



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on May 28, 2009

Surveillance of North Korea Increased

South Korean defense spokesman Won Tae-jae noted during a briefing today that “additional intelligence assets, including personnel, will be deployed while reconnaissance operations over North Korea will increase,” but he did not give specifics.

What might be lost in the attention given to this increased vigilance is that the “Watchcon” surveillance level is separate from the five-stage “Defcon” combat alert level that defines Defcon 1 as maximum readiness and Defcon 5 as peacetime readiness. Won said that the Defcon level remains at stage 4, indicating no current change in the expectation of actual military conflict.

Another aspect to increased surveillance of North Korea is that this could fuel the conflict if it is not done discreetly. Won’s wording that “reconnaissance operations over North Korea will increase” makes it sound like actual flights into North Korean airspace may be involved. This could lead to a confrontation with North Korean aircraft that could quickly escalate the situation. Hopefully, one of the details Won declined to specify is that surveillance “over” North Korea will be limited to methods that aren’t prone to interception, such as the use of spy satellites.

Any direct provocation of North Korea that can be avoided ought to be avoided. Otherwise, we could see a repeat of an incident such as North Korea’s capture of the *USS Pueblo* in 1968. That incident resulted in American military personnel being tortured for months and the eventual display of the captured vessel as a tourist attraction in Pyongyang. Reading *The New American’s* retelling of [“The Story of the Pueblo,”](#) published around this time last year will provide a perspective on the current crisis that may not be obtainable anywhere else.

In fact, if such an incident were allowed to happen again today, it might even be viewed as a way to allow the North Koreans to save face. They would get to hold some American and/or South Korean personnel for a time while they inspect the technology of the crew’s captured craft. Negotiations for the prisoners’ release would drag on, but eventually the crew could be set free in return for something such as more Western aid to prop up the North’s communist dictatorship. The UN might even be allowed to serve as a mediator in the dispute, raising the world body’s stature.

Regarding the capture of the *USS Pueblo* and today’s North Korean crisis, one can only hope that history does not repeat itself.



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