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Korean Sit' Report

USAF, DIA,
NAVY, JCS,
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4-75
0500 EDT
23 August 1976

National Intelligence Situation Report

K O R E A

Summary

There has been no North Korean military reaction to the tree-cutting operation and, although still on alert, there are signs that the armed forces are returning to a more normal status.

A private message to the US from Kim Il-sung indicates his desire to defuse the current crisis. South Korean leaders appear satisfied with the demonstration of US firmness, but want Washington to maintain pressure on the North, including retention in the region of the US military force augmentation.

At this point, the North Koreans may feel that they have achieved some political gains by dramatizing to the world the issue of the US military presence in Korea. However, this has been at the price of a public backdown in the confrontation. In this regard, Pyongyang will probably calculate with increased care before undertaking any new military provocations.

Military Situation

There has been no North Korean military reaction to the tree-clearing operation.

[Redacted]

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Nevertheless, an August 22 press article stated that armed forces "are in full combat readiness." The alert publicly announced by Pyongyang on August 19 will probably remain in effect until North Korea is convinced that the threat of military action by the US and its South Korean ally has abated. For propaganda purposes, Pyongyang may continue to maintain a "paper alert" long after the armed forces have resumed routine operations.

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Allied Forces remain on increased alert. Joint Security Area operations have assumed a more normal posture, and the incremental phasedown of the tree-cutting operation is underway. B-52s, accompanied by US and South Korean fighters, conducted training missions over the South Korean landmass on August 21, 22 and 23. The F-4 and F-111 aircraft, which deployed to South Korea on August 19 and 20, respectively, remain there. The carrier MIDWAY task group arrived on station in the vicinity of the southern approaches to the Korea Strait at 1500 EDT on August 22.

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Political Situation

The most significant North Korean political response since the August 21 tree-clearing operation is the delivery, three and a half hours later at Panmunjon, of a private message from President Kim Il-sung to the United Nations Commander. The message was conveyed orally and privately by the senior North Korean representative on the Military Armistice Commission to his UN Command counterpart.

This is the official English record of their conversation:

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BEGIN QUOTE:

KPA First Statement: I have been instructed by the Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army to convey his message to the Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command side. Quotation: It was a good thing that no big incident occurred at Panmunjom for a long period. However, it is regretful that an incident occurred in the Joint Security Area, Panmunjom, this time. An effort must be made so that such incidents may not recur in the future. For this purpose both sides should make efforts. We urge your side to prevent the provocation. Our side will never provoke first, but take self-defensive measures only when provocation occurs. This is our consistent stand. End of Quotation. I hope that you convey this message to your side's Commander-in-Chief at the quickest possible time.

UNC First Statement: The Supreme Commander KPA message to Commander-in-Chief, United Nations Command, will be delivered by me to CINUNC in accordance with your desires.

KPA Second Statement: I have one thing to add. This morning your side again committed provocation by bringing hundreds of completely armed personnel in the JSA without any advance notification. Such incidents on your part might cause such one that occurred on the 18th. I strongly demand that your side commit no such provocations.

UNC Second Statement: May I have a copy of the Supreme Commander's message to CINUNC?

KPA Third Statement: At present I have no copy. I now await your reply to my last statement.

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UNC Third Statement: Today I met with you at your request only to receive your Supreme Commander's message to CINUNC. I have nothing further to discuss at this time. If you have any other subjects to discuss, we may do so at a future meeting.

KPA Fourth Statement: I would like to state once more clearly, that the provocation which you committed this morning is a serious one which might cause a serious consequences. Therefore, I hope that you seriously consider this and take responsible measures so that such provocations may not recur. I propose to conclude our meeting.

UNC Fourth Statement: I agree to your proposal to conclude the meeting at this time.

END QUOTE.

Kim Il-sung's message, terming the events of August 18 (when two US officers were killed) "regretful" is an effort on his part to defuse the current military tension. Kim's failure to provide a written statement may be an attempt to avoid losing prestige among Koreans by appearing to have backed down in the confrontation. In their press and radio commentaries, for example, the North Koreans are expressing themselves in characteristically vigorous language, though with notable restraint in the use of threats.

South Korean leaders have expressed general satisfaction with the firmness of the US military response to the August 18 killings. There is particular appreciation of the US effort to coordinate plans with ROK authorities and to involve ROK forces in a meaningful way.

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On the other hand, top South Korean leaders have formally expressed to US officials in Seoul a concern that the US might be tempted, in light of Kim Il-sung's admittedly conciliatory statement, to let the North off too easily. The defense minister and the foreign minister, on President Pak's orders, argued for sustained pressure on the North to extract formal apologies, reparations, and assurances of better behavior. The South Koreans advocated maintenance of the augmented US force in South Korea until such objectives are achieved.

The South Koreans are disturbed by other implications of the Kim Il-sung message, including the absence of any South Korean officer at the August 21 meeting. Seoul has persistent concerns about anything resembling direct US-North Korean negotiations on political matters.

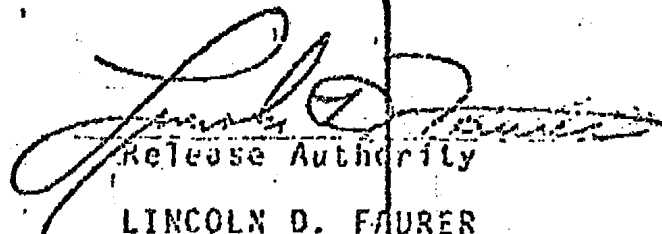
Assessment

At this point in the current crisis, the North Koreans may see more gains than losses for themselves. They have succeeded in dramatizing to the world the issue of the UN military presence in Korea. They are setting the stage for an intensified diplomatic campaign to win support for their anti-US resolution at the fall session of the UN General Assembly. Pyongyang may also feel that it has opened up new possibilities for direct talks with the US on such quasi-political matters as improved security arrangements at Panmunjom.

On the other hand, the North Koreans have been compelled to back down publicly on the matter at issue, apparently intimidated by the military forces so rapidly brought to bear. Nor can Pyongyang be happy with the lack of international enthusiasm for its cause during the recent crisis. The USSR and China offered only feeble replays of North Korean statements and no significant support. Other communist and left-leaning nations with few exceptions, offered only brief and bland commentary.

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The outlook at this point is for a continuation of North Korea's diplomatic offensive against the US military presence in Korea. It is likely, however, that Pyongyang will calculate with increased care before undertaking any new military provocations against US forces in the region.



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