

## ***IS NORTH KOREA REALLY ISOLATED?***

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Published: August 31 2017

### **How did North Korea succeed in missile development?**

This story goes back 10 years to 2007, when I was working as a correspondent of Mainichi Newspaper in Johannesburg South Africa. I was informed by a certain person about the existence of an arms factory in Ethiopia supported by North Korean technical expertise.

The UN Security Council also confirmed the existence of this facility, known as Homicho Ammunitions Engineering Industry (HAEI). Located in an agricultural area 135 km west of the capital Addis Ababa, HAEI was established in 1987 under the guidance of North Korean engineers, and produced ammunition and artillery shells based on North Korean models. I travelled to Ethiopia to cover this story.

Of course, the factory was heavily guarded and I was unable to penetrate the facility itself. However I did gain access to various persons connected, and found that Pyongyang earns foreign currency in return for their technical assistance to Ethiopia for manufacturing weapons.

Looking at how fast North Korea succeeded in their missile development, it makes one keenly aware that what we believe to be true, may not necessarily be the truth of the world.

Japanese media leads us to believe that North Korea is isolated from the international community. Hence our collective belief is that such an “orphan of the world” could never obtain the technology and funding necessary to develop their nuclear capabilities and arsenal.

However, North Korea is not as isolated as we like to believe, and has received technology and funding from various countries across over the world. Otherwise, they could not have developed their nuclear weapons and missile program up to its current level.

### **Intentional breach of sanction**

UNSC resolution 2094, enacted in 2013 following continued nuclear experiments and missile launches by North Korea, strengthens and expands the scope of all UN member countries (193 countries) to sanction arms and/or related materials trading with North Korea.

However, the reality is, not so many countries share the direct security threat of Pyongyang’s nuclear missile program as Japan does. Particularly, many countries in the continent I specialize in, Africa do not share these concerns. The regional threat of North Korea is not acutely felt, and they have not actively cooperated with the UN sanction as expected.

The UNSC Sanction Committee obliges all member countries to report their implementation



Hwasong-14 missile ready on the mobile launcher platform

Photo released by North Korean Authorities

status of sanctions against North Korea. However, as of April 2017, only 106 countries out of 193 UN member countries have submitted their report to the UNSC and only 12 countries out of 54 countries in Africa have submitted their report.

The reason why African countries have not submitted their reports can oftentimes be attributed to low administrative capabilities, but there are also cases of intentional sanction breach owing to military partnerships with North Korea since long before Pyongyang started accelerating its nuclear missile development at the start of this century.

For instance, in November 2009, some parts of tanks were found in a ship of North Korea heading for Congo Brazzaville, while it made a stop at a port in South Africa. There used to be an arms factory established by North Korea in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, which operated until March 2012 when there was an explosion which closed it down.

In 2007, the government of Uganda signed a police force training contract with North Korea. According to insiders, 16,700 out of 43,000 Ugandan police received training from The Ministry of People's Security of North Korea until 2013. North Korea sent about 100 trainers to Uganda and the government of Uganda paid 500 USD per trainer per month.

These examples are just a tip of the iceberg. The UNSC and intelligence agencies of major powers have received a lot of eye-witness information pertaining North Korean weapons and its experts in African continent. Exporting arms and dispatching experts is a business model that allows Pyongyang to gain foreign currency, and for the African side, it is the most inexpensive way to enhance their military power.

### **Reliance on Japanese media only does not paint the whole picture**

African complicity is not limited to the sanction breach only. Let us look at the UN resolution co-proposed by Japan and the EU, adopted on 18 December 2014, condemning human rights abuses in North Korea. This resolution was approved with 116 affirmative, 20 dissenting, 53 abandoned, and 4 absent. Looking closely at how the member countries voted gives us an interesting insight. 3 out of 20 dissenting, 24 out of 53 abandoned, and 2 out of 4 absent were the votes made by African nation states. It means that 29 out of 54 African countries were passive toward the condemnation of North Korea.

There are African countries such as Botswana who cut off diplomatic ties with North Korea (Botswana did so in February 2014). Even Uganda, who undertook the police training partnership with North Korea, announced in May 2016 that they would cut ties with Pyongyang. African countries influenced by Japanese and US lobbying, have been gradually changing their attitude toward North Korea.



UN Security Council convening human rights violations in North Korea

However, there remain some non-African countries too that maintain their relationship with North Korea. In March 2017, the murder of Kim Jong-nam in Malaysia revealed the fact that visa-free travel between Malaysia and North Korea was possible, and that North Korea is not so isolated as the people of Japan are led to believe.

In the Internet era, some Japanese people regularly read foreign newspapers, research papers or reports in foreign languages.

However, most of the Japanese public will still only rely on Japanese media, internet included. It is no exaggeration to say that our nations' general understanding of the world is formed entirely under the very limited conditions of sole dependence on Japanese media.

Unfortunately, the security threat of North Korea is not widely or acutely shared among others in the world. Now that the nuclear missiles of North Korea have become a larger and very real threat to the security of Japan, we are compelled to make more strident efforts to let the world know our concerns about the North Korean threat, as well as to enhance our defense power.

Source: Keiichi Shirato "IS NORTH KOREA REALLY ISOLATED?" The Asahi Shimbun GLOBE, 31 August 2017 [Online]  
Available: <http://globe.asahi.com/news/2017082400002.html> [Accessed: 18-Oct-2017]

(白戸圭一「北朝鮮は本当に孤立しているのか」The Asahi Shimbun GLOBE, 公開 2017 年 8 月 31 日, 最終閲覧日 2017 年 10 月 18 日)