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Terrorism Review (U)

11 February 1988

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Terrorism Review (U)

11 February 1988

Focus

North Korea: Responsibility for the Korean Airliner Bombing (U)

The North Korean Investigations Department (the overseas intelligence organ of the Korean Workers Party) was probably behind the destruction of Korean Airlines (KAL) Flight 858 on 29 November 1987. Elements of the case carry trademarks of previous North Korean operations, and no evidence has surfaced so far to suggest that any other terrorist group participated in this attack.

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Links to North Korean Intelligence

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Operational Itinerary

We have been able to verify some segments of the circuitous journey that Mayumi says she and her partner took en route to their mission. The following events are based on Mayumi's remarks:

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Motivation and Modus Operandi

North Korea's frustration over its inability to cohost the 1988 Summer Olympic Games and its desire to portray Seoul as an unsafe venue for the Games probably provided the motive for the bombing of the KAL flight. We believe the bombing had been planned as the first incident of a campaign intended to raise doubts about South Korea's ability to assure the safety of participants and attendees at the Games. (C NF)

The bombing of KAL Flight 858 conforms to previous North Korean actions in its disregard for innocent life and willingness to flout the norms of international behavior. Among such acts undertaken by North Korea during the last two decades are:

- An abortive commando attack on South Korea's presidential mansion in 1968.
- An unsuccessful assassination attempt in 1974 on the then President of South Korea, Pak Chong-hui, that resulted in the death of Pak's wife.
- The kidnappings of Japanese and Chinese women from Japan and Macao in the summer of 1978.
- An unsuccessful assassination attempt against South Korean President Chon Tu-hwan in Rangoon, Burma, in October 1983 that killed 18 South Korean and Burmese citizens and wounded scores of others. (C NF)

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Outlook

If the bombing of KAL Flight 858 is the opening round in a campaign against the Seoul Olympics, P'yongyang will probably conduct other attacks against South Korean interests. The public exposure and condemnation of the North—as well as South Korean security precautions—may serve as deterrents, however. ~~(C NF)~~

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The Return of P'yongyang

The bloodiest international terrorist attack of 1987 occurred in Asia and heralded the return of North Korea as an active state sponsor for the first time—as far as we know—since its botched attempt to assassinate South Korean President Chun in Rangoon, Burma, four years ago. On 29 November, Korean Airlines Flight 858 disappeared en route from Abu Dhabi to Bangkok, probably over the Andaman Sea. All 115 passengers and crew were killed. A couple who boarded the flight in Baghdad and left it in Abu Dhabi, traveling as father and daughter on false Japanese passports, were apprehended in Bahrain on 1 December. As they were being interrogated, they bit into cyanide capsules concealed in cigarettes; the elderly man died, but his female accomplice survived and was deported to Seoul on 14 December. She has confirmed that the pair were North Korean intelligence agents who had a bomb concealed in their carry-on luggage.

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North Korea's frustration over its inability to cohost the 1988 Summer Olympic Games and its desire to portray Seoul as an unsafe venue for the Games probably provided the motive for the bombing of KAL Flight 858. We believe the bombing had been planned as the first incident of a campaign intended to raise doubts about South Korea's ability to assure the safety of participants and attendees at the Games. Now that P'yongyang has been implicated in the crime, however, it may have to reassess its plans. World public opinion will no doubt hold P'yongyang responsible for any act of violence against South Korean interests between now and the Games.

(C NF)