

S. Korea the latest 'new order' target

by Lydia Cherry

With U.S. establishment press commentators like Leslie Gelb describing North Korea as "the renegade and perhaps the most dangerous country in the world today" and U.S. military reports claiming the North will soon have the ability to develop nuclear weapons, it is not hard to deduce that the "hermit country" is one of the top candidates on an American-British hit list following the Gulf war. North Korea realizes this, and its press organs now regularly reflect this, as did *Nodong Sinmun* on May 7. "The U.S. military has worked out a plan of a 120-day Korean war with a delusion to easily achieve their aggressive aim through a bombing operation as fierce as the Gulf war. It has the illusion it can strike any target," the paper commented.

What is not so obvious, however, is that the Noh Tae Woo government of South Korea is a target too, a fact that has become clearer since President Noh met with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov on the Korean island of Cheju in April. Through Noh's two-year-old "Northern policy" to reunify the peninsula through contacts with the East bloc, the South Korean President has not always operated within the Anglo-American geometry. Like its Asian neighbor Malaysia, President Noh envisages rapidly turning Korea into a developed country; he has announced, for instance that it is a "historical mission imposed on all of us" that Korea catch up with the Group of Seven advanced countries in science and technology by the year 2000. Noh is also reportedly supportive of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's initiative for an Asian economic grouping free of American and Australian control.

Catching fire from many sides

The Noh administration has come under fire during the past month from a growing number of critics, particularly after Noh's meeting with Gorbachov. Soon thereafter, anti-government protesters were back in the streets, with incidents of self-immolation by student demonstrators. Controversial remarks by South Korean Defense Minister Lee Jong-Koo that Seoul was "studying a preemptive strike on North Korea's atomic power facilities"—which North Korea is convinced was a U.S.-ordered signal piece—greatly intensified the pressures. During this same period, opposition leader Kim Dae-Jung took a higher profile, offering a counterproposal on reunification in an attempt to disrupt Seoul-Pyongyang negotiations. Kim Dae-Jung is a longtime subsidiary of

the U.S. embassy in Seoul, and still wields influence over the student protest movement.

During Gorbachov's 24-hour stopover in South Korea on his way home from Japan, talks included discussion on how to resume the North-South Korean dialogue, more discussion of economic and technological cooperation between Seoul and Moscow, and President Gorbachov's proposal that the two sides ink a "treaty of good neighborliness, partnership, and cooperation."

According to South Korean press reports, Gorbachov and Noh concurred that the South Korean and Soviet economies have many reciprocally complementary aspects. A Noh spokesman told reporters that there has already been technological cooperation around 48 projects, and that "the possibility of commercial use of Soviet science and technology is indeed endless." President Noh, in his welcoming speech to Gorbachov, pledged South Korean support to Russia's collapsing economy. "I promise here that I will support Your Excellency's striving to bring perestroika to successful fruition more strongly than any other leadership of any other country. I will stand shoulder to shoulder with you and support your efforts," Noh said.

After the visit, Noh came under immediate fire on the issue of the friendship treaty that Gorbachov had proposed, and to which Noh had assented. Press organs that had previously been supportive of Noh's Northern policy toward North Korea, turned against him. Immediately thereafter South Korean Foreign Minister Yi Sang-ok was sent to Washington where he met with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger. At the end of that meeting, it was announced that South Korea had agreed to form a regular channel of policy consultation with the United States and Japan, an arrangement which it had previously been reluctant to accede to.

One clue of what might have started the fight is provided in an April 22 interview with South Korean Senior Secretary for Economic Affairs Kim Chong-in, published in the daily *Choson Ilbo*. In discussing the content of the summit talks on Chenju Island, the official was challenged by reporters who pointed out that American experts on Soviet affairs "who are known to have abundant information on the Soviet Union," have warned against the kind of economic deals South Korea is making with the Soviet Union. "Dr. Kissinger even warned that since the Soviet economic system is in a state of collapse, enterprises should refrain from investing in the Soviet Union. . . . Defense Secretary Richard Cheney affirms Gorbachov's downfall," the interviewer chided, revealing the Anglo-American bias of his outlook.

"Views expressed by certain individuals are not always right," Noh's economic adviser shot back. "When the price of oil showed a big drop in 1983, Dr. Kissinger made an erroneous prediction that the oil price would go up to \$35 a barrel by 1985. I think the value of investment is an issue which should be left to the judgment of investing enterprises themselves."