Creating Instability in Dangerous Global Regions: North Korean Proliferation and Support to Terrorism in the Middle East and South Asia

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North Korea contributes to instability in the Middle East and South Asia through its proliferation of missiles and other weapons systems used as delivery platforms for chemical (and the production of chemical munitions) or biological weapons, including long-range artillery. Evidence also shows that North Korea has collaborated in the nuclear programs of Syria, Iran, Libya, and Pakistan and has provided weapons and training to terrorist groups in both the Middle East and South Asia (Hezbollah and the Tamil Tigers). Given the recent decision by Washington to take Pyongyang off of the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, the recent and ongoing activity by North Korea directly related to proliferation of WMD and the support of terrorist groups could lead to severe foreign policy challenges for the United States and its allies in the future.

The recent accusation by an Israeli delegate to the United Nations (UN) that North Korea is engaging in proliferation of a variety of weapons (particularly nuclear technology and conventional arms) throughout the Middle East has once again brought to light the serious national security concern that North Korea’s rogue state behavior has created for the United States and its allies. In October 2008, Israeli delegate David Danieli stated at a meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that “The Middle East remains on the receiving end of the DPRK’s reckless activities,” further stating, “At least half a dozen countries in the region . . . have become eager recipients . . . through black market and covert network channels.”¹

With all of the news reports circulating about North Korea’s domestic nuclear program, the six-party talks, and recent health problems that Kim Jong-il has experienced, the proliferation of WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction) or nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) programs and technology and the platforms used to launch them (ballistic missiles) to unstable regions of the world has fallen “below the radar” for most of those who analyze security issues on the Korean Peninsula.² In my view this is unfortunate. Despite the fact that North Korea has engaged in the six-party talks with the United States and key players in the region since February 2007, Pyongyang has showed no signs of ceasing or slowing its proliferation of WMD, conventional weapons, and military training programs to anyone who is willing to purchase them—including rogue states and terrorist groups.³ Indeed, North Korea has continued to maintain close relationships with key players in the Middle East and elsewhere whose state behavior is a danger to Washington’s national interests. The Independent Working Group at the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis estimated in its 2009 report that, “Missile exports, which net North Korea around $1.5 billion a year, constitute one of its largest sources of revenue.”⁴

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In fact, during the fall of 2008, the Commander of United States Forces Korea, General Walter Sharp, remarked that he “is worried every day by the threat of North Korea selling WMD or missile technology to other people that could use it against us or other countries.”

North Korean Proliferation to Syria

There certainly is no doubt that Syria is a state that has been and continues to be a supporter of terrorism and organizations that carry out terrorist acts. Thus, this section will likely be troubling to those who study the Middle East—as North Korea has had a longstanding relationship with Syria that dates back nearly twenty years. North Korea and Syria have been collaborating in the nuclear field since the late 1990s, according to Michael Hayden, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). When speaking to the World Affairs Council of Los Angeles in September of 2008, Hayden remarked, “The depth of that relationship was revealed in the spring of last year . . .” Hayden was referring to a plutonium nuclear reactor—which the North Koreans helped the Syrians build—that was destroyed by an Israeli air strike in 2007. He also stated that the facility was “similar to Yongbyon in North Korea, but with its outer structure heavily disguised.” Hayden’s remarks were compelling and showed that there was overwhelming evidence relating to the assessment that the North Koreans built the facility in Syria, stating, “Virtually every form of intelligence—imagery, signals, human source, you name it—informed their assessments, so that they were never completely dependent on any single channel.”

There is a great deal more evidence that can be gleaned about North Korean–Syrian nuclear cooperation from a background briefing given to the press by the CIA on April 24, 2008. According to the briefing, the Syrians constructed a plutonium nuclear facility in the eastern Syrian Desert with the help of the North Koreans. The American intelligence community began to suspect that something was going on during the late 1990s, and increasing evidence piled up from information gathered in 2000, 2001, 2003, and 2006. In 2001, information was acquired tying North Korean nuclear entities to high-level Syrian officials. This information helped analysts trace cooperation back to as early as 1997. In 2003, evidence was compiled that tied North Koreans to work sites in Syria, but the exact location could not be determined. In 2005, analysts received indications that the Syrians and North Koreans were involved in a project in the Dayr az Zawr region of Eastern Syria—but again without an exact location. By late 2006, an actual facility had been identified. By the spring of 2007, photographs of the facility were obtained (both of the interior and exterior) that revealed it was in fact a nuclear reactor. It is important to note that the facility was not configured to produce electricity, as there were no power lines coming out of it. The facility used North Korean–type technology and actually closely resembled the facility at Yongbyon. Internal photographs revealed a gas-cooled, graphite-moderated reactor that had technology and configuration much like the Yongbyon reactor in North Korea.

As the Syrians rushed to dismantle and bulldoze the facilities following the bombing by the Israeli Air Force, more evidence became obvious. For example, a light tin roof and thin curtain walls had been added to the facility after it was constructed. This was to alter the building’s outline, which otherwise would have closely resembled the profile of the North Korea’s facility at Yongbyon. Evidence presented during the briefing also pointed to a number of North Korean nuclear experts who were in the area as the project was ongoing. In addition, analysts obtained photographs of North Korean nuclear officials meeting with Syrian officials. North Koreans made multiple visits to Syria before construction on the facility began in 2001 and also helped with procurement of materials that were likely
intended for the facility. One of the key North Koreans involved in the operation was nuclear scientist Chon Chi-bu, who was photographed and linked directly to set up of the facility. North Korean advisors also apparently assisted in damage assessment following the facility’s bombing. In short, to quote one of the senior intelligence officials who conducted the briefing, “. . . our information shows that Syria was building a gas-cooled, graphite-moderated reactor that was nearing operational capability in August 2007. The reactor would have been capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons. It was not configured to produce electricity and was ill-suited for research.” The official further remarked, “Only North Korea has built this type of reactor in the past 35 years.”

Reportedly, Israeli intelligence monitored a Syrian port where a North Korean cargo ship had docked, and tracked the cargo to the nuclear facility site. It is unclear if the materials carried on the North Korean ship were of the sort that would have made the Syrian facility operational or close to operational, but it is clear that the arrival of the cargo from North Korea had something to do with the decision by the Israeli government to destroy the nuclear site. Syrian ports have also regularly served as a conduit in the North Korea–Syria–Iran triangle of proliferation and military/WMD cooperation. Reportedly, the port of Tartous in Syria acts as the initial point of land entry for missile components and technology that are sent by sea from North Korea to Iran.

While the nuclear cooperation between North Korea and Syria is troubling to say the least—and both nations refuse to acknowledge that it even exists—there is much more to the relationship. North Korea and Syria have had a long and very useful collaboration on ballistic missiles since the early 1990s and this ongoing relationship is troubling to those who are concerned about the security of Israel and the Middle East.

By the late 1980s Syria’s relationship with the Soviet Union was deteriorating. Damascus began to look elsewhere for the acquisition of its ballistic missiles. On March 20, 1990, a senior North Korean official named Yi Chong-ok traveled to Syria, presumably to lay the groundwork for a missile deal. By late 1990 the two nations had come close to reaching a deal. Syria reportedly used the money it was given by Saudi Arabia ($2 billion) for participating in the Gulf War coalition to finance the deal. The initial deal was for the purchase of 150 SCUD C missiles for $500 million, with long-term deliveries to continue. A key part of the deal was that North Korea would build two missile assembly facilities in Syria. It is believed these facilities were completed by either 1993 or 1994 and have since been producing thirty to fifty missiles a year. Syria conducted its first test of the SCUD C during the summer of 1992. It has since conducted several more test launches.

North Korea and Syria probably began talks regarding the transfer of the SCUD D ballistic missile from North Korea to Syria during the late 1990s. In May of 2000 Syria reportedly received up to 50 SCUD D systems. The Syrians conducted their first successful test flight of the SCUD D on September 23, 2000. During a test firing of the SCUD D conducted during 2005, the missile inadvertently landed in Turkey. The missile was examined by specialists from American intelligence and others who came to realize that it had components not in the original model. The improved SCUD D discovered and examined by U.S. officials and others now is assessed to have a range of 700 kilometers and a separating warhead. The missile also had a warhead capable of delivering chemical payload, including VX gas. It can be assumed that this advanced capability was developed for the Syrians by the North Koreans, who also no doubt have this capability.

The North Koreans also have transferred chemical and biological weapons programs to Syria. Syria may have the largest stockpile of chemical weapons in the Middle East. Dozens of Iranian engineers and Syrians were reportedly killed on July 23, 2007, when they were attempting to load a chemical warhead containing VX and Sarin onto a SCUD
missile at a facility in Syria. The SCUD, the warhead—and perhaps the manufacturer—were all North Korean. But missiles are not the only way that chemical weapons could be launched by Syria. Multiple rocket launchers or tubed artillery could also be (and is likely to be) used to launch chemical munitions. This is also closely tied in to the North Koreans because they are assessed to have perfected the capability to equip their artillery with chemical munitions. Some or all of the long-range North Korean Army artillery systems that currently sit in range of Seoul are assessed to be equipped or are capable of being equipped with this capability. It is likely that given the level of cooperation between Damascus and Pyongyang, a chemical weapons capability also exists for Syrian artillery. It is also likely that these forces have been equipped and trained by the North Koreans.

North Korean Proliferation to Iran

There has been a great deal of talk both in the press and among analysts about North Korean nuclear proliferation since the plutonium facility in Syria was taken out by Israeli air strikes in 2007. Most of the focus though has been on Syria. Until recently there was very little talk of North Korean nuclear cooperation and/or collaboration with any other country in the region. Recently, this has changed as new evidence has come to light.

A recent report from the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) says that the government there has set up a facility in Tehran where dozens of North Korean experts are helping to design nuclear warheads for ballistic missiles. The NCRI was the group that disclosed details about Tehran’s nuclear program in 2002. The group says that the North Koreans are building the nuclear warhead designs for the Shahab-3 ballistic missile, the Iranian version of the North Korean-built No Dong ballistic missile. U.S. officials reportedly believe that the design for a highly enriched uranium (HEU) warhead, built small enough to fit on a No Dong, that was found when inspectors went through Libya’s nuclear program components is the same design that the Pakistanis (through the A.Q. Khan network) gave to the Iranians and the North Koreans. Thus the nuclear connection between Iran and North Korea originally began with the help of Pakistan. The collaboration between Pyongyang and Tehran reportedly began around the 2003 timeframe, when nuclear specialists from the DPRK engaged in increased visits to Iran. These visits are reported to have either accelerated or initiated work between Iranian and North Korean specialists to develop a nuclear warhead for the No Dong missile (Shahab-3 in Iran). According to press reports citing people living inside Iran and foreign intelligence officials, during this timeframe there were so many North Koreans working on nuclear and missile projects there that the Iranians actually set aside a resort on the Caspian coast for their exclusive use.

The assertion that North Korea has developed technology to fit a small nuclear warhead on a No Dong missile is also supported by statements made by former senior U.S. intelligence official Arthur Brown, who stated, “The fact that they have a warhead that’s fitable to the Nodong (ballistic missile) is pretty much given.” Brown made his comments to the Foreign Correspondents Club in Japan. Brown’s statement was further supported by a statement by General Kim Tae-young, the Chairman of the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), who told members of the National Assembly that “North Korea has been pushing to develop a small warhead to be mounted on a missile.” If this is true, it is likely that the warhead is of an HEU design since a plutonium warhead would likely be too big to fit on a missile. All of this recently disclosed evidence points to two key issues: 1) North Korea is likely involved in a collaborative nuclear program with Iran and they are working together to perfect a warhead for a No Dong (Shahab-3) missile, and 2) This further
supports evidence that North Korea has an active HEU program, and may be proliferating it. North Korea continues to publicly deny the existence of an HEU program.\textsuperscript{25}

When it comes to missiles, no nation has bought as many different kinds of missiles and missile technology from North Korea, or had a longer relationship of acquisition with North Korea, than Iran. North Korea successfully tested its own indigenously produced, reverse engineered version of the SCUD B ballistic missile during 1984, after getting its first SCUD from Egypt sometime during the late 1970s.\textsuperscript{26} Sometime during the early 1980s, Pyongyang entered into an agreement with Iran to receive North Korean missiles, for which the Iranians apparently paid in hard currency. The Iranians almost instantly made good use of the missiles acquired from the North Koreans, as they very quickly ended up firing them at Iraq in the now infamous “War of the Cities.”\textsuperscript{27} During this time North Korea was already working on increasing the range of its SCUD missiles. Pyongyang successfully produced and tested its own version of the SCUD C during 1986 and then again in 1990. Soon thereafter, the SCUD C missile was also sold to Iran.\textsuperscript{28}

North Korea conducted a successful test of the No Dong missile in 1993.\textsuperscript{29} Iranians were reportedly present at the test launch.\textsuperscript{30} Iran began the acquisition of No Dong missiles almost immediately during the mid-1990s and was able to provide the North Koreans something in return that they needed very badly—oil. Based on a variety of sources it appears that the missiles were purchased at least partially with Iranian oil instead of cash. The No Dong is known as “Shahab-3” in Iran.\textsuperscript{31} Apparently the Iranians are not only working with the North Koreans to build a nuclear warhead for the No-Dong/Shahab-3, but they also have flight tested the missile several times and as recently as July 2008.\textsuperscript{32}

During the 1990s, the North Koreans built a missile system based on the old Soviet SS-N-6 submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM). They converted this system to a land-based, “road-mobile” missile system with an estimated range of 4,000 kilometers.\textsuperscript{33} The North Koreans reportedly sold eighteen of these systems to Iran in the fall of 2005.\textsuperscript{34} The Iranians did not wait long to test this missile and conducted their first test launch (named “Shahab-4”) on January 17, 2006. The missile flew a full 3,000 kilometers and the Iranians intentionally destroyed it in mid-flight.\textsuperscript{35} Performance data recovered from the flight test reportedly revealed a range capability of 4,000 kilometers for the missile. North Koreans were probably present at the launch.\textsuperscript{36} The missile is what is referred to in the South Korean press either as the “Taepo Dong X,” or the “Musudan.” It is also deployed in North Korea, though the only place it has ever been flight tested is in Iran. If one looks at Figure 1, it becomes clear that the missiles Iran has acquired from North Korea (all of the missiles on the map were acquired from North Korea) can now hit targets, not only all over the Middle East, but also points in Europe.\textsuperscript{37}

North Korea also is collaborating with Iran on its long-range Taepo Dong I and II systems. This reportedly began in the late 1990s, as Pyongyang helped the Iranians develop their own versions of Taepo Dong’s and Taepo Dong variants, known in Iran as the Shahab-5, and possibly the Shahab-6. None of these missiles appears to be operational yet. Tests of both systems, the Taepo Dong I in 1998 and Taepo Dong II in 2006, failed.\textsuperscript{38} Reportedly, an Iranian delegation of engineers was on hand for North Korea’s missile test-launches in 2006 (launches included SCUD, No Dong, and the Taepo Dong II systems). Ten engineers from the Iranian Republican Revolutionary Guard were at the launches, according to Japanese and South Korean press sources. The engineers were reported to have been involved in the preparation for the Taepo Dong II launch. Perhaps more importantly (and more likely) the Iranians were also reported to be on hand to arrange for possible Iranian procurement of technology associated with the missile.\textsuperscript{39}
Finally, Iran has a long history of acquiring conventional weapons from North Korea. During the Iran–Iraq war, Tehran acquired long-range artillery systems from North Korea. Of note these are of the same type (a 170 mm self-propelled artillery system) that North Korea currently has deployed near the Demilitarized Zone (many pointed at Seoul) and that are assessed to be capable of delivering chemical munitions. North Korea has also reportedly sold a variety of naval craft to Iran, including mini-submarines that would be able to function with relative ease in the shallow waters off the Iranian coast. There are likely other weapons systems that the North Koreans sold to the Iranians as well. Such systems would probably include small arms, other types of naval craft, and components for radar and air defenses.

**North Korean Proliferation to Libya**

North Korea had a relationship with Libya that reportedly began sometime during the very early 1990s. While rumors of conventional arms sales are probably true, one of the most important deals that Libya and North Korea made was for the delivery of SCUD C missile systems. Libya reportedly also was looking to acquire the No Dong missile during the late 1990s, but apparently never did so. When Libya agreed to completely disclose the details of its WMD programs and dismantle them under the eyes of international inspectors, several SCUD Cs from North Korea were included in the stockpile of weapons that were
handed over. But the inspections conducted of Libya’s program detailed much more than just missiles. It also showed the ties between North Korean and Libyan nuclear programs, and connections between those two countries and Pakistan.

According to an article released in the American press in 2005, scientific tests conducted by U.S. government scientists led them to conclude with 90 percent certainty that North Korea sold processed uranium to Libya, as the two nations were both working to bring their HEU programs to fruition. During 2004, international inspectors found the evidence that North Korea provided Libya with nearly two tons of uranium hexafluoride. Libya provided the toxic material to the United States when it submitted its program to inspectors in the midst of agreed dismantlement. After extensive testing conducted at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee during 2004, intelligence officials reportedly revealed to the press that scientists concluded that the material originated in North Korea, not Pakistan.

There was still more revealed about Libya’s nuclear program as it went through inspection and dismantlement. According to reports released to the press, Pakistan supplied Chinese blueprints and plans for designing a nuclear warhead for delivery by a missile (the PRC provided a great deal of assistance to Pakistan for its nuclear weaponization program). Intelligence officials reportedly believe the plans were also provided to both the Iranians and North Koreans. The documents discovered had detailed technical instructions for manufacturing components for the device and fitting it atop a ballistic missile (in all likelihood a No Dong). Among the many documents examined were important and detailed descriptions (sometimes in Chinese) of a warhead design. The documents showed detailed designs of what analysts reportedly assess to be a 500-kilogram warhead. This is extremely important because it shows that, while Libya and North Korea were cooperating, they were also likely sharing designs provided to them by the A.Q. Khan network in Pakistan. It is also important because it points to what may be the basis for the current collaborative development nuclear warhead project reportedly ongoing in Iran between North Korean and Iranian engineers and scientists.

**North Korean Proliferation to Other Nations in the Middle East**

North Korea has had a long and troubling relationship involving proliferation of WMD, the platforms to carry WMD (ballistic missiles), and even conventional weapons with Iran, Syria, and until 2004, Libya. But these are not the only nations in the Middle East with which North Korea has had weapons deals in recent years. To a lesser extent Pyongyang has also engaged in deals with at least three other nations in the region. This of course adds further credibility to the assessment that North Korea will sell anything to anybody who has the cash (or something useful to barter) to pay for it.

It is fairly well known among analysts who study North Korea that Pyongyang was able to kick off its SCUD missile program because of a deal with Egypt that sent SCUD B missiles originally acquired from the Soviet Union from Cairo to North Korea in the late 1970s. As part of the deal between Egypt and North Korea, Pyongyang also reportedly helped the Egyptians build a SCUD B production facility during the 1980s and 1990s, and supplied components and other materials for the SCUD C system, including perhaps actual SCUD C missiles. Unconfirmed reports have stated Egypt was also attempting to acquire the No Dong missile system from the North Koreans as well, but to date these reports have not been proven. According to reports from the 1990s, Egypt received numerous shipments of SCUD C components from North Korea and possibly missiles—and was
working to enhance the range. The Egyptians have probably (with the help of the North Koreans) begun indigenous production of the SCUD C.47

But Egypt is not the only U.S. ally to acquire missile systems from North Korea. During 2002, NATO forces (from the Spanish Navy) intercepted a shipment of fifteen SCUD missile systems onboard the merchant ship So San bound for Yemen. The missiles were hidden under a shipment of thousands of bags of cement (which is what the ship falsely declared on its manifest). Reportedly, NATO naval forces were acting on U.S. intelligence when they intercepted the ship. Embarrassingly for the United States, Yemen asked that the missiles be released as they were part of what the Yemeni government described as a legal arms deal. The request by the Yemeni government was granted and now Yemen is also a recipient of North Korean missiles. Though the request was granted, it did show that the government of Yemen had violated an agreement not to purchase missiles and parts from North Korea.48 Another nation friendly to the United States, the United Arab Emirates, also is reported to have purchased twenty-five SCUD B missiles from North Korea, as well as artillery and multiple rocket launchers.49

**North Korean Proliferation and Arms Deals with Pakistan**

The focus of this paper is on the Middle East, but it is also important to include information about Pakistan because it too has been tied into WMD proliferation in the Middle East and because it is connected to North Korean proliferation activities.

In 2002, following an accusation by the United States that North Korea was developing an HEU program in collaboration with Pakistan, Pakistani scientist A.Q. Khan confessed that he had run a network that was selling HEU technology to Pyongyang (and others). According to numerous sources, Khan confessed that he had supplied the North Koreans with centrifuge prototypes and blueprints, which enabled Pyongyang to begin its centrifuge enrichment program.50 At the time, and now, the Pakistani government denied knowledge of the operation, but there has been a great deal of evidence that shows this is not true—in fact, the government in Islamabad not only sanctioned and enabled the operation, but profited from it. Dr. Khan has now confirmed this himself. He recently made a statement that the planes carrying the uranium enrichment materials to North Korea and elsewhere were loaded under the supervision of Pakistani security officials. He also stated that he had originally taken sole responsibility for the nuclear proliferation because his friends had persuaded him that it was in the national interest.51 Khan also denied his early confession in whole, saying that he had not meant a word of it. In fact (and as many suspected), Khan stated that the confession was forced on him by then President Pervez Musharaff.52 Thus, the evidence is clear that the Pakistani military—and the government—was involved in collaboration with North Korea and others for an HEU nuclear weaponization program.

In an interview with the Japanese press, former Pakistani leader Benazir Bhutto stated in 1993 she had been able to “obtain technology from a long-range missile” from North Korea. The missile was the No Dong, and the payment for the missile was uranium enrichment technology. Bhutto was escorted to North Korea by A.Q. Khan, and of course this was the beginning of the nuclear cooperation that began in the mid-1990s.53 While the program began in the mid-1990s, by 2000–2001 it had kicked into high gear. The deal, apparently originated under Bhutto and continued under the supervision of Khan after she fell from power, was a “nukes for missiles” barter deal between two regimes in Islamabad and Pyongyang that were both strapped for cash. Pakistan provided technology, equipment, and blueprints to North Korea. North Korea provided missiles (primarily the No Dong) to Pakistan (North Korea was already providing SCUD missiles to Pakistan).54 According to
press reports, the missiles and nuclear technology were being shuttled between North Korea and Pakistan on American-built C-130s.\textsuperscript{55} Also of interest, these long-range “shuttle” trips made by C-130s carrying nuclear materials, technology, and scientists to North Korea, and No Dong missiles back to Pakistan reportedly flew through Chinese airspace.\textsuperscript{56} On one of the trips, the Pakistani Air Force C-130 used to shuttle the weapons and technology reportedly broke down in North Korea and was temporarily unable to return to Pakistan. This is said to have created quite a dilemma in North Korea at the time, where no spare parts existed for the American-made aircraft.\textsuperscript{57}

The missiles for nukes deal ended after A.Q. Khan’s “confession” (now completely disowned) and probably because of pressure put on Pakistan by the United States, which began supplying foreign aid to Pakistan when Islamabad joined Washington in prosecuting the global war on terror.\textsuperscript{58} Unfortunately, the damage was already largely complete. Khan’s nuclear “bazaar,” financed, endorsed, and enabled by the Pakistani military and government, had already provided nuclear plans, components, centrifuges, blueprints, technology, and scientific support to North Korea, Iran, and Libya. Of note, the design for an HEU warhead that can be fitted aboard a ballistic missile (presumably the No Dong) that is now reportedly being modified and perfected in Iran, in a collaboration between Iranian and North Korean specialists, originated in Pakistan with the A.Q. Khan network. Thus, Pakistan was the conduit in the North Korea–Iran collaboration—and possibly in other related activities. But North Korean proliferation goes beyond arms deals with nation-states in the Middle East and South Asia. Pyongyang also has enabled terrorist groups.

**North Korean Proliferation to Terrorist Groups: Hezbollah**

North Korea is well known as a nation-state that will sell anything to nation—or non state actor—who will pay for it. This includes a relationship with Hezbollah that, according to some reports, goes back to the late 1980s. Reportedly, during this time period Hezbollah operatives received several months of training in North Korea. Among the key players in Hezbollah who spent time in North Korea were Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general; security and intelligence chief Ibrahim Akil; and Mustapha Badreddine, head of counterespionage operations. The training in guerrilla operations occurred at the behest of Iran, which appears to be yet another result of Tehran’s close relationship with North Korea. North Korea also supervised the building of underground facilities that Hezbollah constructed in southern Lebanon. In fact, according to several reports, all of Hezbollah’s underground facilities were built primarily under the supervision of North Korean instructors during the 2003–2004 timeframe. These facilities included dispensaries for the wounded, food stocks, and arms dumps.\textsuperscript{59} Thus, it is clear that the North Koreans provided assistance to Hezbollah, through Iran, for extensive operations that could be run from underground facilities.\textsuperscript{60}

It is likely that this North Korean assistance in Hezbollah underground facilities served as a major factor in the difficulties the Israeli military ran into when prosecuting combat operations against Hezbollah during their conflict in 2006. In fact, as Israeli reporter Lenny Ben-David has articulated, “Hizbullah’s military bases, armories, bunkers and communications networks were much more extensive than Israel’s intelligence services estimated on the eve of the 2006 war.” Ben-David asserts that the tunnel-building operations were conducted under the auspices of the Korea Mining Development Trading Corporation, a company that has been officially sanctioned by the United States for its activities.\textsuperscript{61}

Hezbollah also has reportedly received shipments of important arms that have been used to inflict casualties on Israeli troops—and civilians. According to sources in the South Korean press, Mossad has discovered that Hezbollah was able to hit the outskirts of Tel
Aviv with short-range missiles containing components supplied by North Korea. According to the report, missile components were shipped from North Korea to Iran. The missiles were then assembled (presumably by Iranians) and transported to Hezbollah via Syria. There are reports that Hezbollah has received other shipments of arms that have the potential to cause serious damage to Israel as well. According to the opposition group, the Reform Party in Syria (RPS), Hezbollah acquired CW agents from North Korea during the summer of 2008. RPS (which reportedly has ties to the Lebanese intelligence community) states that the recently acquired mustard and nerve gas was received with the help of Syria and can be mounted on Hezbollah’s short-range missiles that target Israel. If true, this would be a significant change in the threat to Israel’s security.

North Korea Proliferation to Terrorist Groups: The Tamil Tigers

Hezbollah is not the only terrorist group that has had connections to the North Koreans in recent years. A video of an attack during 2000 by the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) on a Sri Lankan navy ship reportedly reveals speedboats that were of North Korean origin. The video also revealed that the rebel group was using what appeared to be a North Korean variant of a Russian (and later Chinese) 107 mm Katyusha rocket launcher. An analysis of the video described above in Jane’s Intelligence Review reveals that there can be almost no doubt that the armaments being used by the LTTE were of North Korean origin: “In the video, LTTE Sea Tigers can be seen using a variant of the 107 mm Katyusha rocket, fired from a lightweight tripod, in pairs. This is believed to be a variant of the Chinese Type 63 107mm launcher. The Chinese produce a single tube version called a Type 85 fired from a man-portable tripod, but the North Koreans produce a double version. This is quite a rare weapon . . . “

The LTTE also was the recipient of an attempted shipment of 152 mm and 130 mm artillery shells and 120 mm mortars from the North Koreans during 2007. The shipment was thwarted by the Sri Lankan navy. The seizure of an LTTE boat mounted with a 14.5 mm machine gun is also assessed to be connected with North Koreans. The Sri Lankan navy is known to have intercepted and attacked North Korean merchant ships carrying arms to the LTTE on three different occasions in recent years, October 2006, February 2007, and March 2007. It reportedly was able to sink two of the North Korean ships. Of interest, on several occasions the North Korean merchant ships fired on the Sri Lankan vessels, which likely led to the eventual sinking of two of the ships. According to a report from the Congressional Research Service that cites the Sankei Shimbun in Japan, the Sri Lankan government filed an official protest with the North Koreans.

Conclusions

North Korea’s activities in the Middle East, South Asia, and with terrorist groups have been disruptive both to regional security and to the national security interests of the United States and its allies. Thus, it is rather surprising that these activities have received relatively little attention as the United States and the other parties in the six-party talks process seek to persuade North Korea to transparently dismantle its nuclear programs through diplomacy. While the United States has reportedly brought up the issues of nuclear proliferation, North Korea continues to publicly deny its involvement—and there has been no mention of North Korea’s support to terrorist organizations. As the evidence shows, Pyongyang has shown
no signs of slowing down its arms deals, its collaboration on WMD initiatives, or its support
to terrorism in what is arguably the most volatile region on earth.

Given the fact that the evidence points to North Korea’s participation in proliferation
programs to rogue nations and support to terrorist groups, it is likely that many
in the United States will be disturbed by the news that on October 11, 2008 the Bush
administration announced it would remove North Korea from the list of state sponsors
of terrorism. Soon after the deal was announced many conservatives expressed dis-
may, with some voicing concern that it also sends a very bad message to Iran. Represent-
ative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida remarked, “By rewarding North Korea be-
fore the regime has carried out its commitments, we are encouraging this regime to
continue its illicit nuclear program and violate its pledge to no longer provide nu-
clear assistance to extremist regimes.” Many conservative lawmakers in South Korea’s
National Assembly—who had been largely supportive of Bush’s policies previously—
were also outspoken about their concern regarding the delisting. Indeed, as former
deputy negotiator for the U.S. delegation to the six-party talks and current direc-
tor of Asian Studies at Georgetown University Victor Cha admits, “…Pyongyang’s
uranium-based nuclear activities and its proliferation connections with Syria are said to
be covered by the scope of the agreement, though ambiguities remain. Moreover, none of
this is set in stone until the six parties codify the understandings reached in Pyongyang—
and even then, who is to say the North won’t welsh again in the future?” Cha does believe
that the delisting and agreement is “…another yard gained in a slow ground game.” At
the time of North Korea’s delisting, Barack Obama also reportedly hailed the Bush adminis-
trations decision to take Pyongyang off of the terrorism list as an “appropriate response.”
Thus, it is likely to remain a fixture in the Obama presidency.

Despite removing Pyongyang from the State Department’s list of states sponsoring
terrorism, the December 2008 round of six-party talks resulted in none of the formal
agreements the Bush administration had hoped for. In fact, one of the key “oral” agreements
earlier discussed among the six parties was dismissed by the North Koreans—the removal
of nuclear samples from North Korea for analysis and verification. The North Koreans
claimed in December 2008 that this would violate their sovereignty. U.S. State Department
spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters that the United States is not going to rethink
its removal of North Korea from the list. Former Senior Advisor for Asian issues at
the National Security Council, Michael J. Green was quoted in the South Korean press
as saying, “The Bush administration erred in removing North Korea from the list without
extracting a more concrete step on verification. We now know the North Koreans tricked
us.”

Many questions remain, despite the optimism by Bush administration officials and
former officials. Does the agreement to delist North Korea set a precedent for other nations
such as Iran? Does this in fact mean that if nuclear weaponization programs are frozen
(because the program most certainly has not been dismantled, nor have the North Koreans
even admitted the locations or numbers of their Plutonium weapons or their HEU facilities),
the U.S. government will forgive other acts of irresponsible state behavior such as prolif-
eration and support to terrorism by delisting a state that agrees to some initial (and these
agreements are certainly far from being anything but initial) moves in the right direction?
In the interest of not inciting the North Koreans, will the U.S. government now ignore their
other acts that disrupt stability in the Middle East in the interest of pursuing the six-party
talks? North Korea recently resorted to brinkmanship by initiating activity at a nuclear
test site, leading to the assessment that a possible test could occur again. North Korea
also apparently began preparations for another long-range missile test at its missile testing
facility on the east coast. Did these brinkmanship moves (and North Korean threats to restart their reactor) create a flurry of activity that resulted in Washington letting them off the hook? And if so, does this set a precedent for Washington’s dealings with other states who engage in rogue behavior, such as Iran?

Certainly these are troubling questions. But perhaps the most troubling question is, how can the United States and its allies put enough pressure on North Korea to end activities that disrupt stability and security in the Middle East? The Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) is one method that the United States and many allies have used (with mixed results at best) in an attempt to disrupt North Korea’s proliferation activities (the program has been aimed primarily at maritime means of proliferation in the past). Perhaps increased participation by the South Koreans in PSI would enhance its effectiveness. In fact, only nine weeks before President Bush removed North Korea from Washington’s list of terrorism sponsors, India—responding to a request from the United States—blocked a North Korean cargo plane from delivering cargo to Iran by denying it permission to fly from Myanmar (Burma) to Iran through Indian airspace. The aircraft was an IL-62 owned by the North Korean “airline.” A senior U.S. official reportedly stated, “It was frankly a success that we stopped North Korea from doing this.” According to several press sources, the Americans believed the aircraft was carrying gyroscopes for missile guidance systems.

A North Korean aircraft flying out of Burma carrying components of weapons systems that will enhance Iran’s missile capability is interesting. But it also brings us to the subject of North Korean proliferation to Burma. A variety of reports now indicate North Korea is helping Burma with a fledgling nuclear weaponization program. Burma has a small reactor that it claims is for “peaceful purposes.” But reportedly the government sent 30 officers to study reactor technology in North Korea during 2003, and in 2006 started buying machinery required for reactor construction. According to an essay written in Foreign Affairs by Michael Green and Derek Mitchell, “Western intelligence officials have suspected for several years that the regime has had an interest in following the model of North Korea and achieving military autarky by developing ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons.” Reports from exiles say that North Koreans are engaged in tunneling and constructing water-cooling systems for the Burmese in an isolated area of the country. Workers who have been in the area describe the underground facility as “quite huge,” and say that the Burmese are working in collaboration with North Korean technicians. The facility is surrounded by tight security. In January 2009, a North Korean believed to be a weapons specialist working on a secret project at the facility died from undisclosed causes. His body was quickly cremated and shipped back to North Korea. Details of the secret North Korea–Burma project remain sketchy, but are disturbing to those who follow Pyongyang’s proliferation of technology and weapons. But despite efforts that have often proven to be extremely frustrating at times to disrupt North Korean proliferation and support to illicit activities, Pyongyang has always been able to come up with new strategies and techniques to get past them and to continue initiatives that have gained them both cash and resources. Thus, only continued vigilance and close collaboration by the United States with its allies will be able to contain the rogue state behavior of a North Korea, which shows no signs of halting collaboration and cooperation with dangerous state and nonstate actors in the Middle East and South Asia.

Notes


37. For the source of the map shown, and other analysis on missiles Iran has acquired from North Korea, see “Recognizing Iran as a Strategic Threat: An Intelligence Challenge for the United States,” Staff Report of the US House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Subcommittee on Intelligence Policy, 23 August 2006, available at http://intelligence.house.gov/Media/PDFS/IranReport082206v2.pdf?#search=%22Recognizing%20Iran%20as%20a%20Strategic%20Threat%20An%20Intelligence%20Challenge%20for%20the%20United%20States%22.


68. Niksch, “North Korea: Terrorism List Removal?”


79. For more analysis on South Korea’s past role in the Proliferation Security Initiative, see Myung Jin Kim, “South Korea–North Korea Relations: Influence of the PSI on North Korea,” Strategic Insights, vol. 5, issue 7 (September 2006), available at http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2006/Sep/kimSep06.asp.


