



Written by on May 20, 2010

N. Korea Threatens War Over S. Korean Charges

AP reported a North Korean statement on May 20 asserting that South Korea fabricated evidence implicating the North in a torpedo attack that sank the South's ROKS Cheonan on March 26 in order to provoke the North. The statement said any attempt by South Korea to retaliate for the warship's sinking would be answered with "all-out war."

North Korean naval spokesman Col. Pak In Ho told Associated Press Television News in an exclusive interview in Pyongyang: "If (South Korea) tries to deal any retaliation or punishment, or if they try sanctions or a strike on us ... we will answer to this with all-out war."



The *Cheonan* had a crew of 104 men at the time of sinking, with 58 crew members being rescued and another 46 members lost and presumed dead.

Voice of America News reported that early on May 20, the South Korean co-director of an international investigative team said that the evidence overwhelmingly proved that a North Korean submarine fired a torpedo that triggered a powerful underwater explosion, causing the Cheonan to break apart and sink.?? The office of South Korean President Lee Myung-bak issued a statement that Seoul will take "resolute counter-measures" against North Korea through international cooperation.?? According to the statement President Lee told Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd that South Korea wants North Korea to admit to "wrongdoing" concerning the sinking.

A [statement released by the White House Press Secretary](#) on May 19 referred to the report issued by the investigative team:

The report issued today by the team of international investigators reflects an objective and scientific review of the evidence. It points overwhelmingly to the conclusion that North Korea was responsible for this attack. This act of aggression is one more instance of North Korea's unacceptable behavior and defiance of international law. This attack constitutes a challenge to international peace and security and is a violation of the Armistice Agreement.

The President spoke with President Lee on May 17 and made clear that the United States fully supports the Republic of Korea, both in the effort to secure justice for the 46 service members killed in this attack and in its defense against further acts of aggression.

North Korea must understand that belligerence towards its neighbors and defiance of the international community are signs of weakness, not strength. Such unacceptable behavior only deepens North Korea's isolation. It reinforces the resolve of its neighbors to intensify their cooperation to safeguard peace and stability in the region against all provocations.

There was a touch of irony in the U.S. government's strongly worded statement, in contrast with an



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often weak U.S. response to North Korean acts of aggression in the past. Commentary in this latest report highlighted that irony:

The colonel [Pak In Ho] spoke to APTN outside another foreign warship: the *USS Pueblo*, seized by North Korea in a high-seas hijacking in 1968. The American captain and crew were held for 11 months before being freed.

Towed to Pyongyang in 1999, the ship is popular tourist sight, a floating museum moored along the Taedong River that showcases North Korea's naval exploits.

Pak, a 55-year veteran whose uniform was bedecked with medals, said he was among those who helped capture the *USS Pueblo* more than four decades ago.

The initial U.S. response to the capture of the *Pueblo* and its crew in international waters was pathetically weak. Eleven months after the *Pueblo* was captured, the United States gave North Korea a written apology acknowledging that the ship was spying and promising that another such incident never happen again. After this humiliation, the crewmen were released and allowed to walk across the border into South Korea. But, although the United States retracted its admission, apology, and assurance once the captives were safe, our government squandered an opportunity to recapture the *Pueblo*, itself.

As W.W. "Chip" Wood wrote in his article, "[The Story of the Pueblo](#)":

The *Pueblo* was eventually moved by the North Koreans from Wonson on the east coast of North Korea to Nampo on the west coast. The trip required moving the vessel through international waters for several days, as it was towed around South Korea. Although the U.S. military had to have been aware of the *Pueblo*'s location, no effort was made to retake or sink the ship. To the best of my knowledge, there was never a court of inquiry — or any embarrassing questions at a White House press conference — about why this was allowed to happen.

The *Pueblo* subsequently was taken to Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, where it is the most popular tourist attraction in the city. Thousands of visitors have been shown the ship's secret communications room, still in a partially disassembled state from when the ship was seized. A popular souvenir of a visit is a photograph taken while a tourist stands behind the machine gun mounted at the rear of the ship.

However discouraging the story of the *Pueblo* may be, it pales in comparison to the overall U.S. foreign policy that allowed the communist regime in Pyongyang to maintain control of the northern half of the Korean peninsula in the first place. Were it not for UN control and deliberate mismanagement of the 1950-53 Korean conflict — and U.S. submission to that control — the government based in Seoul would no doubt now govern the entire peninsula.

Photo: South Korean navy soldiers stand guard near the wreckage of the South Korean naval vessel Cheonan (PCC-772): AP Images



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