

May 8, 1967

**Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the
Hungarian Foreign Ministry**

Citation:

"Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry", May 8, 1967, Wilson Center Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1967, 60. doboz, 40, 002128/1/1967. Obtained and translated for NKIDP by Balazs Szalontai
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/110622>

Summary:

A report on Romanian, Czech, and Hungarian views of the Korean People's Army, military relations between North Korea and the Soviet Union, and North Korea's military policy.

Original Language:

Hungarian

Contents:

Translation - English

In the course of the preparations for the Korean visit of the Hungarian military delegation headed by Comrade [Minister of Defense Lajos] Czinege, in recent weeks we also consulted the Czechoslovak, Polish, Romanian, and GDR military attachés accredited to Pyongyang. [...]

Lieutenant-Colonel Goch, the Czechoslovak military attaché, pointed out that as a result of the adoption of the faulty Chinese views, in recent years the development of the Korean People's Army came to a standstill, the Korean comrades did not pay attention to the development of modern military technology and military studies. In his view, the standard of the People's Army was approximately 10-12 years behind modern requirements. Both he and other military attachés emphasized that the new political line of the Korean Workers' Party, reinforced also by the party conference held last fall, manifests itself more and more positively in the military and political field as well since 1966. The Korean comrades started to modernize the army and acquire [the use] of up-to-date arms.

In the judgment of Captain Voicu, the Romanian military attaché, the moral and political standard of the Korean People's Army is high, in the army great attention is paid - and every day several hours are devoted - to political education. The Korean soldiers are steady and hardy, they indeed bear up well under difficult circumstances. However, their military training, if one takes [the requirements of] a modern war into consideration, leaves much to be desired, for until recent times it was the principles and approach of the guerrilla struggles and the experiences of the 1950-53 war that they have applied.

[...]

Every military attaché pointed out that the backwardness of the general technical standard of the country and the cadres constituted a serious problem in the modernization of the army and the adequate acquisition of [the use of] the new arms. In the view of the Czechoslovak military attaché, they will need at least 5-6 years to show any serious achievements.

The Romanian military attaché pointed out that it was very sensible that the Soviet Union provided the DPRK with adequate modern arms, and one should also evaluate such Korean demands positively. Due to low technical standards, however, the armament, including the modern arms, gets spoiled quickly, the Koreans cannot handle them adequately yet. Comrade Voicu remarked that it was said that now the Soviet Union did not pour modern arms [into North Korea] to the extent that the Koreans had asked for but - very rightly - she also sent [Soviet] technical experts along with the continuous supplies so as to teach and train the local ones. Comrade Voicu emphasized that this was a very reasonable measure, for no matter how many arms were here, it was not of much use [to the North Koreans] if they could not handle them adequately and ruined them.

[...]

In the opinion of Comrade Voicu, the supreme leadership of the People's Army is well-trained. Minister [of Defense] Kim Chang-bong [Kim Chang Bong], a graduate of Frunze Academy, is an excellent organizer. The practical guidance of the People's Army is in the hands of Chief of Staff Choe Gwang [Choe Kwang]. Deputy Minister O Jin-u [O Jin U] [...] is the best-trained Korean military leader. [...]

By the way, GDR Military Attaché Schröter remarked that the standard of the [North Korean] military leaders was not comparable to European requirements. Most of them acquired the most elementary skills [only] after liberation, and in the 1950-1953 war they fought on the basis of the experiences gained during the guerrilla struggles.

However, in recent years a younger and better-trained military generation has begun to be educated.

With regard to this issue, Romanian Military Attaché Voicu said that to his knowledge, the commanders of the military units were chosen primarily from the old guard, and they paid attention mainly to political and moral training. However, the heads of the staff of the units are usually chosen from the officers belonging to the young generation, who, as opposed to the commanders, already have better military skills and training. In essence, tactical training is in the hands of the latter. Comrade Voicu added that there was a sort of collective leadership in the units ([composed of] the commander, the head of the staff, and the political commissar), but he did not know details.

The military attachés said that recently the People's Army started to carry out military exercises under the circumstances of nuclear war as well. Previously they had been of the opinion that the use of atomic weapons was not effective under the Korean natural conditions. Nevertheless, it seems that the opinion and experiences of others [i.e., the Soviets] have induced the Korean comrades to modify their standpoint in this field too. In the view of Comrade Goch, however, civil defense is still lagging behind, in essence the population has not been prepared yet for the contingency of a nuclear attack.

Comrade Voicu said that in conformity with the positive changes that had become obvious since last year, the Korean comrades have paid increased attention to coastal and anti-aircraft defense. They already defend Pyongyang with missiles, and a substantial military force is stationed in the area of the city. By the way, the bulk of the army is stationed along the Demilitarized Zone, the 1st Army in the west and the 2nd Army in the east.

The military attachés pointed out that the strength of the armed forces was very high in the DPRK, it was approx. 600,000 with the public security forces included. The Korean comrades refer to South Korea so as to justify this strength, which otherwise constitutes a very heavy burden for the national economy. Deputy Premier Kim Gwang-hyeop [Kim Kwang Hyop] told the leaving Soviet Ambassador and the Hungarian trade union delegation that the country had serious problems of labor shortage because of that, and this also played a role in that they had to prolong the Seven-year Plan.

With regard to this issue, Lieutenant-Colonel Zaluszka, the Polish military attaché, remarked that the economic problems caused by the high troop strength were aggravated by the unjustifiably long period (four years) of service.

Concerning the international contacts of the Korean People's Army, the Romanian military attaché confirmed that there were 75 Korean pilots in the DRV with the aim of exchanging experiences, and, to his knowledge, they also participated in sorties.

Korean officers had studied in China before, but they were recalled, because the Chinese had agitated them in the course of the „Cultural Revolution.“ According to the information available for the Romanians, at present there are no Chinese military experts in the DPRK, but the Soviet military attaché believes that a group of Chinese officers, whose function is unknown, still resides in the DPRK.

There are Soviet military experts working in the DPRK, and at the same time Korean officers went to Soviet military academies [...].

A few Korean military officers studied in Romania in 1955-57, but no one has been there since then. According to Comrade Voicu, at that time the Korean side gave

them [the Romanians] to understand that their cadres „became corrupted" there.

[...]

Every military attaché referred to that they lived in isolation, the Ministry of Defense dealt with them in a formal way, no military program, visit, or exposé was organized for them. Hitherto the leaders of the People's Army and the ministry have evaded their requests and avoided conversations of fundamental importance, but they [the military attachés] usually found them cordial and friendly men (this was pointed out both by the Polish and the Romanian military attaché).

[...]

István Kádas
(Ambassador)