Korean side, the Military Commission for Truce is a place where they can confront Americans

face to face, and they take full advantage of this opportunity. Speeches of a [North] Korean delegate are mostly propaganda in nature and are used namely in the internal propaganda of the DPRK. Consistently, the negative attitude towards participating in joint investigations of the discussed incidents, as stipulated in the Truce Treaty, is a shortcoming of [North] Korean comrades in their dealing with the Commission.

The DPRK authorities are pressuring the Czechoslovak and Polish delegations with the Supervisory Commission of the Non-Aligned States into making the SCNAS a platform for the anti-imperialistic struggle in the [North] Korean style, without regard to the mandate of the Commission given by the Truce Treaty. At the same time, the [North] Korean comrades only inform the Czechoslovak and Polish delegations about the problems in the Demilitarized Zone sporadically and inaccurately. The Czechoslovak delegation with the SCNAS conducts its activities in agreement with the directive currently in force with the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The situation in Korea lately underwent a very dangerous development. On January 23rd this year, patrol boats of the DPRK detained an American spy ship Pueblo with 83 men and escorted it to the North Korean port Wonsan. According to the DPRK's information, the American ship was captured 10 miles away from Wonsan and 7.6 miles from the Jodo Island. The ship was collecting data about water depth, location of troops, and defenses of the DPRK coast.

On January 19th this year, this incident was preceded by an attempt of an armed group of 30 to penetrate the residence of the South Korean president in Seoul, with an objective to assassinate the President and other government officials. There was an exchange of fire for several hours between that group and South Korean police, with dead and injured on both sides. The South Korean regime mobilized armed forces that, together with the American Army, destroyed most of the members of the group.

On January 24th, Americans accused the DPRK at the Military Commission for Truce of an attempt to assassinate the President and high officials of the South Korean regime and of capturing an American ship in international waters. A spokesman for the U.S. said that the capturing of the ship could have grave consequences and endanger peace in the DPRK. He demanded immediate return of the ship with the crew and an apology. He also asked that a serious warning be passed on to Kim Il Sung. The [North] Korean side rejected the accusation.

President Johnson and Minister Rusk characterized the situation as very serious. The United States representative at the UN, Goldberg, expressed to U Thant concerns of the American government about the consequences of the incident and asked for a meeting of the Security Council regarding the capture of the American ship. The U.S. presents the issue of the ship as a part of a continuous violation of the Demilitarized Zone and as a provocation against South Korea. The U.S. asked the USSR to intervene with the [North] Korean side for the release of the captured ship. The USSR declined to intervene and warned the U.S. against any rash actions.

The United States, South Korean regime, and the DPRK introduced a number of military measures in order to increase the combat readiness of their armed forces. These measures, together with the psychological conditioning of the population in the both parts of Korea, create, on their own, a situation when any rather serious incident caused by one of the parties could escalate into a larger scale military conflict.

According to international law, the DPRK's course of action would be legal if the American vessel were engaged in a hostile activity in the coastal waters of the DPRK and offered resistance when ordered to leave. If the incident happened in the open sea, the DPRK's intervention was not legal. It is difficult to judge this matter now. We assume the position of the DPRK that the ship Pueblo was in the DPRK coastal waters.

From this point of view, detention of the ship appears to be an act of defense of the DPRK's sovereignty.

Soviet ships, with aid for the DRVN (Democratic Republic of Vietnam) and with substantial commercial and military supplies for the DPRK, were passing through the area where the ship Pueblo was detained. From this corridor, the ship could have monitored the movement of part of the DPRK's naval forces, including the submarines, one of the main air force bases, a zone of security defense installations of the DPRK, and the movement in the area, which, the U.S. obviously believes, is used for the transportation of North Korean groups to South Korea. It seems that considering the importance of this area and the growing tension at the 38th parallel of latitude, the ship's mission was to determine the level of readiness of the Korean People's Army, or when possible, how imminent the danger is of carrying out the slogans for the unification of the country by force.

It is necessary to view the current conflict in a wider context because the DPRK has alliance treaties with the Soviet Union as well as with the PRC, in which both countries pledge to help the DPRK if it is attacked and is drawn into a military conflict.

The presentation by the U.S. delegate at the Security Council consisted basically of already published accusations from the American party. The Soviet delegate reacted with a strong accusation of the U.S. policy of intervention in Korea, and in the case of the ship Pueblo, he operated, namely, with the deposition of the ship's captain to counter the American arguments. Discussion in the Security Council did not result in support of the American version, decisively opposed by the USSR. So far, the American delegation has not presented any resolution to the Security Council. The development of discussion of the matter in the Security Council can be characterized by a proposal of the Soviet delegate to immediately invite the DPRK into the Security Council. The U.S. rejected the proposal, saying that they would be willing to admit the DPRK delegation to the Security Council only if the ship with the crew is released. There is also an effort, especially of developing countries, to mediate the U.S. and the DPRK. The fact that the issue was discussed in the Security Council turned out, in the present situation, to be a positive; it helped to calm military hysteria in the U.S. and bought time to search for a diplomatic solution to the conflict. Due to the offensive of the NLF (National Liberation Front) in South Vietnam, the U.S. was forced to tone down its response to the DPRK in connection with incident of the ship Pueblo.

The DPRK preferred direct talks with the U.S. Since February 2nd, the negotiation has been on going in the Military Commission for Truce in Panmunjeom between representatives of the U.S. and the DPRK. According to the reports from our embassy, the negotiation is conducted in a calm manner. According to the press release from the AP in Seoul, representatives of the DPRK negotiating in Panmunjeom expressed a willingness to return to the United States the wounded and killed crew members of Pueblo. According to another report from Reuters in Tokyo, referring to the news from a South Korean pressroom, the U.S. and the DPRK reached a basic agreement in Panmunjeom on February 5th about the release of the Pueblo crew. The same source reported that the U.S., in essence accepted North Korean conditions, and they will admit that the Pueblo entered North Korean sovereign waters. The U.S. allegedly promised a public apology as well. As per the report of the Reuters agency in Washington, the U.S. State Department allegedly made a statement on February 5th that it has no information confirming the report of the basic agreement with the DPRK about the release of the Pueblo crew. These reports are not officially confirmed yet. Even if they turn out to be true, we still cannot expect a radical decrease in tension as long as the military measures implemented in connection with the Pueblo incident are not revoked.

III.

The acceleration of the dangerous developments on the Korean Peninsula and the complex situation there were the subjects of talks of the KPCZ CC First Secretary, c. A. Dubcek with the representatives of the CPSU CC while he was recently in Moscow. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs consulted this matter with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR in December last year. Follow-up consultation happened through our ambassador in Moscow in the last few days. In both instances, Soviet comrades were made familiar with our assessment of the developments in Korea and were informed about our concern with some dangerous aspects of the problem. Soviet comrades identified themselves fully with our opinions but stressed that representatives of the DPRK assured the Soviet side that the DPRK would not take any steps that could result in a military conflict. During the recent developments with the ship Pueblo, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also received from the Soviet party two pieces of information for the Czechoslovak government, with a description of concrete steps that the USSR is taking.

According to the last information, which the Soviet Ambassador relayed to c. V. David on February 2nd this year, the [North] Korean comrades agree with the position of the Soviet representative during discussion about the U.S. complaint to the UN Security Council. They think it is necessary to stretch the proceedings of the Pueblo issue in the Security Council.

Various ideas about mediation to settle the incident are being floated unofficially in the UN Security Council. The Soviet side informed the [North] Korean comrades about it. Since the [North] Korean comrades are able to deal with Americans directly in Panmunjeom, they feel that mediation of third countries is not necessary, in principle. As for the concrete proposals for mediation, our [North] Korean friends believe it is possible to choose tactics according to further developments.

In conversations with the Soviet Ambassador from January 28th to January 31st, concerning further possible steps that the DPRK may take in connection with the incident, the [North] Korean comrades said only that the DPRK is not going to succumb to provocations and is ready to work towards the easing of tensions.

On January 29th, Rusk sent a letter to c. A. A. Gromyko. In this letter, Americans reiterated their version that the ship Pueblo was in international waters at the moment of interception. Rusk maintains that Johnson exercises restraint in the matter and believes that settling the issue as quickly as possible would be in the interest of both parties.

During unofficial consultations among members of the Security Council, U.S. Representative Goldberg approached the USSR representatives declaring that the U.S. is trying to find a diplomatic solution to the conflict in such a way that would include the repatriation of the ship and its crew, without damaging positions of either party.

In the response to Rusk, as well as in the conversation between the Soviet and American representatives in the Security Council, it was stressed, as the [North] Korean comrades requested, that the incident can be settled if tension in the area does not increase, national dignity of the DPRK is not insulted by making it responsible for the incident, and the policy of threats is abandoned; the U.S. must stop pressuring the DPRK and threatening her.

On January 31st, the USSR representative told the [North] Korean comrades that by adopting tough measures for defense of its sovereignty, the DPRK has politically won. Now, it would be desirable to solidify these results and, at the same time, to demonstrate the peaceful character of the DPRK's course in connection with the incident. That could be achieved by expelling the crew of Pueblo from the territory of the DPRK. The [North] Korean comrades were told that such a step from their side

could not be interpreted as weakness; on the contrary, it would be appreciated everywhere as a show of a responsible approach, and it would strengthen, even more, the international position of the DPRK.

As far as it is up to the Soviet government, it will, of course, even in the future, see to it that events around the incident do not grow out of certain boundaries, and it will make every effort so that they do not escalate into an armed conflict.

The Soviet comrades also expressed conviction that their Czechoslovak friends share this position because it follows our common course in international issues. They would be grateful to the government of Czechoslovakia if it could, if at all possible, share information it has and comments about that matter.

We consider the USSR's approach as correct and thoughtful because it leads to preventing a wider conflict and to transferring its solution to the diplomatic arena. On January 31st of this year, the Czechoslovak government was informed about the declaration of the DPRK government on February 27th of this year concerning the incursion of the American spy ship Pueblo into the sovereign waters of the DPRK. The Czechoslovak government condemned the violation of the sovereignty of the DPRK and expressed to the DPRK government support for the defense of their territory and legal rights. The Czechoslovak press, radio, and television condemned the American provocation against the DPRK and informed the Czechoslovak public about the progress of events. However, the [North] Korean side protested against our press reprinting western information without comments and resolutely demanded that it publish only information released by the DPRK. Our press was notified of some inaccuracies that happened when news from western press agencies was used.

According to the assessment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as Ministry of National Defense, even if the issue of the ship Pueblo is settled peacefully, the situation in the Korean area will remain dangerous, especially due to the military measures implemented by both sides.

In current situation, it would be suitable to proceed this way:

□□□ be permanently in constant contact with the Soviet comrades, keep them up to date about our findings and to continuously consult the development of the situation and coordinate our common steps.

. To support the DPRK politically in defense of its territorial sovereignty and legal rights and to condemn provocations of the U.S. and the South Korean regime against the DPRK.

. To be in contact with the DPRK MFA and with the DPRK Embassy in Prague and to request from them information about positions of the DPRK. To influence the DPRK suitably towards peaceful resolution of the conflict. To that end it is suggested for the KPCZ CC Secretary to receive, as soon as possible, a diplomatic representative of the DPRK and to convey to him our position in a suitable way.

□□

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Defense, and the Ministry of the Interior will keep continuously informing the KPCZ CC Presidium and the Czechoslovak government.