

Operations Department

The Operations Department is the leading organization for commando and intelligence training of the KPA. Its central task is the education and training of North Korean intelligence officers tasked with covert entry into South Korea, Japan and other countries with the expressed purpose to conduct intelligence collection as well as executing such activities as kidnappings and assassinations. The Operations Department is also tasked with coordinating training of escort units who would take the lead in the event the DPRK initiates an invasion or military action against South Korea. To fulfill this latter mission, the Operations Department links with units of the Korean People's Navy for administration and training, and a fleet of submarines.

The Operations Department's activities date back to the early 1960's when Kim Il-sung embarked on a policy of destabilization of South Korea. In 1968, a commando attack by the DPRK's 124th Army on Seoul's Blue House (the Presidential Residence) was averted by South Korean security forces; this was an attempted presidential assassination. Also, in 1968, more commandos turned up on the east coast of South Korea in a failed attempt at inciting communist revolution in the South. Another attempted assassination of the former South Korean President Park Chung-hee via bombing resulted in the death of President Park's wife. In October 1983 a small team from the Operations Department detonated a bomb that missed then-South Korea President Chun Doo-hwan in Burma (Myanmar) but resulted in the death of four (4) SK Cabinet Members.

The Operations Department was allegedly involved in the kidnapping of twelve (12) Japanese nationals to the DPRK with the intention of their teaching Japanese language, protocol and behavior to North Korean operatives intended to infiltrate Japan. Most notoriously was the Operations Department involvement in the 1987 bombing of Korea Air Flight 858. The flight departed Baghdad en route for Seoul via Abu Dhabi. Two DPRK operatives, Kim Sung-il and Kim Hyon-hui (who disembarked in Abu Dhabi), planted a C-4 time bomb which detonated and killed all 153 passengers aboard. Both North Korean operatives swallowed cyanide, but Ms. Kim survived and remanded to South Korea where she authored a memoir and currently resides. The bombing of flight 858 resulted in the DPRK's 20-year placement on the US list of States That Sponsor Terrorism.

The Operations Department primary training campus is the Kim Jong-il Political and Military Academy; however its training facilities are dispersed throughout the DPRK. Clandestine agents are trained as individuals or in small groups of two (2) and three (3) at remote locations where they are sequestered from all communications and human contact, except trainers and domestic staff. According to several reports and accounts, training of clandestine agents occurs in KWP or Kim Family villas which tend to be remote and highly secure. The estimated number of Operations Department personnel has increased significantly from approximately 6-8,000 agents in the late 1990's to as many 40 to 50,000 as of 2009. It is likely that Operations Department personnel are intended no longer to train for infiltration operations of South Korea and Japan, but COIN operations in the event of a loss of domestic central control or stability operations in the event of a messy transfer of power from Kim Jong-il to the succeeding system. The DPRK still has a fear of

invasion by a foreign force (either the US or China) and it is also highly likely the Operations Department is training as a resistance force.

The Operations Department's central executive offices remain located in the KWP Central Committee Moranbong #3 Office Complex. As of March 2009 the Operations Department was removed from the departments of the KWP Central Committee to the National Defense Commission. Since the early 1970's it has been a favored constituency of General-Secretary Kim. While subordinate to the NDC Chief of Policy in one of the NDC's subordinate bureaus, its director is National Defense Commission Vice Chair, Gen. O Kuk-ryol who has been responsible for command and control of the Operations Department since 1994. General O is indisputably one of the most powerful individuals in the DPRK and with close personal ties to General-Secretary Kim and a role managing succession.