



One of the two KPAF MiG-29s that intercepted a USAF RC-135S COBRA BALL on March 2, 2003. Visible in this image are the port drop tank on the inner pylon and what appear to be R-60 AA-8 APHID AAMs on the outer two pylons. This image was captured from a video taken by one of the crew members aboard the RC-135S. (USAF)

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MiG-29 in KPAF Service

By Joseph S. Bermudez Jr.

Background

During the 1980s a distinct warming of relations occurred between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Soviet Union. A result of this was that Kim Il-sung visited Moscow in May 1984 and October 1988 where he signed a number of agreements concerning intelligence sharing, basing, arms deliveries and general military cooperation. Among the more significant developments for the Soviets were the deployment of small intelligence assets in the DPRK and the opening up of its airspace to Tu-16/

95/142 BEAR reconnaissance missions along Japan and PRC for shadowing U.S. Navy operations in East Asia. For the Korean People's Air Force (KPAF) these agreements provided for the acquisition of MiG-23ML FLOGGER G, Su-25K/UBK FROGFOOT and MiG-29B/UB FULCRUM A/B aircraft.¹ At the time of their delivery the MiG-29s represented a dramatic improvement to KPAF offensive and air defense capabilities. They remain to this day the most modern and capable aircraft in the KPAF inventory.

Although the details of the original MiG-29 agreement are unknown it appears that it encompassed the delivery of a regiment of approximately 45 MiG-29B/UB FULCRUM A/B air superiority fighters and provisions to assist the DPRK to establish an assembly line for the aircraft. In order to undertake assembly of the MiG-29 the DPRK constructed the Panghyön Aircraft Factory, south of the village of Panghyön-dong, and 7 km south of Panghyön Airbase, Kusöng-si, P'yöngan-bukto.² This factory is subordinate to the Second Economic Committee's Seventh Machine Industry Bureau, which is responsible for the procurement, de-

velopment and production of aircraft and related equipment.³

During early 1988 the first model 9-12B MiG-29B FULCRUM A aircraft arrived from the Soviet Union with the total rising to fourteen by the end of 1992.⁴ Among these are believed to have been at least one two-seat model 9-51 MiG-29UB FULCRUM B trainer. Not surprisingly, fourteen aircraft consisting of twelve single-seater fighters and two combat trainers was the standard Soviet squadron (*eskadrilya*/battalion) since the 1960s. Also delivered were unknown quantities of R-60 AA-8 APHID, R-27 AA-10 ALAMO and R-73 AA-11 ARCHER air-to-air missiles (AAMs).⁵

There is, however, considerable confusion surrounding possible subsequent deliveries of MiG-29s during the 1990s.⁶ On August 20, 1999, however, the ROK Ministry of Nation Defense issued the following statement to clarify the issue,

It has become known that ROK and US intelligence have concrete indications that North Korea has recently introduced parts for around 10 MiG-29 aircraft from Russia, and is currently in the process of assembling and producing them. Currently, it has been confirmed that North Korea imported 14 MiG-29 aircraft between 1988 and 1992, that it assembled/produced another three, and that of these, one crashed during flight, leaving them currently in possession of 16 aircraft. We would like to inform you that although our military has continuously monitored to see whether North Korea has either additionally acquired and/or produced MiG-29 aircraft since then, there has been no indications of this whatsoever up to now...⁷

As this statement indicates, despite Kim Chong-Il's stated plans to equip the KPAF with the MiG-29, assembly proceeded extremely slowly. The primary reason for this was that by early 1992 Russia stopped providing MiG-29 components because of the DPRK's failure to pay for them in hard currency. The continued viability of the DPRK's MiG-29 program was further called into question in November 1992 when, during his visit to the ROK, Russian President Boris Yeltsin stated that Moscow had withdrawn support for the DPRK's MiG-29 facility, as well as halted sales of offensive arms to P'yongyang.⁸ This apparently did not preclude the Russian supply of outstanding spare parts or equipment under existing contracts.⁹

The Panghyön Aircraft Factory, as noted above, subsequently assembled three MiG-29s it had likely received in "semi knock-down" (SKD) form acquired from Russia. The first two of these were reportedly flown on April 15, 1993 in celebration of Kim Il-sung's birthday.¹⁰ By the end of 1993 MiG-29 assembly at the Panghyön Aircraft Factory had ceased, however, it was involved in other programs (e.g., An-2, Mi-2, MiG-19, etc.). One of these programs wit-

nessed the modification of at least one An-24 COKE to mount the MiG-29's NO-19E pulse-Doppler radar, which may have been an attempt to develop a rudimentary airborne early warning (AEW) capability.¹¹

With the supply of MiG-29s and spare parts from Russia halted the DPRK was forced to obtain needed spare parts through illicit means in Russia and among former client states such as Hungary, Yugoslavia, Belarus, India, Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. The majority of these efforts are believed to have been generally unsuccessful. For example, during June 1999 the Main Military Prosecutor of Belarus instituted criminal proceedings for the misappropriation of six MiG-29 and four Mi-8 engines discovered at a commercial warehouse. The pretrial investigation established that the engines, with a total value in excess of \$3 million, came to Belarus from Russia and that it was planned to sell them in Algeria and the DPRK.¹² As noted above during early 1999 the DPRK achieved a notable success when it was able to acquire parts for approximately 10 MiG-29s in Russia.¹³

The following year press reports from the ROK indicated that the DPRK was interested in obtaining the Russian Su-30MK.¹⁴ Such speculation was put to rest in July 2000, however, when Russian President Vladimir Putin visited the DPRK. During this visit Kim Jong-il requested grants for the purchase of MiG-29s, MiG-29 components and AAMs among other military items. Putin declined these requests demanding the settlement of the DPRK's outstanding accounts with hard currency.¹⁵ Nine months later, however, President Putin modified his position somewhat and on April 27, 2001 Minister of People's Armed Forces Kim Il-ch'ol and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov and Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov signed agreements for "cooperation in the areas of defense industry and military equipment" and "2001 military cooperation" at the Russian Ministry of National Defense in Moscow. Included within these agreements was DPRK access to a broad range of Russian military equipment and technologies, including MiG-29 spare parts and components. This, of course, was contingent upon the DPRK's ability to pay with hard currency. Over the intervening years the level of Russian sales have fluctuated significantly as a result of international political pressure and the DPRK's ability to pay. Regardless, the KPAF has apparently been able to acquire from a variety of different sources sufficient spare parts and components to maintain its fleet of MiG-29s at minimum levels.¹⁶

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One of the two KPAF MiG-29 keeping station on the starboard side of the USAF RC-135S COBRA BALL on March 2, 2003. Just visible in this image is the IRST and ODD RODS antennas in front of the canopy. Note the slight "hump" behind the canopy suggestive of the FULCRUM C, although this could be distorted by camera angle and lighting. (USAF)



One of the KPAF MiG-29 approaching the port side of the USAF RC-135S COBRA BALL on March 2, 2003. (USAF)



One of the MiG-29s keeping station on the port side of the USAF RC-135S COBRA BALL on March 2, 2003. Visible in this image are the starboard drop tank on the inner pylon and what appear to be R-60 AA-8 APHID AAMs on the outer pylons. The ODD RODS antenna and IRST are just visible in front of the canopy. (USAF)



A closeup of the starboard side of the MiG-29 showing what appear to be R-60 AA-8 APHID AAMs on the outer pylons and the national insignia on the tail. (USAF)



An RC-135 Cobra Ball aircraft from the 55th Reconnaissance Wing out of Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, prepares to be refueled over the Pacific Alaska Range Complex on March 26, 2007. (USAF)



The 45th Reconnaissance Squadron's RC-135 Cobra Ball are brought together on the flight line at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska. These aircraft are rarely seen in the same place at the same time due to their worldwide reconnaissance missions. (USAF)

It is currently estimated that the KPAF has an inventory of approximately 30 MiG-29B/UB FULCRUM A/B aircraft, however, no more than 12 have ever been seen at once on commercial satellite imagery. It should be noted that as export models these aircraft are significantly less capable than their Russian counterparts.

Deployment

Defectors report that upon arrival the MiG-29s were assigned to the 55th *Kumsong Guard* Air Regiment of the 1st Air Combat Division based at Sunchŏn Airbase, approximately 43 km north-northeast of P'yŏngyang.¹⁷ These same sources state that the 55th Air Regiment is a combined unit consisting of both the KPAF's MiG-29B/UBs and Su-25K/UBKs.¹⁸

Generally, except for occasional temporary and training deployments to different air bases the MiG-29s have remained at Sunchŏn. On May 28, 1996 Captain Yi Chol-su, a KPAF MiG-19S pilot who had just defected, said the KPAF "...plans to move an MiG-29 battalion from Sunchŏn Airbase in P'yongan-bukto to Onchŏn Airbase to reinforce air force squadrons with additional warplanes later this year or early next year."¹⁹ This is believed to have occurred during the 1996-1997 winter training cycle. It is unclear if this was a temporary or permanent redeployment as commercial satellite imagery has only shown MiG-29s at Sunchŏn Airbase throughout the 2000s.

Onchŏn Airbase is a unique example of the extent to which the KPAF has gone to harden some of its airbases. The base consists of three separate runways, interconnected by a series of roads and taxiways. The primary 2,500m runway runs north-south. A secondary 2,000m runway is located 1,300m to the east and runs roughly east-west. In the hill mass at the eastern end of the second runway the KPAF has constructed an "underground runway" which runs through the hill mass.

Defectors have reported that MiG-29s of the 55th Air Regiment have conducted takeoff exercises to verify that they can be launched directly from the underground runway. Due, however, to a rapid build-up of exhaust gases it was determined that a 5 minute interval was required between aircraft launches. It was believed that this time might be reduced to 3 minutes if additional ventilation equipment is installed. Direct landings into the underground runway were generally deemed as impractical due to limitations in both runway length and the width.²⁰

Operations

Little reliable information is available concerning the day-to-day operations of the KPAF's MiG-29s. As the premier fighter unit of the KPAF the pilots of the 55th Air Regiment are reported to have higher yearly flight hours than in other KPAF units. These, however, are still low when compared to

their ROK, Japanese or U.S. counterparts. Routine training flights are typically of short duration and generally centered within the western air defense district.

A notable exception to this lack of information was a series of operations during February-April 2003.

On Thursday February 20, 2003 ROK Air Force fighters were scrambled to challenge a KPAF MiG-29B FULCRUM A that had crossed south of the North Limit Line over the West Sea (i.e., Yellow Sea). The MiG-29 withdrew north after two minutes when challenged by the two ROK fighters. This was reportedly the first such intrusion since 1983.²¹

Five days later, on February 25, KCNA declared,

*The U.S. imperialist warhawks illegally intruded a RC-135 strategic reconnaissance plane into the territorial air of the DPRK to spy on it on February. 24. The plane belonging to the U.S. forces took off [from] its overseas base at around 9:30 Monday morning. It illegally intruded into the air above the territorial waters of the DPRK between Musudan and Wŏnsan Bay in the East Sea and spied on the DPRK for hours, supported by a KC-135 refueling tanker. This reconnaissance plane made shuttle flights in the air above the same territorial waters of the DPRK for more than 10 hours on February 21, 22 and 23 to spy on important targets along the east coast of the DPRK. This is a premeditated move to find an opportunity to mount a preemptive attack on the DPRK.*²²

This was followed by another statement on March 1 again protesting "...U.S. RC-135 strategic reconnaissance planes..."²³

The following morning, at 10:48 AM (0148 GMT), March 2, 2003, two KPAF MiG-29s from the 55th Air Regiment and what are believed to have been two MiG-23ML FLOGGER G fighters from the 60th Air Regiment intercepted a U.S. Air Force RC-135S COBRA BALL reconnaissance aircraft over the East Sea (i.e., Sea of Japan). The RC-135S from the 45th Reconnaissance Squadron, 55th Reconnaissance Wing, was conducting a routine mission in international airspace, approximately 240 km (130 nm) off the coast of the DPRK. The fighters shadowed the RC-135S for approximately 22 minutes. At one point one of the MiG-29s approached to within 15 meters of the RC-135S. There was no radio communications between the MiG-29s and RC-135S although one of the MiG-29 pilots made the internationally recognized hand signal to the flight crew to follow him, presumably back to a KPAF airbase and captivity. The RC-135S flight crew ignored the gestured command and broke off the mission returning to their base at Kadena Airbase, Japan, without any damage. As a result of this incident U.S. reconnaissance flights were temporarily suspended but were resumed with escort by the end of the month.²⁴

Given the intensity of the pre-mission propaganda and that the KPAF employ its most modern aircraft, piloted by



A DigitalGlobe image of the southern end of Sunch'ön Airbase on March 18, 2011. There are 2 Su-25Ks parked on the apron and two MiG-29s in front of hardened aircraft shelters. The MiG-29 on the right has its canopy and forward fuselage covered by a tarp. What may be fuel trucks are in front of the hardened aircraft shelter on the left. (DigitalGlobe)



A frame capture from a KPAF propaganda video showing a MiG-29 taking off. Visible in this image are the three pylons beneath each wing, although it isn't clear if there are any AAMs mounted. (KPAF)



A KPAF propaganda video showing pilots running to their MiG-29s. This image, and those following, may have been taken along the southeast taxiway at Sunch'ŏn Airbase. This image shows what appears to be five MiG-29s. (KPAF via <http://elhangardetj.blogspot.com/2011/02/mig-29-de-corea-del-norte.html>)



Photo of MiG-29B #415 from a propaganda video shows the aircraft armed with what appears to be R-27 AA-10C ALAMO AAMs. (KPAF via <http://elhangardetj.blogspot.com/2011/02/mig-29-de-corea-del-norte.html>)



A closeup of the starboard side of MiG-29B #415. Note theIRST and ODD RODS antennas in front of the canopy, the commemorative placard below the canopy, the gun port in the port wing root and the tip of what appears to be a R-27 AA-10C ALAMO under the starboard wing. (KPAF via <http://elhangardetj.blogspot.com/2011/02/mig-29-de-corea-del-norte.html>)



A closeup of the starboard side of MiG-29B #55X. Visible are the ODD RODS antennas in front of the canopy, the gun port in the port wing root and the tip of what appears to be a R-27 AA-10C ALAMO under the port wing. (KPAF via <http://elhangardetj.blogspot.com/2011/02/mig-29-de-corea-del-norte.html>)



The undersides of a MiG-29B banking away from the camera. Note the national insignia, medium blue undersurface color and what may be AKU-470 pylons on the inner stations and APU-470 pylons on the outer two stations. Aircraft number is not visible in the original. (KPAF via <http://elhangardetj.blogspot.com/2011/02/mig-29-de-corea-del-norte.html>)

its top pilots from different air regiments, there is little doubt that this intercept mission was well planned and coordinated at the highest levels. Just as significant is the fact that this was only the fourth known incident of a KPAF interception of U.S. reconnaissance aircraft since the end of the Korean War. The previous three were: a U.S. Navy P4M-1Q Mercator of VQ-1 in 1959; a USAF RB-47H of the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing in 1965; and a U.S. Navy EC-121M of VQ-1 in 1969. The 1969 incident resulted in the shooting down of the aircraft with the loss of all 31 personnel aboard.

There are several additional interesting aspects to COBRA BALL incident.²⁵

- Both MiG-29s carried drop tanks and AAMs, which is suggestive that they were launched out of their home airbase at Sunchŏn, rather than being staged out of a closer airbase (the MiG-23MLs are based at Pukch'ang Airbase, Sunchŏn-si, P'yŏngan-namdo).
- The aircraft were armed with what appear to be R-60 AA-8 APHID air-to-air missiles (AAM) rather than the more capable R-27 AA-10 ALAMO or R-73 AA-11 ARCHER AAMs
- The use of two MiG-29s and two MiG-23s from different air regiments could be understood to indicate that the KPAF command was ensuring each flight would be watching the other so that there were no defections and that no actions were taken without prior approval.
- Both MiG-29s appear to have had difficulty maintaining station with the RC-135S.
- In portions of the video taken of the MiG-29s by the RC-135S crew the spine aft the cockpit appears to be enlarged in a manner similar to that of the model 9-13 MiG-29 FULCRUM C. This appearance could simply be a function of the camera angle and light. If, however, these were FULCRUM C aircraft it would imply that they were part of the 10 aircraft acquired in Russia during 1999, or a separate batch acquired later from former Soviet client states (e.g., Romania, Ukraine, Belarus, etc.).

In a separate but obviously related incident on the same morning of March 2, 2003 a Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force EP-3 from the 81st Squadron, 31st Fleet Air Wing, was flying a ELINT reconnaissance mission over the East Sea (i.e., Sea of Japan) within the Japanese Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) when it was approached by a flight of at least two KPAF MiG-29s. The MiG-29s from the 55th Air Regiment locked their radar onto the EP-3, closed to within firing range, but did not attack. The flight crew of the EP-3 declared an emergency and broke off the mission returning to their base at Iwakuni Airbase, Japan. In response to the emergency declared by the EP-3 two Japanese Air Self Defense Force F-15Js from the 6th Air Wing at Komatsu Air-

base were scrambled. By the time the F15J fighters arrived in the area the MiG-29s had departed.²⁶

Four weeks later, on April 1, two Japanese Air Self Defense Force F-15Js were scrambled when an aircraft—believed to actually be a flight of two KPAF MiG-29s—failed to identify itself as it entered the ADIZ over the East Sea (i.e., Sea of Japan). By the time the two F15J fighters reached the area the unidentified aircraft had departed.²⁷

While there have undoubtedly been additional instances since 2003 of KPAF MiG-29s being encountered by ROK, Japanese or U.S. aircraft details concerning these incidents have not been made public.

There has been some speculation that in the days leading up to both the DPRK's July 5-6, 2006 ballistic missile test exercise (which included a fail launch of the U'nha 1 space launch vehicle) and the April 5, 2009 launch of the U'nha 2 space launch vehicle the KPAF deployed MiG-23MLs from the 60th Air Regiment and other aircraft—possibly including MiG-29s from the 55th Air Regiment—to bases north and southwest of the Musudan Launch Facility to fly defensive patrols. Some of these patrols extended to approximately midway between the DPRK and Japan and appeared to have been reconnaissance missions to locate Aegis equipped vessels and to monitor USAF RC-135 flights.

Camouflage and Markings

Available imagery of KPAF MiG-29s is limited. That which is available from a KPAF propaganda video and the inflight video taken by the RC-135S crew in 2003 indicate that the MiG-29s of the 55th Air Regiment are camouflaged with what appears to be either a two-tone green or dark green/dark gray upper surfaces and medium blue undersurfaces.²⁸ Following standard Russian practices the radome is painted a dark gray and there is a black antiglare strip painted from the windshield forward to the radome. The national marking appears above and below both wings and on the outside of each tail.

In the case of the stills captured from the KPAF propaganda video (which appears to have been filmed along the southeast taxiway of Sunchŏn Airbase) and presented here a unique red three-digit aircraft number with a thin white outline is located just aft of the engine inlet that identifies individual aircraft within the unit. There is no evidence that pilots or ground crews have adorned their aircraft with individual markings or unit insignia. At least one aircraft has a red memorial, or dedication, placard on the port side just below and forward of the cockpit. Such placards are often seen on KPAF aircraft and typically make reference to Kim Il-song, Kim Chong-il or some unit award. The propaganda video also shows the MiG-29Bs armed with what appears to be R-27 AA-10C ALAMO AAMs that are painted white and have a red protective cap over the nose sensor.

The stills captured from the inflight video taken by the RC-135S crew presented here, appear to show the MiG-29s camouflaged with a dark green upper and medium blue undersurfaces. It is, however, more likely that they were camouflaged with the same two-tone green or dark green/dark grey upper surfaces and medium blue under surfaces noted above. Likewise, while both MiG-29s carried normal KPAF insignia it is unclear whether they carried individual aircraft numbers. These phenomenon were likely a function of camera resolution and the angle of the Sun. The two MiG-29s were carrying camouflaged drop tanks in the in-board pylons and what are believed to be R-60 AA-8 APHID AAMs, which were painted white, on the two outboard pylons.

Commercial satellite imagery of Sunchŏn Airbase during the past ten years shows a number of MiG-29s positioned on the base's southern parking apron and outside hardened aircraft shelters. These aircraft appear to be either painted with the two-tone green or dark green/dark blue camouflage scheme, or having either natural metal or silver-gray upper surfaces. The reasons for the distinction are unknown.

Gazetteer

Panghyŏn-dong	39° 53' 14.73" N	125° 14' 29.77" E
Panghyŏn Airbase	39° 55' 38.88" N	125° 12' 28.44" E
Panghyŏn Aircraft Factory	39° 52' 36.58" N	125° 15' 29.44" E
Kwaksan	39° 41' 08.40" N	125° 04' 58.83" E
Sunchŏn Airbase	39° 24' 42.53" N	125° 53' 27.76" E
T'aechŏn-up	39° 55' 17.66" N	125° 29' 38.31" E
Onchŏn Airbase	38° 54' 33.96" N	125° 13' 55.97" E
Onchŏn Airbase (Underground)	38° 53' 14.22" N	125° 16' 49.93" E
Pukch'ang Airbase	39° 30' 15.87" N	125° 57' 52.64" E

Organizations Changes Following the SPA 4th Session²⁹

By Michael Madden

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The 4th Session of the 12th Supreme People's Assembly [SPA] held in Pyongyang on 7 April 2011 concluded with two significant personnel changes to the DPRK's national security community.

After nearly 21 years, Chon Pyong-ho retired as a member of the National Defense Commission [NDC]. Chon was the organizational architect and key manager of the country's defense industry, having held positions as vice-chairman and chairman of the Second Economy Commission. From 1986 to 2010 Chon was concurrently director and secretary of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers' Party [CC KWP] Military (Munitions) In-

dustry Department. Chon was elected a member of the CC KWP Political Bureau during the 14th plenary meeting of the 6th CC KWP (6th Term; 6th Party Congress) held during 28-30 November 1988, and he was elected one of the first civilian (non-active duty KPA) members of the NDC at the opening session of the 9th SPA held during 24 to 26 May 1990.

In the 1990s and 2000s Chon led the country's ballistic missile and nuclear weapons' tests. In September 2010 Chon retained his membership on the CC KWP Political Bureau, but implicitly retired as both central party secretary and department director. When biographic profiles on Political Bureau members were featured during a 29 September 2010 *Korean Central Television* news broadcast, Chon was identified as "director of the Political Bureau of the Cabinet and chief secretary of its party committee." This job title is most likely the "transfer to other post" to which KCNA alluded in its 7 April 2011 news item on the 12th SPA's 4th session when it announced Chon's replacement. Unlike numerous other senior personnel migrations, Cho'n has not vacated DPRK public life and remains a front-row center rostrum member at public meetings, having attended the 18th anniversary of Kim Cho'ng-il's election as NDC Chairman on 9 April 2011, a national meeting for Kim Il-so'ng's birthday on 14 April 2011 and a meeting for the 79th anniversary of the KPA's foundation on 24 April 2011.

The appointment of Pak To-chun as Chon Pyong-ho's replacement on the NDC accelerated the upward mobility of Pak's career. In September 2010 Pak was elected a CC KWP Secretary and alternate (candidate) member of the Political Bureau. Since his appointment, Pak has become a member of the outer group of senior party and NDC officials that travel with Kim Cho'ng-il on guidance and inspection tours. From 2005 to 2010 Pak To-chun served as chief party secretary of Chagang Province, where according to DPRK media he was born. Pak held a number of party management positions (notification instructor, guidance official, primary party committee secretary, etc.) in the country's machine-building, logistics and materials industries. Pak's appointment represents one way the central leadership practices retail politics. Chagang Province is home to dozens of defense industry, logistics and machine-building factories. The province has also become one of the regime's major propaganda (publicity) set pieces, the source of numerous ideological slogans and role-models to promote *kangsong taeguk* (a strong and prosperous fatherland) and the 3rd generation revolutionary succession.

The announcement of the convocation of the 12th SPA's 4th session occurred contemporaneously to the dismissal "due to illness" of Chu Sang-song as an NDC member and Minister of People's Security. During the 12th SPA's 4th session Chu was replaced as Minister by Ri Myo'ng-su in addi-

Vice Chairmen



Kim Yong-chun **KPA VMar.**
April 2007



Yi Yong-mu **KPA VMar.**
September 1998



O Kuk-yol **KPA Gen.**
February 2009



Chang Song-taek
June 2010

Members



Paek Se-pong
September 2003



U Tong-chuk **KPA Gen.**
April 2009



Chu Kyu-chang
April 2009



Kim Chong-kak **KPA Gen.**
April 2009



Pak To-chun
April 2011

Selected NDC Organizations and Departments

Ministry of the People's Armed Forces



Kim Yong-chun **KPA VMar.**
February 2009

KPA General Staff Department



Yi Yong-ho **KPA VMar.**
February 2009

Ministry of State Security



U Tong-chuk **KPA Gen.**
August 2009

Ministry of People's Security



Ri Myong-su **KPA Gen.**
April 2011

Military Security Command



Kim Won-hong **KPA Gen.**
February 2009

NDC Foreign Affairs Department



Chon Hui-chong
2007

NDC Policy Department



Pak Rim-su **KPA MGen.**
2007

Reconnaissance General Bureau



Unknown
2010

NDC Administration Department



Unknown
April 2011

NDC Standing Bureau



Hyon Chol-hae **KPA Gen.**
2007

tion to being replaced as chairman of the SPA Legislation Committee by Jang Pyong-kyu, director of the DPRK Supreme (Central) Public Prosecutor's Office. While Ri Myong-su's appointment was part of the SPA session agenda (what *KCNA* called "the organization matter"), there is no indication of his appointment requiring the SPA's ratification. DPRK media published a news item on 7 April 2011 that reported Ri was appointed by the NDC and that the NDC's decision was publicized on 7 April, presumably during the 12th SPA's 4th session. This makes Ri Myong-su the first Minister of People's Security appointed through the NDC.

Until 2010, People's Security was a ministry in the DPRK Cabinet with the Minister's appointment technically subject, like other government organizations under the Cabinet, to the approval of the SPA or SPA Presidium. The Ministry of People's Security [MPS] migrated away from the Cabinet and is currently under the NDC with other internal security (i.e., Ministry of State Security [MSS], Military Security Command) and military (KPA General Staff Department, Ministry of the People's Armed Forces) organizations. In fact, the MPS may represent the last phase in the consolidation of the country's security and intelligence agencies under the NDC. Ri Myong-su is a loyal military adviser to Kim Chong-il in his previous position as director of the NDC's Administration Department [a.k.a. NDC Administration Bureau].

The reason for Chu Sang-song's dismissal remains unclear. During the 12th SPA's 4th session Vice Premier of the Cabinet, Yi Tae-nam vacated his position. However, *KCNA*

reported Yi "was relieved...for his health reason" as against Chu who was "dismissed due to illness." While this may seem a distinction without a difference, news items and other reporting appearing in DPRK media is subjected to an intensive, multi-stage editorial and censorship process. This level of editorial scrutiny is intensified for news reporting, disseminated in translation, focused on the leadership or government. One may see how Yi Tae-nam's departure is intended to appear out of benevolence, while Chu's seems punitive ("dismissed") and ambiguous.

In appointing Ri Myong-su, the central leadership has continued two recent trends in selecting senior party, government and military officials. First, the central leadership has demonstrated a preference for officials with either close personal ties to Kim Chong-il, or a career history of interacting directly with the center. As director of the KPA General Staff Department Operations Bureau and NDC Administration Department Director, successively, Ri has seemed to have direct access to Kim Chong-il since 1995. Other recent personnel appointments that followed this trend include Pak To-chun's election to the NDC, as Pak frequently interacted directly (and socially) with Kim Chong-il as chief party secretary in Chagang Province, or any of the officials elected to the CC KWP Political Bureau or Party Central Military Commission in September 2010. Appointing senior officials who have served as close aides or have a personal connection to Kim Chong-il, expands (or reasserts) central control over political and security organizations, while also ensuring political loyalties remain focused on Kim Chong-il.

Second, like several senior DPRK security managers, Ri has served as commander of a KPA corps-level unit. Kim Yong-ch'un, Yi Yong-ho, Kim Chong-kak, Kim Myong-kuk are some of the corps commanders who have advanced in the senior leadership since 2007. In the 1970s Ri was commanding officer II Army Corps and in the 1980s served as vice commander of III Army Corps. Ri also interacted routinely with the KPA's regular corps and service commanders as director of the KPA General Staff Department's Operations Bureau. Ri's predecessor as Minister, Chu Sang-song, served as commanding officer of the IV Army Corps prior to his 2004 appointment to MPS. Appointing former military unit commanders continues the increasing prevalence of military-style management (command and control) in all of the country's affairs, including the internal security apparatus which now seems to place the Military Security Command at its head. And yet, it should be noted, that in the case of some senior officials, their corps command experience resulted in corps units being downgraded to division, or consolidated into other corps units.

National Defense Commission

The election of Pak To-chun to the NDC during the 12th SPA's 4th session filled one of four vacancies on the commission caused by dismissals, retirement or death. Based on a cumulative observation of DPRK media reporting in 2010 and 2011, the NDC currently consists of ten (10) vice-chairmen and members, including Kim Chong-il. Like the man he replaced, Pak To-chun is a civilian member, or non-active duty officer in the KPA.

Not including Kim Ch'ong-il, the NDC has five (5) vice-chairmen and members who are uniform, active duty KPA officers and four (4) civilians. Three (3) vice-chairman are KPA general-grade officers and one is a civilian, and three (3) civilians are regular NDC members with two (2) being KPA officers. Seven (7) of the NDC's vice-chairman and members were elected to their positions after 2006, with one vice-chairman elected during the 10th SPA's 1st session in September 1998 and one member elected during the 11th SPA's 1st session in September 2003. Interestingly, the two most recent NDC appointments, Pak's in April 2011 and the promotion of Chang Song-taek in June 2010, were civilians. No active-duty KPA officers have been elected vice-chairman or members of the NDC since the 12th SPA's 1st session in April 2009.

April 2011 KPA Promotions List

On 12 April 2011 DPRK media reported that Kim Ch'ong-il, in his capacity as KPA Supreme Commander, issued Supreme Commander Order number 0056 which promoted two KPA officers to Colonel-General, five to Lieutenant General and 38 to Major General, on the occasion of Kim Il-so'ng's Birthday (observed 15 April).

Promoted to Colonel-General were O Il-chong and Hwang Pyong-so. According to ROK sources O Il-chong is the son of the late O Chin-u and director of the CC KWP Military Department. He was elected a member of the Party Central Committee and appointed a CC KWP department director in September 2010. Hwang Pyong-so is a deputy director of the CC KWP Organization Guidance Department. He was elected alternate (candidate) member of the Party Central Committee in September 2010 and is said to have close ties to Kim Ok, Kim Chong-il's 4th wife and technical secretary. Among those promoted to Lieutenant General, Ho Yong-ho may be of interest because he is now Ri Myong-su's principal deputy at the Ministry of People's Security.

Addendum: Lessons Learned Operation DESERT STORM, 1991 ³⁰

During a June 1996 interview Captain Yi Chol-su, a KPAF pilot who had defected to the ROK in a MiG-19 the previous month, stated that the DPRK learned a lesson from allied electronic warfare operations during Operation DESERT STORM, "The North has beefed up its capabilities to counter the U.S. electronic advantage ever since."

Addendum: Lessons Learned Operation ALLIED FORCE, 1999 ³¹

During August 2010 the ROK Christian organization *Caleb Mission* obtained a KPA guidance or field manual describing camouflage, concealment and deception techniques. The approximately 80 page manual was published in 2005 by the KPA Publishing House in P'yongyang and in addition to practical instructions for employing CCD it contained the following lessons learned comment concerning Operation ALLIED FORCE, "Yugoslavian forces in an exposed camp deployed fake anti-aircraft guns, ground-to-air missiles, aircraft and tanks made of logs, plywood and cloth, and hid their actual weapons. As a result, NATO forces in fact destroyed only 13 of the 300 tanks though it claimed to have destroyed 40 percent of the armored targets."

Editor's Notes

As readers will no doubt immediately see this issue of KPA Journal is perhaps the longest to date. The reason for this was the decision to include as many photographs of the MiG-29 as possible. Admittedly most are not the best images, however, considering how difficult it is to obtain images of KPAF aircraft I felt that readers would appreciate seeing them regardless.

I would like to extend my thanks to DigitalGlobe (for allowing me to use the image on page 7), Kim Ji Eun, Mi-

chael Madden, George Mellinger and Dwight Rider for their assistance in the preparation of various aspects of this issue. I hope to follow up the MiG-29 article with information concerning the 1969 EC-121M incident in next issue.

I continue to solicit your thoughts and suggestions on how to both improve *KPA Journal* and to tailor it more closely to your needs and interests, as well as those of the organizations you represent. Please feel free to contact me with any recommendations.

Please feel free to share *KPA Journal* with your colleagues and friends. If you are a new reader and would like to be added to the *KPA Journal* mailing list please do so by sending me an email via the *Contact* feature on the website (www.kpajournal.com).

Thank you, one-and-all for your emails, encouragement and support.

—Joseph S. Bermudez Jr.

Endnotes

- 1 Kim, Min-sok. "North Reportedly Produces 14 MiG-29's Annually," *Chungang Ilbo*, July 9, 1995, p. 2; Lake, John "Mikoyan MiG-23/27 'Flogger'" *World Air Power Journal*, Volume 8, Spring 1992, pp. 40-85; Lake, John "Mikoyan MiG-29 'Fulcrum'" *World Air Power Journal*, Volume 4, Winter 1990/91, pp. 44-91; "Source in Seoul cited on MiG-23's in DPRK," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, August 10, 1986, p. 6; Department of Defense, *Soviet Military Power: An Assessment of the Threat 1988*, 1988, p. 27; "SA-3 SAMs in North Korea," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, January 25, 1986, p. 100; "Korea (North)," *Air International*, October 1985, p. 163; "Weekly Update: Korea Flogger-Gs," *Defense & Foreign Affairs Weekly*, September 16-22, 1985, p. 1; "North Korea Receives Ten More MiG-23 Floggers," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, August 17, 1985, p. 296; and "MiG-23's Delivered to North Korea," *AFP*, June 28, 1985.
- 2 DPRK Military factories typically have an official title, numerical designation and sometimes and honorific designation. The official name of the Panghyön Aircraft Factory is presently unknown. A defector who worked within the munitions industry has called the Panghyön Aircraft Factory the "...Panghyön Aircraft Engine Factory." One report published during 2001 states that MiG-29 production was taking place at Kwaksan, Kwaksan-gun and T'aechön-up, T'aechön-gun, both in P'yongan-bukto. This, however, appears to be unlikely. Interview data acquired by Joseph S. Bermudez Jr.; Ch'oe, Yong-chae. "MiG-29s Are In Production in Kwaksan, T'aech'on, North P'yongan Province," *Sindong-a*, April 2001; Ministry of National Defense, Republic of Korea, *DPRK MiG-29 Acquisition*, Press Release, Seoul, August 20, 1999; U.S. Congress. *Statement of Rear Admiral Thomas A. Brooks, U.S. Navy, Director of Naval Intelligence, Before the Seapower, Strategic, and Critical Materials Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee in Intelligence Issues*, p. 47; Kim, Min-sok. "North Reportedly Produces 14 MiG-29's Annually," *Chungang Ilbo*, July 9, 1995, p. 2; Mama, H.P. "Indian Aerospace Programs: Opportunity Knocks," *International Defense Review*, 10/1988, pp. 1336-1339; and "N. Korea Has 30 'Fulcrums,' Says Japan," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, October 1, 1988, p. 749.
- 3 Bermudez Jr., Joseph S. *Shield of the Great Leader: The Armed Forces of North Korea*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, Australia, and I.B. Taurus, London, 2001, pp. 45-55 and 147-160.
- 4 Interview data acquired by Joseph S. Bermudez Jr.; Ministry of National Defense, Republic of Korea, *DPRK MiG-29 Acquisition*, Press Release, Seoul, 20 August 1999; U.S. Congress. *Statement of Rear Admiral Thomas A. Brooks, U.S. Navy, Director of Naval Intelligence, Before the Seapower, Strategic, and Critical Materials Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee in Intelligence Issues*, p. 47; Kim, Min-sok. "North Reportedly Produces 14 MiG-29's Annually," *Chungang Ilbo*, July 9, 1995, p. 2; and "N. Korea Has 30 'Fulcrums,' Says Japan," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, October 1, 1988, p. 749.
- 5 Interview data acquired by Joseph S. Bermudez Jr.; and "NK's MiG-29s Carry Advanced Missiles," *Digital Chosunilbo*, May 12, 1999.
- 6 For example, Morozov, Vladislav and Uskov, Sergey. "On Guard For Peace and Labor," *Mir Aviatsii*, 2-97, pp. 29-39 states "In May and June 1988, the DPRK received its first six MiG-29 fighters, and by the end of that year the rest of a lot of 30 of these aircraft had been delivered." While other sources state that 12 MiG-29s were purchased from Belarus in 1995, 21 MiG-29SE from Russia in 1996 and that two aircraft were lost in accidents.
- 7 Ministry of National Defense, Republic of Korea, *DPRK MiG-29 Acquisition*, Press Release, Seoul, August 20, 1999.
- 8 "North Said To Seek Aid in MiG-29 Production," *Yonhap*, October 3, 1995, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*; "DPRK MiG-29 Assembly Plant Said 'Stopped,'" *Chungang Ilbo*, November 10, 1993, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*; "'No Knowledge' on New Missile," p. 16; "Yeltsin Promises To Stop Arms Supply to DPRK," *Yonhap*, November 19, 1992, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*; and Lake, John "Mikoyan MiG-29 'Fulcrum'" *World Air Power Journal*, Volume 4, Winter 1990/91, pp. 44-91.
- 9 "Russia To Maintain Military Relations With DPRK," *Voice of Russia World Service*, 19 May 1997, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*.
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- ¹⁵ Chu, Song-min. “Helped by Russia, North Korea Takes Steps to Become ‘Military Arms Powerhouse,’” *Sisa Journal*, May 17, 2001.
- ¹⁶ Given the close military cooperation between Iran and the DPRK it is likely that Iran has been an important source for MiG-29 spare parts and technology. Chu, Song-min. “Helped by Russia, North Korea Takes Steps to Become ‘Military Arms Powerhouse,’” *Sisa Journal*, May 17, 2001; “Plans To Sell Military Hardware To North Korea Noted,” *Moscow TV* 6, May 2, 2001, *Open Source Center*; “North Korean Combat Equipment Produced in Soviet Union to be Repaired in Russia,” *AVN*, April 27, 2001, http://www.militarynews.ru/fcl_l/enews.asp?id=63361; and “N.K. Seeking Purchase of Missiles, Assembling Fighters,” *Yonhap*, February 6, 2001.
- ¹⁷ The honorific *Kumsong Guard* is sometimes rendered as *Kum Song Lifeguard*, *Kumsong Lifeguard*, *Kumsong Personal Guard* or *Kumsong Royal Guard*.
- ¹⁸ Assignment of the MiG-29s to the 55th Air Regiment together with the Su-25s superficially seems implausible, however, there is a precedent going back to WWII when the VVS formed numerous Composite Regiments (SAP – *Smeshannii Aviatsionnii Polk*), most often consisting of 1 or 2 *eskadrilya* of Po-2 light bomber/communication aircraft and 1 or 2 of fighters, or even on occasion an *eskadrilya* of I-15 biplanes and a couple *eskadrilya* of SB fast bombers. If the MiG-29s were part of an uncompleted order, that would be a good reason to assign them with the Su-25s. Part of the logic might be to make it easier to maintain and support two aircraft types, different but of the same generation. Email correspondence with Mr. George Mellinger, dated May 22, 2011.
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- ²¹ “Koreas-Confrontations-Glance,” *Associated Press*, July 16, 2003; and Torchi, Christopher. “NKorea-Air Power,” *Associated Press*, March 5, 2003. Some later sources state that the intruding aircraft was a MiG-19.
- ²² “US Commits Aerial Espionage on DPRK,” *KCNA*, 25 February 2003.
- ²³ “US Espionage Flights On Steady Increase,” *KCNA*, March 1, 2003.
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- ²⁹ Michael Madden is the editor of *North Korean Leadership Watch*, <http://nkleadershipwatch.wordpress.com/>. Sources for this article include: Interview data acquired by Michael Madden; “Kim Jong Il Issues Order on Raising Military Ranks of KPA Commanding Officers,” *KCBS and KCNA*, April 13, 2011; “DPRK Supreme People’s Assembly Meets,” *KCNA*, April 7, 2011; “Minister of People’s Security Appointed,” *KCNA*, April 7, 2011; “Vice Premier of Cabinet Relieved of Post,” *KCNA*, April 7, 2011; “DPRK Radio Report on 4th Session of 12th SPA Held on 7 April,” *Korean Central Broadcasting Station*, April 7, 2011, *Open Source Center*; “National Meeting Held to Celebrate Kim Jong Il’s Election as NDC Chairman” *KCNA*, April 8, 2011; “Biosketch on Chon Pyong-ho,” *NK Leadership Watch*, April 9, 2011, <http://nkleadershipwatch.wordpress.com/leadership-biographies/jon-pyong-ho/>; “Biosketch on Pak To-chun,” *NK Leadership Watch*, April 7, 2011, <http://nkleadershipwatch.wordpress.com/leadership-biographies/pak-to-chun/>; “Profiles of Members of the Political Bureau Presidium of the Workers’ Party of Korea Central Committee, and the members and alternate members of its political bureau,” *KCBS and KCNA*, September 29, 2010; *Yonhap*. *The North Korea Handbook* (Armonk, NY: 2003) p. 688; “N. Korea Ends Parliamentary Session Without Promoting Leader’s Son,” *Yonhap*, April 7, 2011; “Kim Jong-il, Son Absent from Annual Assembly,” *Global Times*, April 8, 2011; “North Korea Offers No Sign of Key Promotion for Kim Jong Un,” *Asahi Shimbun*, April 9, 2011; “Leaders in the Limelight: Ju Sang-song, Minister of People’s Security,” *Vantage Point*, August 1, 2004; “DPRK NDC Is Expanded, Restructured into Permanent Structure,” *Yonhap*, October 5, 2007, *Open Source Center*; “Biosketch on Ri Myo’ng-su,” *NK Leadership Watch*, April 7, 2011, <http://nkleadershipwatch.wordpress.com/leadership-biographies/gen-ri-myong-su/>.
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