



American Sentenced to Six Years Hard Labor in N. Korea

On September 14, North Korea's Supreme Court convicted U.S. citizen Matthew Miller (center) of committing "hostile acts" and sentenced him to six years of hard labor.

"[Miller] committed acts hostile to the DPRK while entering the territory of the DPRK under the guise of a tourist last April," read a statement release by KCNA, the official North Korean news agency. The statement described Miller's punishment as a "labor re-education" sentence.



The Associated Press, which was able to attend the trial, said Miller was tried under Article 64 of the North Korean criminal code, which refers to espionage.

Miller is one of three Americans currently being held in North Korea, reported the *Los Angeles Times*. The others are Jeffrey Fowle, who was detained in May and told CNN he was arrested after trying to leave a Bible at one stop on his tour. Fowle has yet to face trial. The other is Kenneth Bae, who has been held since 2012 and is serving a 15-year sentence — also for "hostile acts." Bae told CNN he has been transferred back and forth between a labor camp and hospitals.

Bae, a Korean-American, was described by the North Koreans as a militant Christian evangelist. Fowle was detained after reportedly leaving a Bible at a hotel.

Miller's case, however, appears different from the others. He has no apparent connections to a church or missionary group. The Bakersfield, California, resident entered North Korea in April this year on a trip organized by U.S.-based Uri Tours. Upon his arrival, Miller decided to not travel with staff from the American company or with other Western tourists, but only with North Korean guides. At some point during his trip, reported the *Los Angeles Times*, Miller reportedly tore up his visa and declared himself "not a tourist." The court reported that Miller had expressed his intention to "experience prison life so that he could investigate the human rights situation."

In an interview with CNN, Miller called on the U.S. government to help him and complained that U.S. officials were not doing enough to assist him with his case. "I've written a letter to my president with no reply," he said. "For this reason, I am disappointed in my government."

Miller said he "prepared to violate the law" of North Korea before arriving in the country and "I was expecting to be detained."

Given the nature of North Korea's repressive communist government and that the United States has no diplomatic relations with Pyongyang, if Miller had intended simply to test the North for a reaction, his experiment was certainly ill-advised. He has probably found — to his dismay — that he got much more of a reaction than he bargained for.

After Miller's experience, Uri Tours issued a statement that noted, in part:

We have ... added specific advice to our pre-trip communications warning tourists, among other things, not to rip up any officially issued DPRK documents and to refrain from any type of



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proselytizing (in light of traveler detentions that have occurred on our competitors' tours).

Reuters quoted a statement made by State Department spokesman Darby Holladay in Washington that the United States requests that North Korea pardon both Miller and Bae "and grant them amnesty and immediate release so they may reunite with their families."

Holladay also said that the State Department "strongly recommends against all travel by U.S. citizens to North Korea."

Reuters also quoted Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Russel, the senior U.S. diplomat for East Asia, who said on September 12 that the three Americans were being used as "pawns" and their detention was "objectionable."

Observers believe that North Korea may be using the detained U.S. citizens to force a high-level visit from Washington, in order to negotiate relief from the UN sanctions imposed on the state in response to its nuclear and missile programs.

According to an AFP report, Robert King, the U.S. special envoy for North Korean human rights issues, has twice tried to visit the North to secure Bae's release, but each time Pyongyang cancelled his visit at the last minute.

In recent months, North Korea has attempted to pressure the United States into agreeing to a resumption of six-party talks on the communist nation's nuclear program, but Washington has insisted Pyongyang must first demonstrate a commitment to ending its nuclear program. The parties to the talks are North Korea, the Republic of (South) Korea, the United States, the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, and Japan.

"Even if a high-level visitor goes to North Korea, it is unlikely that the Obama administration will allow the occasion of the visit to broaden the conversation to include nuclear issues," AFP quoted Scott Snyder, director of U.S.-Korea policy at the Council on Foreign Relations, as saying.

Our nation's resolve in demanding the return of its citizens held overseas on specious charges has weakened considerably since the famous incident in 1904 when Secretary of State John Hay sent a telegram to our consul in Tangier, Samuel R. Gummer, reading: "This government wants Perdicaris alive or Raisuli dead."

Furthermore, the U.S. government established a precedent for weakness in dealing with Pyongyang during the 1968 crisis in which the North Koreans captured the USS *Pueblo* in international waters. One crewman was killed during the attack on the ship and the 82 surviving U.S. crew members were taken to a prisoner-of-war camp somewhere in the interior of the country where they were starved and repeatedly tortured.

Finally, 11 months after the *Pueblo* was captured, the United States gave North Korea a written apology acknowledging that the ship was spying and promising that such action would not be repeated. The crew members were then released, but not the ship.

The *Pueblo* was eventually moved by the North Koreans from Wonson on the east coast of North Korea to Nampo on the west coast — a voyage that required moving the vessel through international waters. Although the U.S. military was surely aware of the *Pueblo's* location, no effort was made to retake or sink the ship.

Miller said, "I am disappointed in my government," but that statement only confirms that he clearly did not think through all the potential consequences of his outlandish scheme. The U.S. and North Korean



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governments have behaved much as might be expected of them.

Photo of Matthew Miller: AP Images

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