

Silence of the Kim

Hello darkness, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again
Because a vision softly creeping
Left its seeds while I was sleeping
And the vision that was planted
In my brain still remains
Within the sound of silence
Simon and Garfunkel: The Sounds of Silence

Something strange has happened in North Korea over the last month. President Trump went to Japan. There he met with Prime Minister Abe. They called on Kim to give up his nukes and missiles. Then President Trump went to Seoul and did the same thing. The next stop was Beijing where President Xi and President Trump called for denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The response from North Korea consisted of verbal barrages. No nuclear tests. No long range ballistic missile tests. Crickets.

There may be a very good reason for no nuclear test.

Commercial satellite imagery of the Punggye-ri Nuclear Test Site subsequent to North Korea's sixth underground nuclear test shows significant movement of equipment, mining carts, material and netting within the area of the West Portal—a yet unused tunnel complex where little or no activity had been seen for the past several months. At the North Portal, where the last five of six nuclear tests were conducted, two temporary structures near the portal's entrance that were likely associated with the September test have been removed, and no vehicles, mining equipment or materials have been observed in this area since the test. While it is not possible to determine the exact purpose of these activities from imagery alone, they could be associated with new nuclear test preparations at the West Portal, further maintenance on the West Portal in general and/or the abandonment of the North Portal. (<http://www.38north.org/2017/11/punggye110617/>)

There are indications that the last nuclear test may have caused internal damage to the structure of the mountain they are using to contain their nuclear detonations.

Commercial satellite imagery of the Sinpo South Shipyard from November 5 indicates that North Korea is on an aggressive schedule to build and deploy its first operational ballistic missile submarine.

The continued movement of parts and components into and out of the parts yards adjacent to the construction halls indicates an ongoing shipbuilding program. The presence of what appear to be sections of a submarine's pressure hull in the yards suggests construction of a new submarine, possibly the SINPO-C ballistic missile submarine (SSB)[1]—the follow-on to the current SINPO-class experimental ballistic missile submarine (SSBA).[2] (<http://www.38north.org/2017/11/sinpo111617/>)

On the other hand, there may be serious problems with the Korean People's Army (KPA). Back in October an article in the DailyNK (<http://www.dailynk.com/english/index.php>) talked about soldiers of

the KPA being ordered into the fields to steal food if they were hungry. The recent defection of a KPA soldier may have inadvertently shown us the results of that policy.

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Surgeons treating a North Korean soldier who was severely wounded by gunfire while escaping to South Korea have removed dozens of parasites from his body, including presumed roundworms as long as 27 centimeters (11 inches), hospital officials said.

The soldier, whose name and rank have not been disclosed, defected to South Korea last Monday by driving a military jeep near a line that divides the Koreas and then rushing across it under a barrage of bullets. Hospital officials said Saturday that it was too early to tell whether he will make a recovery.

While treating the wounds, surgeons found the large parasites, which may be reflective of poor nutrition and health in North Korea's military, the hospital said. Doctors measured the soldier as being 1.7 meters (5.6 feet) tall, but weighing just 60 kilograms (132 pounds).

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/hospital-says-n-korean-soldiers-condition-stabilizing-012213683.html>

Analysis. The harvest is over. The KPA has returned to the remainder of its semi annual training cycle which will mostly likely again include live weapons firings including various missiles. However, the price of rice has not dropped as much as usual. The DailyNK is reporting that rice costs from 5600 to 5810 Korean People's Won (KPW) depending on how far you are from the border with the People's Republic of China (PRC). This is not as much of a drop as normal. The price of rice only dropped about 200 KPW per kilo. It has been much more in years past. This would be an indication that the reports of drought are correct and that the harvest was not very good. If past years are any indication, this harvest will not sustain the people of North Korea through the year until the next harvest.

In addition, North Korea has returned to the practice of using human waste for fertilizer. This would explain the appearance of parasites in the intestines of the KPA soldier. There is no way of knowing how prevalent this situation is in the KPA. However, we must presume that this soldier is typical of the majority of the KPA. This only adds to North Korea's food problem. The North wasn't feeding its soldiers enough before the harvest. Now it is feeding the soldiers and their parasites. Death by starvation is a distinct possibility in the KPA.

The economic strangulation of North Korea continues to increase. North Korea can export almost nothing under the UN Security Council sanctions and the secondary sanctions by the United States and others. The PRC has even ordered that all North Korean bank accounts in the PRC be closed. Even though North Korea is allowed to buy food and civilian goods under the sanctions, they have almost no way to transfer funds internationally to do so. Ships that transfer goods to North Korea ports are then blocked from entering the ports of other nations. This leaves only the commercial shipping owned by the North as a means of carrying supplies to the North.

North Korea was able to recover from the last major agricultural failure because it could trade with the World. Now it can't. Even so it is estimated that a few million North Koreans died during that famine. I do not doubt that this Kim is willing to sacrifice his people during this possible famine. There is also

the possibility that the small but growing market economy in North Korea may temper the results of the poor harvest. The price of rice on the open market will tell us a lot about the ability of the Korean people to survive this time.

If the normal schedule is followed, the next large combined exercises will be Team Spirit/Foal Eagle in the Spring. We should not really expect any major nuclear tests or missile tests until then at least as a protest against the exercises. We are still pending the threatened test of a nuclear warhead in the atmosphere. That may happen at any time. I believe, however, that based upon the 38North article, we will see a test of a submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM) sometime soon. That test may, or may not, be related to any actions taken by the United States, South Korea or Japan against North Korea.

The KPA has to me become a “use it or lose it” force just based upon the poor nutrition standards of the Army. The discovery of a serious parasitical infection in a KPA soldier adds an additional dimension to the malnutrition of the KPA. Treating a whole army for parasites of the extremely serious nature of the KPA soldier is a time consuming and probably expensive task. Nor will the problem be solved until North Korea can procure supplies of fertilizer that make the use of human waste unnecessary. Here North Korea faces the same problems buying fertilizer as it does food.

Nor will this problem be cured any time soon. It takes approximately seven years of no human waste as fertilizer before the produce is no longer infected. Beyond the KPA we have no way of knowing how deeply infected the civilian population of North Korea is. We can presume much less as the civilian population will likely kill most of the parasites by cooking. However, the farm population may be in the same situation as the soldiers of the KPA.

It may also be the case that North Korean society is less vulnerable this time because of the development of markets. Any predictions about the effect of the markets would be a wild guess at best.

Speaking of wild cards, consider the position of the PRC. The PRC wants a stable northeast Asia preferably without the presence of the United States. As long as North Korea has nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them, this is impossible. The US has a mutual defense treaty with South Korea and another one with Japan. President Trump has made it clear that the United States will not allow North Korea to have the capability to strike the United States with nuclear weapons. The recent bouts of “saber rattling” have made it clear to all that we are strongly pressing North Korea to give up its nukes.

Kim sees all of this coordinated military activity as a direct threat to his regime. It is well he should. While we will not invade North Korea, at least not across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) except as a response to a North Korean invasion of the South, there are other places to invade. A repeat of the 1950 invasion of eastern North Korea by the US Tenth Corps is not out of the question. It is highly

unlikely but possibly doable. The last time we left this particular part of North Korea some 100,000 North Koreans were evacuated to the South.

But still Kim sits "silent" with only bleating diatribes on the Korea Central News Agency (KCNA) web site as a reply. Besides the real technical difficulties of another nuclear test, I believe Kim is saving his resources. His intermediate range and intercontinental range ballistic missiles work. We do not know what kind of telemetry North Korea received from the reentry vehicles but must presume it was positive. We must also presume that the reentry vehicles contained dummy warheads to check out the fusing and firing systems for a real warhead.

This is the time when we would do well to treat Mr. Kim like a young child playing in the other room. As long as noise is coming from the room, we are reasonably certain of what is happening. When the noise ceases we must investigate. I suspect the arrival in Pyongyang yesterday of a PRC special envoy will have some effect on Mr. Kim. The Chinese Communist Party Congress is over. President Xi is set for at least another five year term. I believe we will soon find out exactly how far Mr. Kim can go with the support of the PRC.

However, Mr. Kim has already declared the PRC to be an enemy for supporting the UN Security Council resolutions establish the sanctions. Exactly how much of the PRC's "advice" he is willing to take is an open question. I suspect not much. Every time he looks over his shoulder he sees Carrier Strike Groups in the Sea of Japan. He sees B-1 bombers dropping bombs on South Korean ranges and maneuvering off his east coast. He sees the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army and the US Army conducting joint exercises of all sizes just south of him. Only time will tell where he puts the most emphasis.