



A DPRK produced M-1978 170 mm self-propelled gun in service with the Iranian Army. (www.sajed.ir)

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M-1978 and M-1989 170 mm Self-Propelled Guns, Part I

By Joseph S. Bermudez Jr.

The M-1978

During the mid-to-late 1970s, as part of a wide-ranging effort to modernize and mechanized the Korean People's Army (KPA), the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) newly established Second Economic Committee initiated production of a number of self-propelled artillery systems. Among these was the heavy M-1978 170 mm "Koksan" self-propelled gun.¹

The M-1978 uses a modified T-54/Type-59 chassis with two large hydraulic recoil and stabilizing spades at the rear. On top of the chassis is mounted a large unenclosed sliding platform upon which is mounted the 170 mm gun. Mounted on the glacis plate of the hull is a large folding travel lock for the gun barrel. While the 170 mm gun appears to be of indigenous design it may have been influenced by several World War II systems such as the German 17 cm Kanone 18 to which it bears a passing resemblance and possesses similar overall capabilities.² The KPA may have received a few of these captured systems for evaluation from the Soviet Union during the 1960s. The World War II Japanese 15 cm Type 96 coastal defense gun may have also influenced the design of the 170 mm gun. At the end of World War II the Japanese 17th Area Army controlled at least four coastal defense fortresses located on the Korean

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Peninsula at the end of World War II. Two were located in southern portion of the peninsula at Fusan (i.e., Pusan) and Reisui (i.e., Yosu) and two in the northern portion at Genzen (i.e., Wonsan) and Najin (i.e., Rashin).³

The M-1978's 170 mm gun initially possessed a range of approximately 43 km with a high-explosive fragmentation (HE-Frag) round. Subsequently, a rocket-assisted round (RAP) was developed with a range of 54 km. It is unknown, but suspected, that the KPA has also developed a chemical round for the gun. Estimated specifications for the M-1978 are,

Length, overall (hull and gun):	15 m
Length, hull (with spades):	7.6 m
Width:	3.27 m
Weight:	n/a
Speed:	30-40 kph
Road range:	250-350 km
Crew:	8
Gun:	170 mm
Range (HE-Frag):	43 km
Range (HE-Frag RAP):	54 km
Range (Chemical ?):	n/a

The M-1978 entered KPA service with the independent artillery brigades and battalions of the General Staff Department's Artillery Command. Although primarily held in reserve for army-level use some of these heavy artillery units were sometimes attached to the forward corps deployed along the demilitarized zone.

During the eight-year-long Iran-Iraq War the DPRK supported Iran, providing that nation with large quantities of munitions and weapons systems. Among the weapons systems supplied to Iran were an unknown number of M-1978s. These are believed to have been organized into army-level independent battalions or regiments and attached to corps as required. During the fighting some of the Iranian M-1978's were captured by Iraqi forces and subsequently placed on public display. The current status of the M-1978 in Iranian service is unclear, the system can still be seen during military parades held in Tehran being carried on "low-boy" equipment trailers.

There is some evidence indicating that either the DPRK produced an 180 mm version of the M-1978 for Iran that was also captured by Iraqi forces, or that the Iraqi defense industries produced such a version based upon the M-1978.



A M-1978 170 mm self-propelled gun in Iranian service deployed within a revetted firing position. (www.sajed.ir)



The M-1978 170 mm self-propelled gun crew and comrades posing for a group photo. (www.sajed.ir)



The same M-1978 170 mm self-propelled gun crew being resupplied with fresh food. (www.sajed.ir)



An Iranian M-1978 170 mm self-propelled gun and mullahs posing for a group photograph. Note the large red star under the barrel. (www.sajed.ir)



A restored photograph of an Iranian M-1978 firing. Note the crew platform swung out to the right side and large blast. (www.sajed.ir)



Iranian M-1978 170 mm self-propelled gun captured by Iraqi forces and placed on display. (unknown via the internet)



Iranian M-1978 170 mm self-propelled gun captured by Iraqi forces and placed on display. (via Steven J. Zaloga)



Iranian M-1978 170 mm self-propelled gun captured by Iraqi forces and placed on display. (via Steven J. Zaloga)



A U.S. Marine Corps image taken in Iraq on November 29, 2008 of what appears to be a 180 mm variant of the M-1978 self-propelled gun. The Marines were working to clear Iraqi tanks from Al Anbar University in Ramadi. When compared to the M-1978 note the barrel shape and the "pepper pot" muzzle brake. (U.S. Marine Corps Photo by Lance Cpl. Albert F. Hunt)



Another view of what appears to be a 180 mm variant of the M-1978 self-propelled gun at al-Anbar University in Ramadi. (U.S. Marine Corps Photo by Lance Cpl. Albert F. Hunt)



Front view of of the self-propelled gun at al-Anbar University in Ramadi. (U.S. Marine Corps Photo by Lance Cpl. Albert F. Hunt)

At least one example was recovered by U.S. Marines during 2008 on the grounds of al-Anbar University in Ramadi. *(Continued in the next issue)*

12th Supreme People's Assembly⁴

By Michael Madden⁵

The 12th Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) held its 4th session on Thursday, 7 April 2011. The DPRK's 687-member unicameral legislature meets at least once a year to approve the government budget and the annual report of the DPRK Cabinet. Three of the 12th SPA's four sessions have convened during the month of April, which on the national calendar has two major national holidays (the anniversary of the foundation of the Korean People's Army and Kim Il So'ng's birthday, also known as Sun's Day) and several anniversaries. The 4th session of the 12th SPA also occurred one year before the country celebrates the 100th anniversary of the birth Kim Il-song when the country will "fling open the gate to a powerful state by all means in 2012, marking the fatherly leader's centennial birth anniversary." This session may turn out to be the 12th SPA's final convocation until April 2012.

After Choe Tae-pok's opening remarks, DPRK Premier Choe Yong-rim delivered the annual report on the work of the Cabinet and implementation of the budget in 2010. He was followed by Minister of Finance and Vice Premier, Pak

Su-kil, who delivered the annual budget report where he announced, “we expect 15.8 percent of the total state budgetary expenditure to be allocated for national defense expenditures to cope with the acute touch-and-go situation that has been created on the Korean peninsula...strengthening the combat power of the people’s army in every way and more strongly consolidating the foundation of the national defense industry.”

After the reading of the Cabinet and budget reports, 10 senior officials spoke about the reports, “expressing full support and approval of them [and] manifested their will to push ahead with the general offensive.” 5 other officials submitted written statements, and the “Session adopted” the two reports “with the unanimous approval of deputies.”

The final item on the agenda at the 4th session of the 12th SPA concerned personnel. Vice Premier Ri Tae-nam, elected to his position during the 12th SPA’s 3rd session in June 2010, was “relieved” of his position “for his health reason.” Chang Pyong-kyu, who was appointed director of the Supreme Prosecutor’s Office during the 12th SPA’s 2nd session in April 2010, replaced Chu Sang-song as Chairman of the SPA Legislation Committee. Ri Myong-su also replaced Chu Sang-song as Minister of People’s Security. Finally, Chon Pyong-ho was replaced on the National Defense Commission (NDC) by CC KWP Secretary Pak To-chun.

Neither Kim Chong-il nor Kim Chong-un attended the SPA session. During 6 April to 8 April, DPRK media reported that Kim Chong-il, with his son among his retinue, was visiting factories and attending a concert in Chagang Province. Kim Chong-il typically has attended alternate (i.e., every other) SPA sessions; for example, he attended the 12th SPA’s 3rd session in June 2010, but he did not attend the 2nd session in April 2010. This indicates that Kim Chong-il’s power within the regime remains unchallenged and that DPRK political culture shall continue to revolve around him.

The 12th SPA’s 4th session was also the first large, major political event to occur since the 3rd Party Conference/September 2010 Party Central Committee Plenum, and the 3rd session of the 12th SPA. Both these events were marked by a number of personnel appointments in the party and government. It is no accident, then, that the expectations of numerous P’yŏngyang watchers were raised and anticipation built for Kim Chong-un’s formal election to the NDC, which did not happen. This indicates that the hereditary succession process is not as accelerated as some analyses suggest.

While Kim Chong-un was in Chagang Province, another member of Kim Chong-il’s travel party, Chagang native CC KWP Secretary Pak To-chun, was elected the new member of the National Defense Commission. From 2005 to 2010 Pak was Chief Secretary of Chagang Province, the

location of dozens of military and logistics factories. In September 2010 Pak was elected an alternate member of the CC KWP Political Bureau and CC KWP Secretary, presumably for military industry. Pak replaced Chon Pyong-ho, who was a key organizational architect and civilian manager of the country’s military industry and strategic weapons programs. Chon was the general manager of the country’s 2006 and 2009 nuclear tests. He was first elected to the NDC at the 1st session of the 9th SPA held during 24 to 26 May 1990. In September 2010 Cho’n was appointed Chief Secretary of the DPRK Cabinet Political Bureau and the Cabinet’s political director, working in coordination with his colleague of five decades, DPRK Premier Choe Yong-rim. Chon has not vacated DPRK public life and remains a front-row center rostrum member at public meetings, having attended the 18th anniversary of Kim Chong-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 4th Session of the 12th SPA was entirely overshadowed by the departure of Chu Sang-song. KCNA reported Chu’s dismissal by the NDC before publicizing the SPA session, although both occurred the same day [16 March]. To underscore that Chu’s political life expired, he was also replaced as Chairman of the SPA Legislation Committee during the 4th session. The circumstances of Chu’s removal as Minister of People’s Security are not known. When he was dismissed in March KCNA said it was “due to his illness.” It is not clear if this refers to a physical condition affecting Chu’s health, or if “illness” is a euphemism for a series of actions or behaviors in defiance of the central leadership (i.e. monolithic ideological system, unitary leadership, etc.). *Chosun Ilbo* carried an unconfirmed report that Chu was dismissed by Kim Cho’ng-il after a group of students, expelled from Kim Il-so’ng University, vandalized Mangyo’ngdae during February 2011, the historical site of Kim Il-so’ng’s birthplace. There are other areas of the Ministry of People’s Security (MPS) jurisdiction that could have led to his dismissal including: corruption, either localized (travel permits, markets) or on the DPRK-China border; food security; poor population control and policing efforts, particularly with reports of new foot-and-mouth disease cases in February 2011; or, general institutional panic and paranoia in light of recent events in North Africa and Middle East. Additionally, with regard to the reason cited for Chu’s departure, DPRK media provided two phrases to contrast how senior officials vacate their positions: Chu Sang-song “was dismissed from his post due to illness,” while Ri Tae-nam “was relieved of vice premier of the Cabinet for his health reason” during the 12th SPA’s 4th session. According

to some sources both Chu and Ri were removed from office because of accusations of corruption.

Chu Sang-song's replacement, Ri Myong-su, may be the first Minister of People's Security appointed by the NDC and not the SPA. Though Ri's appointment was listed with other personnel matters as the 4th session's last agenda item, DPRK media carried a separate announcement of "a decision of the NDC was made public Thursday [7 April] in this connection." Chu Sang-song was appointed when MPS was part of the DPRK Cabinet, and his appointment subject to SPA approval. Ri is the first to hold the position with the MPS formally subordinated to the NDC and his appointment subject to the approval of the NDC Chairman who according to article 103 of the DPRK Socialist Constitution "appoint[s] or dismiss[es] important cadres of the national defense sector." This is an indication the regime continues building the NDC into what the *Yonhap News Agency* once called "a permanent structure."

Prior to being named Minister of People's Security, Ri Myong-su was serving, since 2007, as director of the NDC Administration Department (which is also called the NDC Administration Bureau), managing reporting channels and communications within the NDC, among other tasks. He has been a military aide to Kim Chong-il for almost two decades. Ri served for a number of years as director of the General Staff Department Operations Bureau, as well as chief of staff of III Army Corps under the late Chang Song-

u, KPA Vice Marshal and eldest brother of Chang Song-taek. Ri is a specialist in combined arms and has served as a military unit commander. Unit command experience is one career characteristic Ri shares with Chu Sang-song (who served as commander of IV Army Corps) and the prevalent criteria for appointment to chief official of a DPRK security organ.

Ri has discharged some of the ceremonial duties of his new office, meeting with the Vietnamese Minister of Public Security on 15 April 2011 in P'yongyang. He was subsequently reported attending Kim Chong-il's guidance in Yanggang and the Hamgyo'ng provinces during 21 to 23 April 2011. While Ri was identified in his new position, his name was listed penultimately, just ahead of Hyo'n Ch'o'l-hae, suggesting he may be holding concurrent positions as MPS and director of the NDC Administration Department. Given that MPS is formally subordinate to the NDC, it is also possible that Chu Sang-song's departure has given the central leadership the pretext to continue the migration and consolidation process that has gradually occurred within the DPRK national security community since 2007.

Addendum, Type 107 MRL

In Vol. 2, No. 1 *KPA Journal* published an article on the DPRK manufactured version of the Chinese 107mm Type-63 multiple rocket launcher. Included with that article were a number of images illustrating the system. A high quality



PLA 107mm Type-63 rocket launcher battery during a firing exercise in 2008. (<http://blog.sina.com.cn/>)

image of the Type-63 in PLA service has come to light and is provided above for comparison with the images provided in the original article.

Editor's Notes

Many readers have written to ask if *KPA Journal* has ceased publication. It has not. Rather, it has been on a sabbatical for the past six months as I have taken a position as Senior Analyst with DigitalGlobe's Analysis Center that has consumed most of my time and energy. Time permitting, during the next six weeks I hope to have *KPA Journal* back on schedule. Depending upon work obligations *KPA Journal* may have to change to a bi-monthly publication schedule next year.

If any readers have additional information concerning the M-1978, M-1989 or the photographs used in the article in this, or next, issue's articles I would greatly appreciate hearing from you.

Beginning with the next issue I will resume uploading new declassified documents relating to the DPRK to the *KPA Journal* website.

Once again, I am indebted to Michael Madden for taking the time to write another insightful article for *KPA Journal*. For anything concerning the leadership and power-holding elite within the DPRK I highly recommend Michael's *North Korea Leadership Watch* website, <http://nkleadershipwatch.wordpress.com/>. A note of thanks also goes to for his assistance in the preparation of various aspects of this issue.

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. The national designator of the system is presently unknown. The term "Koksan" is derived from the city of Koksan, Hwanghae-bukto, where the system was first identified by ROK and US intelligence.
2. For information on the 17 cm Kanone 18 see: Hogg, Ian V. *German Artillery of World War Two*. New York: Hippocrene Books Inc., 1975, pp. 91-92 and War Department. *Handbook on German Military Forces*. TM-E 30-451, Washington, D.C.: War Department, March 15, 1945 pp. VII-28 to 29.
3. U.S. Army. *A Survey of Japanese Seacoast Artillery*. GHQ US-AFPAC Survey of Seacoast Artillery Research Board, 1 February, 1946, pp. 6-14.
4. Interview data acquired by Michael Madden; "DPRK Supreme People's Assembly Meets," *Korean Central News Agency*, April

- 7, 2011; "Report on Implementation of State Budget," *Korean Central News Agency*, April 7, 2011; "Report on the work of the DPRK Cabinet Last Year and Its Tasks for this Year," *Korean Central News Agency*, April 7, 2011; "Fourth Session of the 12th Supreme People's Assembly Held on 7 April," *Korean Central Broadcasting Station*, April 7, 2011; "Minister of People's Security Appointed," *Korean Central News Agency*, April 7, 2011; "Vice-Premier of DPRK Cabinet Relieved of Post," *Korean Central News Agency*, April 7, 2011; "Kim Jong Il Enjoys Performance Given by Artistes of Jagang Provincial Art Troupe," *Korean Central News Agency*, April 7, 2011; and "Kim Jong Il Enjoys Performance by Chagang Art Troupe," *Korean Central Broadcasting Station*, April 6, 2011
5. Michael Madden is the editor of *North Korean Leadership Watch*, <http://nkleadershipwatch.wordpress.com/>.