

Report: The Voice of the North Korean People <PART1>

The Domestic Attitudes towards the Missile Launch and Nuclear Test, 2006

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Introduction

On the morning of July 5th 2006, after multiple missiles were fired into the Eastern Sea (the Sea of Japan), a national "state of semi-war" was issued and military mobilization orders were officially announced. However, the people, who finally had begun to establish their daily routines in the marketplace, couldn't follow such orders. Accordingly, the government seemed to exercise caution due to the possibility of social unrest if the state of semi-war were to become a reality. Thus, regarding this mobilization orders, there were completely different reactions from the people than the orders of March 1993 with the upcoming election of Kim Jong-il as the Commander-in-Chief. A "state of semi-war" was also announced officially in March of 1993, a month before the election of Kim Jong-il as the Commander-in-Chief. However, when comparing this to the announced "state of semi-war" in the summer of 2006, both citizens and organizations showed different reactions. To give an ex training under the instruction of the Young

Men's ample of the difference in the citizen's behavior under the same "state of semi-war," in 2006 the citizens were allowed to take a day off work to relax on national holidays such as the Declaration of Equality of Sexes on July 30th and August 15th, Liberation Day, despite the fact that a "state of semi-war" had just been officially announced. An especially notable act, a new national holiday was issued on August 25th. This seems like an unexpected act of celebration for a nation in a "state of semi-war". This kind of behavior from the people can be seen as a sharp contrast when compared to the nation's atmosphere in 1993. Following these events, on October 9th North Korea suddenly enforced the testing of nuclear weapons. All across the nation rallies were convened where large groups of people were mobilized to boost national prestige. The people at the rallies announced that there was no other choice but to develop nuclear weapons under the threat of the United States. Furthermore, they repeatedly propagated that now that they had become a nuclear power, the nation was now finally the "Powerful Nation" that they have been striving for. However, the enthusiasm and interest of the people were distinctly low. It had only been a month earlier when the nation officially announced "state of semi-war" and the consciousness of the people had already become weary of the issue. Furthermore, the image of a nuclear weapon was too ambiguous for the common person, who did not understand its significance, as they were only concerned with their daily struggle. Day to day survival held priority over issues of nuclear weapons and politics. As the news of North Korea's missile launches and nuclear testing startled the international community, the reporting team within the boundaries of North Korea spread across the nation to obtain

information about how the people, from common citizens to executive officers, in North Korea reacted to this issue and to see what kind of changes there were in the social atmosphere of North Korea during these times.

(The Editorial Staff)



In accordance to the issued “state of semi-war,” enlistees were urgently recruited. Here are citizens of Chongjin-city, North Hamkyung Province, who came to see the newly recruited soldiers off. It was made clear in a later interview with a People’s Army soldier who was mobilized to help in the construction of Kim Won-gyun University of Music in Pyongyang that the young soldiers in this photograph were recruited. (August 2006, Image taken from video by Lee Jun)

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1. The Situation in North Korea during the Summer of the Missile Launches

(Commentary by Ryu Kyung-won)

Military Troop Unit Suffers Damage from Flood

After the missile firing of July 2006, the “state of semi-war” was announced nationally and all military facilities and all citizens were ordered to be in a state of semi-war. The subjects for this order were mostly military, security, defense and educational institutions. The People’s Army was the first institution ordered to be in a “state of semi-war.” Each military troop unit was ordered to occupy their designated quarters. However, due to a flooding from heavy rain in one of the bases situated near the shore of Yangduk county, South Pyongan province, it is said that nearly the entire military troop unit was swept under the flood and most of the soldiers in this troop unit died. Wide-scale military training follows the tradition of avoiding areas with agricultural fields at times when the fields are filled with crops. Thus, the training locations were set near mines and the riverside, but the flooding unexpectedly caused severe damage to the military. Despite the fact that the military had entered a “state of semi-war,” flaws in communications and military orders, as well as a serious lack of resources, could be seen.

Mobilization Orders even for Middle School Students

There was an order for a 15-day military camp for middle school students higher than the 4th grade (around the ages of 15-16) and the Youth Household Troops<#1>.

<#1> Youth Household Troops: An auxiliary military organization that encompasses all middle school student boys and girls who are in the 5th and 6th grade.

The middle school students became subject to this order when they entered into their summer vacation and went into military training under the instruction of the Young Men's Alliance and the Education Agency. According to reporter Shin Do-seuk, throughout August they were engaged in military training near the sand dunes of the streets of Chongjin city, North Hamkyung Province.

However, each person had to prepare their own stock of food and products necessary for the camp, including military attire for training. Even the younger students who were under the 3rd grade were expected to attend a three-day military camp.

On the other hand, in elementary and middle schools more effort was spent for classes on mobilizing wartime mentality, which seemed to have effective results. On the first page of the August 11th issue of the Rodong Newspaper, an editorial expressed increased anxiety and emphasized the need for a revolutionary change in the education for young students. This article seemed to be timed to bring effective results in mobilizing the thoughts of the younger generation. As a result, the younger generation experienced more anxiety toward the "state of semi-war" than adults. However, parents who had experienced the great famine in the '90s taught their children at home that thinking about survival was more important than listening to what the government had to say about a "state of semi-war." In this way, even the younger generation who first listened to what the military-driven government said

about the “state of semi-war”, eventually lost interest and anxiety toward a need to mobilize for wartime.

Recruiting Enlistees and Strengthening Regulations

During the first week of August, the self-enlistment process for recruiting young soldiers began. The targets were middle school students who failed the enlistment process of the People’s Army in the month of April and young working men up to 26-years of age. The number of those who enlisted matched the number of enlistees in April 2006. In order to create an atmosphere to encourage fellow young men to stand at the battlefield, groundless rumors such as “We North Koreans will be the first to wage war,” and “We will win the war in a heartbeat” became popular among these young men. There were scenes in which recruiters wore their military uniforms and marched around Chongjin city. Citizens also showed tears during the marching of the enlisted students with cheers of support and enthusiasm for war even began to circulate a little.

The systematic reporting from defense and security agencies was also enforced. At each workplace, workers were expected to file a work report and the defense procedures were executed daily by the People’s Corps<#2>. to prepare for the war. “In Chongjin city, North Hamkyung Province, though it was partial, there were discreet processes made to track and follow suspicious people. However for regular institutions, the reports on industry organizations were limited to checking emergency backpacks and preparation material and didn’t exceed the normal military procedures.” (Reporter Gong Yong-gil).

<#2> The job of the People's Corps, which is the lowest administrative organization of the security, includes closely monitoring people who are unfamiliar or come from other districts, issuing blackouts, and have meetings that discuss their work as the "security guards of the neighborhood."

On the other hand, in bases near Musan county, North Hamkyung Province, regarding civilian operations and the movement of resources in the streets of Chongjin, "Notes from Byun Village" were handed out to strengthen regulations. It may be necessary to give an explanation of the "Notes from Byun." In the artistic Korean film, "Blood River," there is a town leader named Byun. It is a story that takes place during the Japanese occupation. During this period, the movement of North Koreans was inspected at check stations, and in the film the town leader Byun writes a "travel permit" for a woman who wants to go to the town market. However, on this note, town leader Byun writes, "This woman is suspicious. Please guard her well," but the woman being illiterate shows this "Permit" willingly to a Japanese officer who is on the look out.

Accordingly, the "Note from Byun" in this film exemplifies the corruption of the lower levels of government during the Japanese colonial era who self-indulgently used their authority for unjust means. During this "state of semi-war" issued solely by the military regime, orders came from the authorities to "regulate" and government officials and executives of the lower branches made self-produced "travel permit" as a regulatory means. However, this was done to gain personal wealth through exacting bribes and penalty fines. According to

Lee Jun, the fact that these “Notes from Byun” are being issued openly and freely is a sign that the order of North Korea has become corrupt. The “state of semi-war” sounds imposing but at the same time there are also reports that say that for some people it didn’t have much of an effect. “In the lives of ordinary people, there is no special phenomenon that occurred after the missiles were launched. Especially for ordinary citizens, there was nothing different in their lifestyles from before the missile launches.” (Reporter Shin Do-seuk)



This was taken on August 15th, 2006, Liberation Day (commemorating the Japanese surrender during World War II.) Thousands of people came out to celebrate with barbecue and songs along the banks of the Suseong River in Chongjin, North Hamkyung Province. This was just after a missile had been launched into the Sea of Japan and a state of military alert was in affect (Taken by Lee Jun) (C)ASIAPRESS

A Flurry of Festivity and a Feeling of Tension

Regarding the missile firings, the following two parts of the orders were issued from superiors and were delivered to institutions and agencies.

1) There was first an order that said “It is imperative that we prevent the overreaction of the people.” Specific orders were given such as “Let us follow the Dear General’s concerns: ‘Do not let the people feel anxiety,’ ‘Mobilize only the military,’ ‘Do not let our actions be obvious.’”

(Reporter Paek Hyang) Accordingly, after the launching of the missiles and these orders that were issued, the market actually showed vigorous growth. On the other hand, measures were taken to close markets that sold food that had the possibility of rotting in the summer heat.

It was because of these “considerations by the Dear General,” that on July 30th, the anniversary of the “Announcement of the Equality of Sexes” there were an exceptional number of women who came together to form groups in various places and coupled with the atmosphere of a national holiday showed an abnormal excitement from the people. Also on August 15th, Liberation Day, men and women of all ages came out and celebrated with food and dance to enjoy the national holiday. Above this, August 25th was declared to be the “Anniversary of the New Army” and there were official orders that people should celebrate this day.

Reporter Lee Jun who filmed and reported people celebrating on this day said, “We were just ordered to celebrate this ‘Anniversary of the New Army’ so even though nobody really knew what this new national holiday was about, it was the kind of atmosphere where everybody simply took it as an opportunity to say, ‘Hey, let’s drink.’” The fact that a

new national holiday was issued and the people were partying more flamboyantly than previous years clearly shows the nature of the “state of semi-war.” In other words, it was a state of “preparing for war” in which the people still had the leeway to drink and celebrate.

2) Through specified lectures<#3>, it was officially declared, “Now both China and Russia will no longer support us” and that “we must solve our problems with our own hands” in order to establish a feeling of isolation and to promote a sense of urgency. On one hand, it was declared through the lectures that the missiles were successfully fired and that their goal had been reached. Internal media also revealed, “We need to protect our profits from the enemy states’ interference and disturbances and thus we need to attack first. Developed countries hesitate to enter war and don’t agree. Thus, we need to preemptively attack with our military forces.” (Reporter Lee Jun)

<#3> Lectures: These are lectures held for the propagation of governmental policy and ideas. These lectures are held at various places such as in the workplace, local districts, and party organizations to discipline and educate the people with the thoughts of the government.

The Ambiguous Reactions from the Citizens

Through observing the reactions of the people in response to the missile firings, citizens didn’t explicitly criticize slogans like “Military First” or “Central Military” because they have become somewhat tired of it and showed little interest. In response to such indecisive reactions of the people that show both a sign of dislike, but no strong voice of criticism, it was said that, “They are consoling themselves by saying

that 'It can't be helped,' and voicing vain excuses such as 'Just as the head of a household must be strong to protect one's house, the military must also be strong to protect the country.'" (Reporter Paek Hyang)

The "military first government" (this refers to the policy of the current Kim Jong-il with the slogan of military-first politics<#4>) understood that to channel the frustration and anxiety from the people that would be caused by the sanctions placed by the foreign countries, military tension would be effective in placing the focus point to the international community. This was the reason why they calculated that they would receive support from the people. As a result, policies regarding the livelihood of the people were empty words at best. Therefore, the repeated "military first" policies of the government and the attitude of the people who didn't publicly voice a protest against the development of missiles and nuclear weapons were loosely linked to each other. In this way, the corrupt authority was able to get away with not relinquishing their unjust profits.

Even those people who seemed to support the "military first" ideology of the government seemed to show a completely different side in their ordinary lives. "The citizens were very explicit to express their antipathy by saying, 'We're sick of them taking away resources that are intended to support the military training.'" (Reporter Paek Hyang)

<#4> Military-first politics refers to a governmental policy that prioritizes and emphasizes the military. This started from the time when the governmental structure was under a crisis in the '90s, and the prioritizing of the military was adopted in time of emergency.

The Implicit Anger of the Citizen's toward the Government

Especially regarding the Korean missile launches, there were news in North Korean newspapers, T.V. and non-organizational lectures that the U.N. which had sent economic aid until now wanted to adopt a resolution disadvantageous to North Korea. In this way, the anxiety of the citizens was not pointed toward the international community, but rather toward the government.

"Why did they unnecessarily fire those missiles? If they would've stayed quiet, we would've kept receiving what they have been sending us until now."

"Shooting these missiles costs too much money. They should've just kept it without shooting them. Why did they shoot them? What a waste."

"If they're going to engage in war, they should just go ahead and do it. I don't care which side wins. I just want this situation to be over."

"Hasn't the government been telling us that we will win if we fought in a war right now? Well, if that's true, they should go ahead and get it started."

(These quotes are the voices of the people who were filmed by reporter Lee Jun)

Couldn't it be said that the perspectives of the people seen in these quotes reflect a merchant-like, calculating mindset that they have acquired through their adjustment to a market oriented economy?

A woman who reporter Shim Eui-cheon met on the train heading to Shinuiju replied quite furiously when the topic regarding the missile firings arose.

"This is what I think. The higher officials eat well, wear nice clothes, and they even go out to have their fun with prostitutes. If there's something

wrong with their nose, they have a whole army of people to diagnose their nose, if there's something wrong with their eyes, they have a whole army of people to diagnose their eyes, if there's something wrong with their teeth, they have a whole army of people to diagnose their teeth! Even if they were to die right now, they would have absolutely no regrets in their lives. That's why they can fire missiles and make such a big fuss about it everyday. But why do we citizens have to get caught up and deal with something like that? Isn't already enough that they've required such loyalty when we've showed so much sweat and blood and have received nothing in return? We even sent our beloved sons and daughters to the army for the General's protection. But in the end, they escaped from the military to return home because they were suffering from malnutrition, with their necks thin and their faces swollen. But then the army troops actually came to get them! So I said, 'I'm not going to send my son back to them until I get him healthy and nourished again.' They said, 'We understand,' and left. I wonder how many of those in the military have suffered from malnutrition. That's why they escape from the military. But the troops come to bring them back. If they have the money to launch missiles, they should be feeding the people in the military bases suffering from malnutrition."

Market Oriented Economy and the Missiles Launched for a Show

As we can see from this woman's statement, there are signs of division among institutions and between individuals in our country which exists under the slogan of "Unity with One Heart." When we think about this from this perspective, we can know the intrinsic meaning of the missile launches of 2006. The missile launches showed that the government



This was also taken on Liberation Day, 2006. In a park in Chongjin, youth gather around in dance (disco-style) as if to vent their anger against stringent daily control. Today, despite the fact that the generation involved in the class struggle has shrunk, strict control over thought and culture continues. But all it has done is encourage the yearning for opening to the outside among the younger generation. (Taken by Lee Jun)] (C)ASIAPRESS

had expected that the people would take the “state of semi-war” seriously and while anticipating that confusion would occur, took exhaustive measures to exercise caution on the people, while slowly preparing for the missile launches that was a “show put on for the foreign community” but turned out to become a “policy for the development of internal anxiety.”

This time, even the common people were able to look through the surface of the government’s propaganda to see the policy’s true aim.

Because of this, it has caused the gap between the government and the people to become even wider and deeper than before.

The country attempted to instill a mindset for the people that claimed that the declaration of a “state of semi-war” was to solve international problems beginning with the financial sanction set by the United States and attempted to convince the people that this was a courageous act against international powers. The military-first government intentionally disseminated statements such as “No matter how much we provoke the developed countries, they cannot engage in war with us.” Again, although they were actively propagating the “state of semi-war,” they widely publicized to the people within North Korea the excuse that “in reality, we have no intention of going to war.”

“Don’t create an overly war-like atmosphere. Do not have the people sense anxiety.”

The order clearly shows that the government was most concerned over the confusion and anxiety that might arise from the people by declaring a "state of semi-war", as this went against UN resolutions at a time when governmental authority was weakened and Provisions Storage Number Two through Number Four<#5> were empty.

<#5> Provisions Storage Number Two through Number Four: Storages of provisions for the time of war. These are numbered due to its level of importance. Only Provisions Storage Number One is left untouched, and the rest are already empty.

There’s an interesting trend to note among the people. According to perspectives from the people regarding the missile launches, there’s a

sense of blatant economic viewpoint never seen before and could not have existed if not for the ideologies that have stemmed from the market life which has flourished during the last decade. With the possibility of economic sanctions placed by the international community due to the missile launch, even the common people began to think about the ramifications to their own lives and people began to discuss with each other which businesses would suffer and which would profit. To give some examples, if the economic sanctions were to take place, the price of rice would rise so people began to discuss whether it would be beneficial to buy up a stock of rice, or if Japan would stop exporting used automobiles to North Korea, the bicycle business would profit from this. In this way, they discussed these issues not as a political issue of isolation as a nation, but they thought of this in connection to their own lives. Mid-level authorities began to express a sense of anxiety due to the U.S. economic sanctions that were not felt before. This is a sign that shows that the economic sanctions were beginning to affect the whole economic activity within North Korea. Companies who traded internationally and sold daily products were already beginning to experience the negative effects and because of this, could not hide their discontent toward the government's policies.

On the outside, the declaration of a "state of semi-war" seemed to be a bold and courageous act, but in essence, it was at best merely a scripted show and had no important influence in the marketplace, which has now become the central economic activity for North Korea. In the end, it only had a minimal influence in areas that are unproductive to the economy, such as to the daily lives of soldiers and young students.

If there were any effect at all, this opportunity was only used as an incentive to educate the soldiers and young students.

(August 2006 : Edit: The Editorial Staff)

PROFILES:

Lee Jun

Lee Jun is in his thirties and resides in central North Korea. He used to be a laborer at a machine factory. In 1999 during the mass famine of the “March of Tribulation,” he crossed the border into China with his family. While living as a vagrant in China, he ran into Ishimaru who was making a report at the time. It was then that he decided to return to North Korea as a journalist to show the world the true situation there. He has been recording video within the country since 2004.

Ryu Kyung-won

Ryu, in his forties, previously worked at a trading organization in Pyongan Province. After serving in the military and graduating from Pyongyang Agricultural University, he worked for a while as an agricultural science researcher. He then became a laborer for a foreign currency procurement company, where he was also a trade supervisor. He often went to China for this job. In 2003 Ryu escaped from North Korea and currently resides in China where he does reporting.

Shin Do-seuk

Shin Do-seuk is in his thirties and resides in South Hamkyung Province. After served 10 years in military near the area of military demarcation line, he begun to work at secretary in the factory.

Paek Hyang

Paek, a mother of two in her forties, lives in the northern part of North Korea. She began her work as a journalist in 2005 after meeting Ishimaru during a brief border crossing into China. She says she wants to show the outside world North Korean society from a woman's perspective.

Shim Ui-chun

Shim is a man in his thirties living in central North Korea. His 2008 report on the Hwanghae region became a global scoop.

TO BE CONTINUED IN PART 2

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