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Pueblo and American - South Korean
relationsPolitical report no. 11
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When Pueblo was detained the night of January 23rd, all of the South Korean propaganda was still fully involved with the case from January 21st involving 31 armed persons who, according to a captured member of the group, were supposed to kill the South Korean president and other key representatives of South Korea. They are still being pursued in the area mainly between Seoul and the demilitarized zone.

The Seoul incident from January 21st of this year revealed shortcomings in the security system between the position of the 2nd US infantry division in the western part of the demilitarized zone and Seoul. In addition, it showed poor readiness of the South Korean armed units to counter a similar larger scale action as the January 21st incident.

The inefficiency of South Korean troops and police, proven by the incident, raised a wave of dissatisfaction that was reflected in the South Korean press just when Pueblo was detained. South Korean propaganda found some counter arguments against these reproaches of its own press, and soon was able to distract the public and turn its attention to three issues: the Japanese press interpretation of the January 21st incident, the US position to the Seoul incident and the detention of Pueblo, and to internal political issues concerning the relations between the ruling Republican Party and the New Democratic Party.

The very first reports of the Japanese press about the Seoul incident caused concern and soon agitation, because of the way the news was presented; it almost immediately resulted in small demonstrations against Japanese journalists accredited in South Korea, even calling for their immediate expulsion. Until today, these demonstrations were followed by larger demonstrations and protest gatherings against the Seoul incident. They were distinctly anti-North Korean in nature with all the signs of anti-communist hysteria, complete with burning straw effigies of Kim Il Sung. Most participants were students, intelligentsia and artists; however, South Korean authorities managed to get labor unions involved as well. Despite the selectivity of the South Korean educational system, especially when it comes to admissions to secondary schools, South Korean authorities did not even have to apply direct pressure to ensure participation in these demonstrations. Their main purpose has been achieved: to turn public attention from criticizing the government, army and police to a more acceptable matter - against the DPRK, which was a complete success. These tendencies were further strengthened when an underground group of 32 (directed from the DPRK, according to the South Korean press) was arrested, as well as a group of fishermen who returned to South Korea after staying in the DPRK.

The South Korean government was able to accomplish all its aims; in fact, a South Korean flying squad, with active help from civilians, killed the last of the 31 armed insurgents, even though we cannot say that it was a direct consequence of this propaganda.

South Korean propaganda was able to sustain the wave of anti-communism on the same level by other events as well, like a funeral ceremony for police personnel killed on January 21st and for other South Korean soldiers who were shot while pursuing "armed guerilla groups of South Korean patriots and revolutionaries". Namely two funerals were exploited exceptionally: a funeral of a higher commander of the South Korean army, and a funeral of a school child who was killed during the armed group's attack on the access road to the presidential palace. Widely publicized testimony of the only captive from this armed group alleged that "we were

supposed to cut Bak Jeong-hui 's head off" and so on. He also claimed threats made by the armed group members to peasants: "If you don't help us and report us, we will take revenge on you and your family members when the country is united soon" had its intended effect. The last ones killed from the group of thirty one were physically weak and hungry, which among other things showed that by the very first appeals, South Korean propaganda was able to deter civilians from helping the armed group in any way.

These propaganda efforts of South Korean ruling circles were also accompanied by internal measures that were aimed at practically every South Korean and strictly limited possibilities to provide meaningful assistance to members of the armed group.

Some later news also raise speculation that a three-member group seen far south-east of the city Taegu had its own mission, not necessarily connected with the mission of the main group in Seoul. That is to say, Jeong-hui's villa is near Taegu.

Measures of the South Korean government – accelerated arming of segments of population (protection of important private production facilities) as well as fast modernization of South Korean coast guard – further intensified the anti-infiltration and anti-communist propaganda so much that it, at least initially, overshadowed the propaganda around the detention of Pueblo.

During the Seoul incident, there were disagreements between the ruling and opposition parties; however, right after January 21st, the opposition party showed maximum willingness to cooperate with the ruling party "in light of serious danger to the security of the South Korean state from North Korean infiltrators." The incident was portrayed as not just an isolated action of thirty-one armed men but a systematic and planned activity of the DPRK with the final objective of "armed aggression against South Korea."

Therefore, one of the consequences of the Seoul incident is, among other things, that the ruling and opposition parties achieved certain degree of unity.

Initially, South Korean propaganda accepted the detention of Pueblo as a vindication of its warning that the USA is underestimating the danger that manifests itself in the speech of Kim Il-song on December 16th, 1967, and that the former DPRK

KCPA deputy warned against as early as the beginning of summer after he defected to the South. The first responses to the Pueblo incident then indicated several facts that must have been unpleasant to Americans, to say the least. One of them was an argument that by crossing the unnoticed DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) in the section of the US 2nd infantry division, the armed group revealed not only that the US Command in South Korea underestimated the possibility of infiltration from North Korea but that it was satisfied with declarations about impenetrability of the electronic barrier that was already fully functional in the section of this American unit. At the same time, South Korean officials argued against American practice of arming South Korean forces in both South Korea and South Vietnam with dated American weapons, some of which the American Army used already in World War II. As evidence they pointed out comments made by some key South Korean political and military officials about what happened last year when South Korean soldiers in South Vietnam refused to fight with obsolete rifles M-1. As a result, they were issued new, lighter and shorter rifles M-6 with much more effective shooting frequency increasing not only their fight capability not also producing concrete results in combat against armed forces of South Vietnam National Liberation Front.

The request for expedient modernization of all South Korean units was accompanied by two warnings addressed directly and indirectly to the US: South Korean Foreign Affairs Committee Deputy talked about a possible withdrawal of all South Korean troops (48,000) from South Vietnam even before the commencement of the South Vietnamese NLF offensive, and the Parliament asked that South Korean armed forces be removed from the US command (of the UN armed forces in South Korea).

Effectiveness of these two threats was visible almost immediately: modern weaponry for South Korean units that was originally planned for delivery by the end of March, was immediately airlifted to South Korea, and the designated units are scheduled to receive it by the end of February. Johnson's message to Bak Jeong-hui

and the trip of his special envoy to Seoul were supposed to explain to the South Korean government why the US rejected the military approach in cooperation with the South Korean armed forces in the first phase of Pueblo detention, and why Smith negotiates with Bak Jeong -guk in Panmunjon behind closed door without the presence of a South Korean representative. Americans also had to explain to the South Korean government why they do not make any connection between the Pueblo and Seoul incidents at the negotiations in Panmunjon. South Korea's pressure on Johnson had its desired effect. Regardless of the precarious situation Americans faced due to the South Vietnam NLF offensive, the mere thought of Koreans pulling out their troops, which Americans themselves consider as the best of all the satellite armies and which, after the Americans, are the most numerous, was dangerous even more so because of the NLF armed force offensive.

The effectiveness of the South Korean threats manifested itself not only in Johnson's message and in an expedited shipment of modern weapons to the South Korean army but also in an additional hundred million US dollars. These provisions on the part of the US came after South Korean officials openly said, in connection with their disapproval that the US is negotiating about Pueblo with the DPRK in Panmunjon behind closed doors without South Korean representatives, that they do not approve of the US approach. First of all, the South Koreans claimed the Pueblo incident could not be separated from the Seoul incident. Second, the US pledged to discuss all their measures in South Korea with the South Korean government. Third, the US cannot expect to stop "North Korean aggressive behavior" with several ships, older weapons and their own existence.

After Johnson's message, the special envoy, additional 100 million dollars, accelerated military aid and a change of the US position to Pueblo (the USA through Smith in his negotiations with the DPRK started to honor the South Korean request not to separate the Seoul incident from the Seoul one), there was no more talk about withdrawing the South Korean units from South Vietnam nor about removing South

Korean units from the UN command in South Korea. The objective was reached; the subjective pressure from the South Korean government

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met with the objective pressure of the South Vietnamese reality – therefore, South Korean government circles could accept with satisfaction the words of Johnson's message that the South Korea is one of the US best allies, and could continue to press the US to further concessions namely in shipments of modern weapons and military equipment. Reports were proliferating that the Seoul incident showed organizational incompetence of South Korean military and police units and their inadequate equipment (M-1 rifles have many disadvantages like they are too heavy and bulky for the small South Koreans and thus less suitable for anti-infiltration activity in the mountains and in the less accessible terrain, they are less suitable compared to automatic rifles that the armed infiltrators had). All this points to a South Korean request to arm all anti-infiltration units with modern rifles M-6 that all South Korean units in South Vietnam already have, and to arm with these weapons also police units and special anti-infiltration units. However, judging from comments of some top South Korean military representatives, South Korea wants to exploit the Seoul and Pueblo incidents to the maximum in the shortest possible time: additional requests were expressed for the USA to help with replacement of communication equipment on all levels of the South Korean army, with reference to shortcomings in communication that appeared last few weeks due to old radio relays and telephone switchboxes. Based on experience from the last days of January, South Korean authorities also strongly criticized the kinds of food unsuitable for the anti-infiltration units, pointing out that there are already talks going on with the US command in South Korea that rice cans are not suitable and that they will be replaced with other kinds of food, along with the necessary kitchen material for preparation of warm meals in field conditions.

The DPRK press is correct in saying that Americans ran into a dead end in South Korea when the last developments in South Vietnam almost coincided with the "revolt" of the South Korean government, who wanted to exploit this extremely advantageous situation to the maximum, and is so far succeeding.

It may sound like irony but the fact is that the Seoul incident together with the Pueblo incident made it possible for South Korean ruling circles to solve, by pressuring the USA, some problems of military nature they always blamed on US

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dilatoriness. Since South Korea is quickly getting new equipment and arms in exchange for assurances that it will not pull its troops from South Vietnam, the questions of war and peace are reaching a higher level. Certainly, these successes of South Korean politics will not remain without response from the DPRK who, as we can judge not only from the confidential monitor, KCPA, is closely following especially the South Korean military problems and can be expected to make further effort to counter the latest South Korean measures with new requests to socialist countries, and thus neutralize the "results" of the Seoul and Pueblo incidents that were far more beneficial to South Korea than to the DPRK.

We can therefore assume that the arms buildup efforts will only increase on both sides of the demilitarized zone. Because of intensified propaganda on both sides, more pointed conflicts could develop on land and sea or near the demilitarized zone. These prospects cannot, in any case, mean a decrease of tension; on the contrary: the mutual race to modernize the equipment of armed forces can only exacerbate the already strained atmosphere on the Korean Peninsula, and that the danger of words becoming reality will continue to grow.

Today, when it is already clear that the DPRK cannot expect to surpass South Korea economically in the near future – and everything shows the DPRK abandoned these goals for good – the possibility of peaceful unification of the country is disappearing. Also hindering reunification is South Korea's anti-communism, which will continue to grow after the Seoul and Pueblo incidents and will also prevent the founding of a Marx-Lenin party in the South for a long time, as was outlined at the national conference of the KWP last year. On the contrary, all development in this part of the world suggests that the DPRK definitively gave up everything not related to the military solution of the Korean issue, even at the expense of lowering the living

standard of Korean people to an extreme degree and taxing the relations with the fraternal socialist parties and the PRC for only one end - intensive preparation for country unification with the help of weapons.

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We think that a lot will depend on the position of the USSR and the European socialist countries to this problem in a complicated situation. We cannot rule out that the Korean Worker's Party is already counting on more active aid of the People's Republic of China, whose arms potential could play a role on the Korean Peninsula in a Korean Worker's Party solution that is, as we believe, unrealistic.

Ambassador:

Holub