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Military Supplies for North Korea

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Military Supplies for North Korea

CONCLUSIONS

The North Korean Army was equipped almost entirely with Soviet equipment prior to the invasion of South Korea 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 for these items. Transport into Korea is by rail or sea through such northeast Korean centers as Najin and Chongjin.

The materiel requirements of North Korean units are only a fraction of those of the US, and the transportation facilities available to the North Koreans, while damaged by UN naval and air attacks, are still able with improvised arrangements to meet the needs of front-line forces though not permitting the accumulation of reserves. 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 a major part of the supplies entering Korea probably comes from the Vladivostok area by water or from the USSR via Harbin-Tumen by rail. Coastal shipping is also heaviest 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, it is probable that minimal requirements will 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 to the forward areas.

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I. 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 been during 1950 a substantial flow of Soviet equipment, including military-type vehicles (at a rate of at least 150 per month), medical supplies, petroleum products, blankets and "special clothing."

Resupply of materiel since 25 June 1950 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, materiel dumps have undoubtedly been built up by the USSR in North Korea and Manchuria, as well as the Soviet Far East, during the post-war period.

There have been specific reports of shipments from the USSR to North Korea of such items as GAZ "Jeeps" (266 were reported to have been shipped in one day) and other vehicles, tires, items of railroad equipment, "special clothing" (uniforms?) and medical supplies during July and August.

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 barge activity observed on the Korean west coast. It is possible that Soviet materiel intended for the Chinese has been diverted to the North Koreans.

II. NORTH KOREAN TRANSPORTATION AND SUPPLY PROBLEMS

A. Nature and Magnitude of North Korean Transportation Problem

The daily supply requirements 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.

The over-all capacity of Korean transport facilities, despite its extreme vulnerability to attack because of the large number of bridges and tunnels, is still considerably greater than the enemy's relatively small supply requirements. The extraordinary ability of the North Koreans to absorb 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.

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B. Routes and Means of Transport

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 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 by water to North Korean ports for transshipment by rail from the Vladivostok area, or by rail via the Harbin-Tumen line. Considerable traffic in lesser volume has also been observed on the west coast line from Simuiju on the Manchurian border to Pyongyang and Seoul. Some of this west coast traffic originates 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 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 relatively large scale by 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.

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APPENDIX

CATEGORIES OF SUPPLY FOR NORTH KOREAN ARMY

1. 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 overall 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 relatively large Korean fish catch and from the vegetable crops.

2. Clothing

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

3. 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 supply of petroleum products in the USSR and satellites is adequate to meet requirements and to permit stockpiling. It is believed that 1½ million metric tons have been stockpiled along the Trans-Siberian Railroad and in the southern Maritime Province. The support of the North Korean forces with petroleum products therefore constitutes only a small drain on these stocks and is a question of transportation rather than availability within the Orbit.

Although a few tankers have been observed by reconnaissance in 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.

4. Arms 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

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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 only 200-300 KM on the speedometers.) Estimates indicate that stocks of materiel 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.

5. Ammunition

The North Koreans are able to produce limited quantities of Soviet-type small arms, hand grenades, mortar ammunition, and possibly artillery shells and is largely dependent upon the USSR for its ammunition supply. Air attacks have undoubtedly increased this dependence. In the approaches to Incheon Harbor, 200 pound magnetic type mines, an item not manufacturable in Korea, have been reported. Furthermore, Soviet manufactured fragment bombs have been delivered to Korea.

Ammunition shipments to the Korean front, totaling at least 7,000 tons, were made in late August and early September at an average daily rate of 350 tons. A North Korean combat division is estimated to require about 44 tons of ammunition daily, so that known shipments in this period would support 8 enemy divisions. There is evidence, moreover, that the aggregate quantity of ammunition actually moved to forward areas in September considerably exceeded 350 tons per day. It appears likely, therefore, that the relatively low level of North Korean ammunition requirements is being met.

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