



ARTYKUŁ

## **North Korea by the end of the 1980s in the reports of the military intelligence of the Polish People's Republic**

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For many years, every few weeks or months, the eyes of the entire world turn to one of the last strongholds of contemporary totalitarianism – North Korea. The military aspirations of the unpredictable Kim Jong Un loom large on the leaders of the biggest modern powers of the world.

The first light in the tunnel, the hope for a change for good of the North Korean dictator, were the declarations and arrangements made during the meetings between the US president Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un. The

first such meeting took place in Singapore, on June 12<sup>th</sup> 2018; the second one on February 27<sup>th</sup> 2019 in Hanoi, during the denuclearisation summit; the third one in a demilitarised zone in Panmunjom on June 30<sup>th</sup> 2019. Despite many declarations and promises of change in the relations between the world powers and North Korea, none of the meetings led to a long-awaited breakthrough.

### **The most strategic branch of the state**

While debating on the military strength of North Korea, it is worth looking into archives and answer the question regarding the genesis of its potential.

The culmination of the military development came in the end of the 1980s. It was then, when - not caring about the economic crisis, wide-spread famine and poverty consuming the country - the biggest investments were made into the most strategic branch of the state, meaning the development of the army.

Intense investments into the North Korean army had been made since the beginning of the 1970s. The culmination of the military development came in the end of the 1980s. It was then, when - not caring about the economic crisis, wide-spread famine and poverty consuming the country - the biggest investments were made into the most strategic branch of the state, meaning the development of the army.

Of course, it is not easy to judge the capabilities of the North Korean army due to the limited access to its documents. An interesting source of knowledge on the military are the documents from the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance including, among others, the files of the communist military intelligence.



## The North Korean military ranks

(source: Institute of National Remembrance)

## In the eyes of the military intelligence of the Polish People's Republic

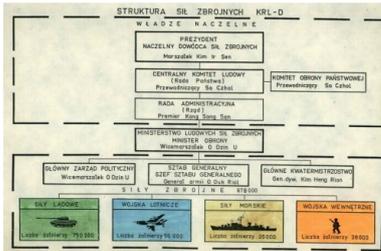
The analyses prepared by the Board of the Second General Command of the Polish Army, which had an intelligence facility in the capital city of Pyongyang gathering information on i.e. the military potential of Korea, as well as on the locations of the troops and their equipment, are a valuable source of knowledge for those interested in the North Korean army.

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The information in these files of the communist intelligence came from very good sources, meaning from the

officers of the Polish army cooperating on site, in Korea, with the country's army, having access to documents and seeing the units described in the reports with their own eyes.

In light of the incredibly scarce, modern intelligence materials regarding North Korea, the remaining archives of the communist ally of this country, which Poland was 30 years ago, with its own diplomatic facility, provide a more accurate insight into the state of its army and its equipment in the not-so-distant future.



**Structure of the armed forces of North Korea (source: Institute of National Remembrance)**

### Structure and military potential of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

In the organisational structure of the armed forces of North Korea, the supreme commander was, obviously, Kim Il-sung. At the same time, he was the Chairman of the Military Committee of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers' Party.

In total, the regular, operationally ready soldiers of the North Korean armed forces counted nearly 900 thousand, out of which 40 thousand were internal forces. Including the reserves, the entire army amounted to a staggering 4 million soldiers. It is worth noting that the entire population of the country was

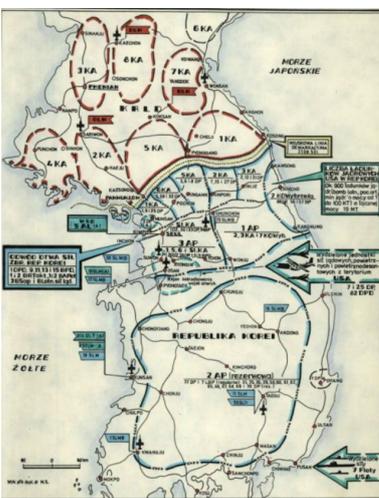
at the time around 20.5 million citizens.

This committee consisted of the Chairman and 18 other members, including 10 active military officers, 7 retired and the son of Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il. The Committee of National Defence and its Chairman were responsible for the defence policies. At the governmental level, the minister of people's armed forces was responsible for the military, assisted by four deputies. Of course, in the army's structure there was also the position of the Chief of the General Command with his two deputies, one of whom was responsible for the military intelligence.

Kim Il-sung, by ruining his country economically, invested in the armed forces. By the end of the 1980s, 10% of total GDP was allocated to military goals (which was more than 4 billion dollars). Ironically though, despite the huge investments in the army, the Korean forces counted many soldiers but were not exactly modern. Nonetheless, the military potential looked impressive in numbers.

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The armed forces, meaning the Korean People's Army, consisted of the land troops, air force, air defence, navy and internal forces. The biggest part of the KPA were the land troops counting around 750 thousand soldiers. They were divided into 3 commands, 8 army corps, 34 infantry divisions, 2 armoured divisions, 5 mechanised divisions, 9 independent infantry brigades, 7 independent armoured brigades and a brigade of tactical-operational rockets.



**Distribution of the armed forces of North Korea, South Korea and American troops at the Korean Peninsula from 1987 (source: Institute of National Remembrance)**

**Distribution of strategic resources and main industrial facilities at the Korean Peninsula (source: Institute of National Remembrance)**

When it comes to the equipment, the Korean army had almost 3500 tanks and 1140 armoured vehicles. The artillery had 4650 cannons and howitzers. Additionally, they had 2000 rocket launchers and 54 tactical surface-to-surface rocket launchers with range of 70 km. Among other military equipment, they had 3300 armour-piercing cannons, 11000 mortars and 8000 anti-aircraft guns.

The air force counted 55 thousand soldiers, including 3 squadrons of bombers, 10 fighter-bomber squadrons, 12 fighter squadrons and air transport. Additionally, there were 4 anti-aircraft rocket brigades in the air defence, as well as squadrons and independent batteries of anti-aircraft cannons.

In terms of the planes, the air force of the DPRK had around 800 combat planes and 179 choppers. Of course, all of them were produced in the USSR (Il-28; Su-7; MiG-15/17; MiG-19; MiG-21).

In turn, the navy of North Korea had 35 thousand soldiers organised into two fleets (the so-called eastern and western ones). In total, both of them had 450 battleships, including 20 submarines, 4 frigates, 30 rocket boats, 32 patrol boats, 182 torpedo boats, 163 artillery boats and 18 landing ships.

The distribution of the air force, according to the intelligence of the Polish People's Party, looked as follows: 13 large air bases and probably 30 lesser ones located near the demilitarised zone.

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The last piece of the North Korean armed forces were the internal forces - they mainly protected the buildings of the central and economic offices and patrolled the coast.

To this day, with huge probability, we can assume that the main part of the strike force of North Korea is based on the structures established in the 1980s. The only thing that has changed, and has done so dramatically - is the nuclear arsenal, which is currently an obvious scarecrow for the modern world powers.

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