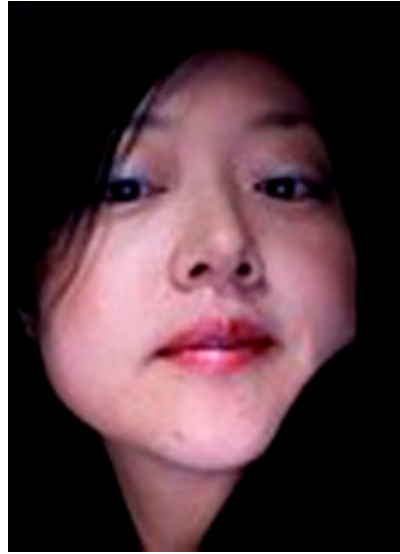




Written by on March 19, 2009

North Korea Detains U.S. Journalists

The South Korean state-controlled Yonhap News Agency, citing unnamed diplomatic sources, said North Korean soldiers took the Americans into custody after they ignored orders to stop filming. South Korean television channel YTV said guards from the North crossed the border into Chinese territory to arrest two U.S. journalists, quoting an official in Seoul.



“It’s difficult to comment on this matter because it involves a U.S. citizen, but our government is aware that a U.S. journalist is in detention in the North,” a South Korean government official told Korea’s *Munhwa Ilbo* newspaper, before it was learned that two journalists, not one, were in custody.

Most of what is known about the two journalists has come from the Rev. Chun Ki-won of the Durihana Mission, an organization based in Seoul, South Korea (with a U.S. office in McLean, Virginia) that is dedicated to helping refugees from North Korea. Chun cited sources who told him that the two women, along with a Chinese guide, had been detained, but that an American cameraman who accompanied them escaped “at the last minute.”

Chun had met with the women in Seoul recently, and had helped them plan their trip to China’s border region near the Tumen River, which separates China from North Korea. The journalists had called Chun on the morning of their arrest from the Chinese border city of Yanji and told him they were heading toward the Yalu River near the Chinese border city of Dandong. Chun said he warned the women not to go near the border, because he considered the area to be dangerous.

Fox News reported that Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang told reporters in Beijing that “China is investigating the issue involving relevant U.S. nationals on the border between China and (North Korea).”

Fox News observed that foreign journalists standing on the Chinese side of the border are often jeered at by North Korean border guards, who often hold their rifles threateningly, just yards away.

The incident occurred as tensions between North Korea and the United States have increased over the North’s plans to launch a satellite into space during the first week of April. The UK’s *Guardian* newspaper observed that diplomats in Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo have said they believe that North Korean will test a long-range ballistic missile in violation of a United Nations security council resolution.

Japan’s defense minister, Yasukazu Hamada, said on March 19 that Japan may mobilize a missile shield, moving PAC-3 missiles presently near Tokyo to positions further north to protect its population against fragments that might fall into Japanese territory if the launch fails.

As we write, it is impossible to predict the outcome of this incident, which — if reports are accurate — indicates that North Korea has continued its policy of ignoring international boundaries whenever it



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serves its purposes. But whether the Koreans release the journalists shortly without fanfare, or if it develops into a prolonged U.S.-North Korean standoff, history does not portend a strong U.S. response that would make Americans proud.

Consider the *USS Pueblo*. In January 1968, two North Korean sub chasers and four heavily armed torpedo boats captured the *Pueblo* (a lightly armed technical research ship) in international waters off Korea. After strafing the ship with machine-gun and cannon fire, North Korean sailors boarded the *Pueblo* and steered it into the North Korean port of Wonsan. The 82 surviving crewmen were imprisoned and treated brutally for 11 months. Finally, on December 23, 1968, they were released after our nation's chief negotiator signed a document stating that the United States "shoulders full responsibility and solemnly apologizes for grave acts of espionage committed against the Democratic People's Republic of [North] Korea after having intruded into the territorial waters" of that nation.

Our government issued the statement knowing it was false — the *Pueblo* had never sailed closer to North Korea than 13.5 miles, well outside the 12-mile limit — sending a message of weakness not only to communist North Korea but to the world. Like some weakling who lets the school bully steal his lunch once without resistance, the stage was set for the bully nations of the world to steal Uncle Sam's lunch at will.

The *Pueblo* was never returned. In October 1999, it was towed from Wonsan on the east coast, around the Korean Peninsula, to Nampo on the west coast. This required moving the vessel through international waters, but the U.S. Navy made no attempt to recapture the *Pueblo*, further sending a message of weakness.

U.S. foreign policy wasn't always so weak, however. In 1904, a bandit named Ahmed ibn-Muhammed Raisuli kidnapped an American citizen named Ion Perdicaris in Morocco. When bandits demanded ransom, President Theodore Roosevelt expected the Moroccan government to intervene. When the Moroccan government failed to make an adequate response, Roosevelt ordered the U.S. Navy to take up station off the coast of Tangier to press home the point.

Now speaking from a position of strength, Roosevelt, sent the following message to the bandit's headquarters: "Perdicaris alive or Raisuli dead." Perdicaris was released within 24 hours, and a military engagement was unnecessary.

It is ironic that in the years since World War II, the United States has not used its military might to protect U.S. citizens when necessary, yet freely has sent our military into Korea, Vietnam, Bosnia, and Iraq, where no Americans were threatened.

Photo of Euna Lee: AP Images



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