

South Korea assassination squad to target Pyongyang leadership

Ben McGrath**18 September 2017**

South Korea is assembling an assassination unit to be activated by the end of the year, according to Defense Minister Song Young-mu. It is being trained by the US military to be able to murder North Korean leader Kim Jong-un as well as other high-ranking figures in Pyongyang. The move is part of an overall agenda in Washington and Seoul to expand plans for war against the impoverished state.

The decision to roll out the hit squad is particularly chilling given South Korean President Moon Jae-in's comments on Friday following North Korea's test firing of another ballistic missile. Moon responded by ruling out talks with Pyongyang saying, "In a situation like this, dialogue is impossible." He then warned that South Korea has the "power that can destroy the North beyond any recovery."

The assassination unit is just one aspect of the preparations for war with North Korea. Defense Minister Song told the National Assembly's defense committee on September 4, "We are in the process of conceptualizing the plan. I believe we can create the unit by December 1." The assassination squad would also be tasked with carrying out nighttime raids across the Demilitarized Zone, separating the two Koreas.

The same US Navy Seals team that murdered Osama bin Laden in 2011 is working to train the new unit. This US Seal Team 6 took part in this year's massive Foal Eagle/Key Resolve war games, conducted by the US and South Korea each spring. It was the first time it had been involved in the exercises, during which, it practiced assassinating Kim Jong-un.

Seoul and Washington are openly discussing the murder of a country's head of state, though claiming it is only meant to scare Pyongyang or be used in the event of war. However, influential former government figures are openly calling for Kim's assassination. Nam

Seong-uk, a professor at Korea University and former leading official in the National Intelligence Service (NIS) told a meeting of members of the right-wing Liberty Korea Party two weeks ago that, "The problem will not be resolved unless Kim Jong-un is eliminated."

The assassination squad is part of the Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation (KMPR) program. It divides Pyongyang into different sectors to be destroyed in a barrage of missiles supposedly if North Korea shows any signs of attacking. The hit team would then infiltrate and kill any top regime officials who survived. The key to the KMPR is its implementation at any *signs* of an attack, making it a part of a wider preparation for preemptive war.

South Korea demonstrated its KMPR system in its response to Pyongyang's missile test on Friday. The military launched two Hyunmoo-2A ballistic missiles only six minutes after the North's launch. Both landed in the Sea of Japan but only one accurately hit its designated target. After signs of the North's missile test were reported to Moon on Thursday, "The president, without taking anything else into consideration, approved the firing of Hyunmoo missiles upon North Korea's missile provocation," a government source stated.

A second system, known as the Kill Chain, has similarly been designed to launch preemptive attacks on North Korean military positions. The third system being put in place is called the Korea Air and Missile Defense (KAMD), which can supposedly track and shoot down an incoming missile.

The KMPR program is not new. It was announced, along with its hit squad, last September following North Korea's 5th nuclear test, by the Park Geun-hye government. President Moon, who postured as an opponent of military escalation and promised to engage

Pyongyang in dialogue, is continuing the program.

In fact, South Korea is accelerating its war drive as the US's Trump administration continues to ramp up tensions and threats. Seoul has already reached an agreement with Washington to remove the limit on the war head weight on its ballistic missiles while also agreeing to the full deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery.

Moon is planning to increase South Korea's military budget to 2.9 percent of gross domestic product during the course of his term, up from 2.4 percent. Trump also stated in a Tweet that he would allow South Korea and Japan to purchase substantially larger amounts of military equipment from the US.

The overall joint US-South Korea war strategy is known as Operations Plan (OPLAN) 5015. First adopted in 2015, it instituted a far more aggressive posture, including plans for "decapitation raids" on North Korean officials. It served as the basis for the springtime Foal Eagle/Key Resolve exercises as well as the Ulchi Freedom Guardian drills conducted last August. Seoul's KMPR plan is designed to carry out OPLAN.

Even if one takes at face value South Korea's claims that these programs are "defensive", they greatly heighten the danger of war. In its article on the assassination squad, the *New York Times* admitted, "[T]he potential consequences of accurate detection [of a North Korean attack] are huge. Miscalculation could prompt an unwarranted preemptive strike, which could start a regional nuclear war."

Such a war would be catastrophic. As chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford stated in July, a war "would be horrific, and it would be a loss of life unlike any we have experienced in our lifetimes, and I mean anyone who's been alive since World War II has never seen the loss of life that could occur if there's a conflict on the Korean Peninsula."

At the same time, there is no reason to believe that South Korea or the US would not try to assassinate Kim Jong-un or conduct some other clandestine operation to goad the North into firing the opening shots. The *Asahi Shimbun* reported on June 26 that former President Park Geun-hye had signed off on a plan to remove Kim following an unsuccessful meeting of officials from the two Koreas in December 2015. Citing an anonymous source, the paper stated the plan

included the possibility for Kim's forced exile, retirement, or assassination.

Pyongyang made unsubstantiated claims in May that the US's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the NIS in 2014 bribed a North Korean lumber worker in Russia to carry out the assassination of Kim. Given the tensions and the regime's own nervousness over a US-South Korean attack, even a minor incident or accident in Pyongyang involving a leading figure could be interpreted as an act of war.



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