

US speeds Attack Plans for North Korea

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Editorial Comment by Michael Carmichael of the Planetary Movement

A native of North Korea, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon who is also the head of the Unification Church and a long-standing friend and ally of the Bush family, owns the *The Washington Times*. The report below by Bill Gertz should not be taken lightly, since the *Washington Times* is regarded as one of the most reliable sources for leaks from the right-wing of the US military-intelligence communities, and it has obvious connections to Korea.

Michael Carmichael

The Pentagon has stepped up planning for attacks against North Korea's nuclear program and is bolstering nuclear forces in Asia, said defense officials familiar with the highly secret process.

The officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the accelerated military planning includes detailed programs for striking a North Korean plutonium-reprocessing facility at Yongbyon with special operations commando raids or strikes with Tomahawk cruise missiles or other precision-guided weapons.

The effort, which had been under way for several months, was given new impetus by Pyongyang's underground nuclear test Oct. 9 and growing opposition to the nuclear program of Kim Jong-il's communist regime, especially by China and South Korea.

A Pentagon official said the Department of Defense is considering "various military options" to remove the program.

"Other than nuclear strikes, which are considered excessive, there are several options now in place. Planning has been accelerated," the official said.

A second, senior defense official privy to the effort said the Bush administration recently affirmed its commitment to both South Korea and Japan that it would use U.S. nuclear weapons to deter North Korea, now considered an unofficial nuclear weapon state.

"We will resort to whatever force levels we need to have, to defend the Republic of Korea. That nuclear deterrence is in place," said the senior official, who declined to reveal what nuclear forces are deployed in Asia.

Other officials said the forces include bombs and air-launched missiles stored at Guam, a U.S. island in the western Pacific, that could be delivered by B-52 or B-2 bombers. Nine U.S. nuclear-missile submarines regularly deploy to Asian waters from Washington state.

The officials said one military option calls for teams of Navy SEALs or other special operations commandos to conduct covert raids on Yongbyon's plutonium-reprocessing facility.

The commandos would blow up the facility to prevent further reprocessing of the spent fuel rods, which provides the material for developing nuclear weapons.

A second option calls for strikes by precision-guided Tomahawk missiles on the reprocessing plant from submarines or ships. The plan calls for simultaneous strikes from various sides to minimize any radioactive particles being carried away in the air.

Planners estimate that six Tomahawks could destroy the reprocessing plant and that it would take five to 10 years to rebuild.

Asked about the strike planning, Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said the U.S. government is seeking a "peaceful, diplomatic solution" to the threat posed by North Korea.

Regarding any military options, Mr. Whitman said, "The U.S. military is prepared and capable of carrying out all of its assigned missions."

The planning does not mean that the United States will attack, only that military forces are ready to do so if President Bush orders strikes. Concerned about threats from rogue states such as North Korea, Mr. Bush called for a ballistic missile defense system, parts of which are operational.

Defense officials said a key factor in the ramped-up planning effort is China's new attitude toward North Korea. Beijing's leaders, upset that North Korea conducted the test, supported a U.S.-led United Nations' resolution.

Chinese opposition to military action had limited defense planning, the officials said. In the past, U.S. military plans required warning Beijing, a move considered likely to compromise any planned action because of the close military ties between China and North Korea.

The Bush administration regards the new level of Chinese support as a "green light" for more aggressive military planning.

U.S. officials think North Korea will conduct another underground test soon because Pyongyang is demanding to be recognized as a declared nuclear power. Both China and the U.S. gauged the test as only partially successful.

The Yongbyon plant, 32 miles from the coast and a half-mile from a river, is considered a key target because U.S. intelligence agencies suspect that it is where the plutonium fuel used in the Oct. 9 test was produced.

Defense planners also said equipment destroyed at Yongbyon would be difficult to replace once newly approved U.N. sanctions are in place.

Another set of targets could be the nuclear test site near Kilchu, in northeastern North Korea. That site includes several research and testing-control facilities in the mountains — and possibly one more tunnel where a nuclear device could be set off, the officials said.

Recent intelligence reports also provided new information about Pyongyang's uranium-

enrichment program, which remains hidden in underground facilities in northern North Korea, the officials said.

The U.S. Special Operations Command has been planning raids against North Korean nuclear facilities for some time. It has conducted training for joint operations with South Korean special forces as well as unilateral U.S. operations.

U.S. Pacific Command spokesman Capt. Jeff Alderson declined to comment on military planning but said the command is continuing to shift forces to the Pacific and has four missile-defense ships deployed in Japan.

Mr. Bush said recently that any transfer of nuclear weapons by North Korea would be a "grave threat," phrasing viewed as diplomatic code for a military response. Defense officials said the military option will be used if North Korea is caught transferring nuclear arms to other states or terrorist groups.

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