

State Security Department

The State Security Department is directly subordinate to the National Defense Commission. The SSD is often called by other names such as the National Security Agency or National State Security Agency. Its primary mission is to protect Kim Jong-il's power monopoly in the Party, State and military. It is a hybrid agency that is tasked with domestic political security (keeping the population in line) and intelligence collection, as well as engaging in active security operations and dispatching its operative to liaison with other Party or State intelligence departments (such as the United Front or the now-former KWP Operations Department¹). Through the Military Security Command, it monitors high ranking Korean People's Army officers (the MSC has its own entry here). The MSC was subordinate to the SSD, but these agencies may now work in concert with another with the MSC receiving its tasking directly from the National Defense Commission. The State Security Department has broad license in its surveillance activities over the North Korean population, with all but the most powerful DPRK policymakers (i.e., NDC Members, KWP Secretariat) beneath its intense scrutiny.

Personnel of the State Security Department are drawn from the ranks of the Korean People's Army. The SSD also recruits casual operatives and agents (human sources) from non-KPA members of the North Korean population. In many instances, these operatives are not taken from the upper-echelon of the Songbun system (the Core Class, or those worthy of enlightenment), but from the so-called wavering class (or class in need of reform or "fixing"). For North Korean citizens on the margins of society and wishing to advance up the Songbun ladder, serving as an informant to the SSD can prove to be an expeditious path; then again, the SSD may and will view this population as easily expendable, outliving its intelligence value. The SSD runs its own university, the State Security Department University which educates its officers and management. The SSD has not had a formal director since the late 1980's when the incumbent passed away; the position no longer exists. Instead, to maintain control and have unfettered information about the SSD's activities, executive management of the SSD is franchised to a Senior Deputy Department Director from the Korean Workers' Party, with informal connections to the KWP Organization and Guidance Department, particularly its Senior Deputy Director (who is tasked with security affairs). The Senior Deputy Director of the State Security Department, who manages its day-to-day operations, is National Defense Commission member and KPA Colonel-General U Tong-chuk. The SSD's central headquarters, which includes some of its subordinate bureaus, is located in Ryotmot-dong, Hyongjesan District (*kuyok*), Pyongyang.

The SSD's primary mission and task is its political policing authority—monitoring KWP cadres, KPA officers, state-owned corporation employees, and State officials for signs of dissent or subversion. The SSD investigates internal and external threats to Kim Jong-il. The Signals Interception Bureau (directly subordinate to the SSD's management) monitors most all telephone conversations and it regulates and monitors the DPRK's inter- and

¹ With the rising power of the National Defense Commission, the KWP Operations Department (tasked with intelligence operations against South Korea) has absorbed by the NDC. The Operations Department's director, General O Kuk-ryol, is a member of the National Defense Commission and is said to have a great deal of influence in the KPA and with Kim Jong-il.

intranet. The SSD provides security for the DPRK's overseas embassies and foreign missions, but more importantly it monitors the communications and activities of DPRK Ambassadors. The State Security Department also fulfills counter-intelligence duties, whereby information and reports generated through other security agencies (such as the Security Command or the General Political Bureau of the MPAF) are checked against reports issued by the SSD.

Institutionally, the State Security Department is linked directly to the Ministry of Public Security in two significant ways. Any North Korean citizen who is alleged to violate the DPRK's arcane political laws (such as disrespecting or opposing Kim Jong-il) will find the Ministry of Public Security refer that case to the SSD, which can involve extra-judicial proceedings to determine culpability. The SSD also shares administrative responsibility for the DPRK's political detention centers. It is also linked to the Central Public Prosecutor's Office. The State Security Department also links directly to the Guard Command. The SSD provides a secondary layer of security for General-Secretary Kim, with the Guard Command providing the primary layer of physical protection. According to one account from February 2009, during a guidance visit from Kim Jong-il, one of the KWP political education cadres who met the General-Secretary started talking to his colleagues about the meeting and talked of his concern about his health. He was subsequently accused by one of these colleagues of spreading rumors about General-Secretary Kim's health. The local Party Guidance officials referred the case to the State Security Department, a virtual death sentence. But this should not convey a harmonious relationship between Kim Jong-il and the SSD.

The SSD also has informal connections to Kim Jong-il's Personal Secretariat because it manages business operations and front companies that remit portions of their revenue to General-Secretary Kim, while financing some of its intelligence operations. The SSD's primary currency-generating activities involve manufacturing and trafficking narcotics. Historically, however, Kim Jong-il and the SSD have a contentious relationship. The SSD is usually tasked with managing market regulations (from the July 1 Decree) and investigating corruption in the outer provinces, when local audits fail or local law enforcement fail to implement policy. However, in its front companies the SSD has been accused of embezzlement and running side-line operations. This has created discontent in some areas of the DPRK, and General-Secretary Kim was recently under pressure (a relative term for the Suryong) to smooth things over with the aggrieved parties.

Another note about the SSD-KJI relationship; these are not the first accusations of corruption against the SSD, which started to emerge when the DPRK economy commenced its flat lining in the early 1990's. Add to that the aforementioned surveillance and enforcement powers granted the State Security Department. From the early to middle 1990's the SSD's investigations began running into KWP and State executives who were unofficially untouchable because of close personal connections to Kim Jong-il. The State Security Department commenced to engaging the Ministry of Public Security in a bureaucratic turf-war. Simultaneously, the SSD also engaged in a similar turfwar with the Military Security Command (which was technically subordinate to SSD). General-Secretary Kim sided with the MPS and Military Security Command, and had his brother-

in-law Jang Song-thaek (and his brother the late KPA VMAR Jang Song-u), among other political managers, purge the senior officers of the State Security Department.