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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

15 September 1950

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM NO. 326

SUBJECT: Military Supplies for North Korea

Prior to the invasion of South Korea, the North Korean Army was equipped almost entirely with Soviet equipment, and the resupply of these forces since June has been almost exclusively from Soviet sources. The major part of the petroleum products, military equipment, and ammunition now being supplied by the USSR to North Korea is sent from the Vladivostok area, which probably serves as both an originating and transshipment point. Transport into Korea is by rail or sea through such northeast Korean centers as Najin and Chongjin.

The material requirements of North Korean units are only a fraction of those of the US, and the transportation facilities available to the North Koreans, although damaged by UN naval and air attacks, and insufficient to permit the accumulation of reserves, are still able with improvised arrangements to meet the needs of front-line forces. The economy of the rear areas, however, has been severely strained because of the disruption of rail and highway routes.

The concentrations of rail traffic north of Seoul appear to be largest on the east coast, indicating that a major part of the supplies entering Korea comes by water from the Vladivostok area or by rail from the USSR via the Harbin-Tumen line. Coastal shipping appears particularly heavy on the east coast; on the other hand, through highway traffic north of Seoul appears to be heavier on the west coast.

The North Koreans have adequate indigenous supplies of foodstuffs. Although the supply of winter uniforms may become a problem for the North Koreans, minimal requirements will probably be met. North Korea produces no petroleum, but POL supplies from the Soviet Union are adequate. The resupply of unit equipment, which has been adequate to date, will depend more on transportation availability within Korea than on the ability of the Soviet Union to replenish North Korean forces from stocks in the Soviet Far East and Manchuria. The supply of ammunition to the North Koreans appears adequate to support the present level of operations, but it is unlikely that significant ammunition reserves are being built up primarily because of transportation difficulties in the forward areas.

NOTE: This memorandum has not been coordinated with the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force.

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1. Over-all supply position of the North Korean army.

The People's Army of North Korea was originally equipped with surrendered and captured Japanese materiel. The initial supply of Soviet arms and equipment probably came from the stocks of the Soviet occupation units. The USSR reportedly agreed to equip six divisions and seven "peace preservation" units between 20 May 1949 and 20 May 1950. In addition, there has probably been a substantial flow of Soviet equipment during 1950.

Resupply of material since 25 June 1950 probably has come almost exclusively from the USSR. The large stockpiles of war materials that were established within the Maritime Military District of the USSR in preparation for operations against Japanese forces in Manchuria in 1945 probably represent an important source for the continuing resupply of the North Korean Army. In addition, during the postwar period, materiel dumps have undoubtedly been built up by the USSR in North Korea and Manchuria, as well as in the Soviet Far East.

Truck convoys have recently been reported moving from Manchuria into Korea. An additional indication of logistic support from the Dairen or Antung areas is the large activity observed on the Korean west coast. It is possible that Soviet materiel intended for the Chinese has been diverted to the North Koreans.

2. Transportation and supply problems.

The daily supply requirement of the average North Korean combat division are believed to total only about 70 tons. According to North Korean logistic planning tables, the tonnage which must be put down in forward areas by North Korean supply and transport agencies is probably only about one-tenth of the US logistic requirement.

Despite the extreme vulnerability of Korean transport facilities to attack because of the large number of bridges and tunnels, their over-all capacity is still considerably greater than the enemy's relatively small supply requirements. The extraordinary ability of the North Koreans to overcome disruption of the transportation network is enhanced by their capacity to improvise transport over short lines of communication through the exploitation of their large manpower resources.

Supplies are being moved from North Korea to forward areas by all available means. Aerial reconnaissance has revealed that the greatest rail traffic is on the east coast line, running from the Korean-Manchurian-Soviet border area

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through the major east coast Korean ports to Wonsan and thence across to Seoul. This suggests that Soviet logistic support is being provided in quantity either by water from the Vladivostok area to North Korean ports for transshipment by rail, or by rail from the USSR or Manchuria via the Harbin-Tumen line. Considerable traffic, but in lesser volume, has also been observed on the west coast rail line from Sinuiju on the Manchurian border to Pyongyang and Seoul. Some of this west coast traffic may originate in Central Siberia or western USSR. South of Seoul, rail traffic has been sporadic, moving largely at night, and through rail traffic has probably not been possible in recent weeks owing to the substantial number of bridges damaged or destroyed. Segments of the two main rail lines in South Korea are probably still in operation, however, utilizing whatever equipment and repair facilities are available in the areas between destroyed bridges.

The bulk of the through North Korean truck traffic observed recently has been moving along the west coast. Several large truck convoys have been observed moving southward between the Manchurian-Korean border and Pyongyang. After delivery, these trucks will undoubtedly remain in North Korea. Trucks are also believed to be used extensively for the transshipment of supplies from railheads to those forward areas where rail lines are either non-existent or inoperable. Truck movements are being supplemented on a fairly large scale by the use of human caravans and by animal-drawn carts and vehicles.

North Korean shipping operations have been observed both north and south of the 38th Parallel and have been on a fairly large scale on both coasts, particularly the eastern coast where there are several Korean ports close to Vladivostok which are not subject to the UN blockade. Traffic consists largely of a variety of small craft which move southward along the coast, primarily at night, using small harbors, inlets, and islands as staging points and transshipment centers. A few larger vessels of unidentified nationality have also engaged in this traffic.

3. Categories of supply.

a. Food.

The daily ration for front line North Korean troops is estimated at less than 1 pound per man. The actual supply of food within the area presently occupied by North Korean forces is more than adequate to supply the over-all needs of an army of 200,000 for an extended campaign of a year or more. This is predicated on North Korean ability to hold and harvest the rich grain crops now maturing in southwestern Korea. Additional foodstuffs are available from the sizeable Korean fish catch and from vegetable crops.

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b. Clothing.

North Korean imports from the USSR, combined with stockpiling of uniforms and further restrictions upon civilian use, will provide the minimum needs of the armed forces for cotton textiles. The provision of winter uniforms will present a more serious problem, although the minimal winter clothing requirements will probably be met.

c. Petroleum Products.

It is estimated that the North Korean Army presently requires 16 tons of POL products per division daily. North Korean indigenous POL resources are practically nil. A large refinery in Wonsan, built to process 1½ million barrels of crude oil annually, and a large petroleum storage area north of Wonsan have been reported almost totally destroyed.

The support of the North Korean forces with petroleum products probably would constitute only a small drain on stocks in the Soviet Far East and is a question of transportation rather than availability within the Orbit.

Although a few tankers have been observed in western Korean waters, the considerable number of railway tank cars observed along the east coast line in Korea suggests that petroleum supplies are primarily transported in smaller vessels from Vladivostok to northeastern Korean ports not subject to the UN blockade, and thence transloaded for movement southward by railway tank cars and finally in smaller containers by truck.

d. Unit Equipment.

The quantities of combat equipment expended by the North Korean army during the past 10 weeks is an almost certain indication that Ordnance is being supplied on a continuing basis from sources outside Korea. Intelligence reports do not indicate pre-invasion stockpiling of unit equipment of a magnitude required to support current operations. (There have been confirmed reports of new trucks captured with speedometer readings of only 200-300 km.) Estimates indicate that stocks of material in Soviet territory close to Korea are sufficiently large to permit resupply of the People's Army, but there has been no intelligence to indicate the amounts involved, or the transport used. It is concluded, however, that North Korean unit equipment resupply, like petroleum resupply, depends upon North Korean ability to keep open and maintain adequate transport to the zone of combat.

c. Ammunition.

The North Koreans, although able to produce limited quantities of Soviet-type arms, hand grenades, mortar ammunition, and possibly artillery shells, are largely dependent upon the USSR for their ammunition supply. Air attacks have undoubtedly increased this dependence. In the approaches to Inchon Harbor, 200 pound magnetic type mines, an item not manufacturable in Korea, have been reported. It appears likely that the relatively low level of North Korean ammunition requirements will continue to be met.