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The Secretary's Morning Intelligence Summary

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North Korea: "No" to Special Inspections

In a sharp escalation of North Korean rhetoric, the Ministry of People's Armed Forces (MPAF) yesterday issued a rare, toughly worded public statement. The broadside was much harsher than a foreign ministry statement over the weekend and probably reflects leadership differences on handling the nuclear question.

The MPAF statement began with the standard North Korean litany of carefully circumscribed complaints about gunboat diplomacy and the "ill-boding" moves of "conservative forces in the US military." It went on, however, to loose a frontal attack on the Geneva talks, presenting them in uniformly negative terms and suggesting they had achieved nothing and held no promise.

Bridling at "pressure"

Arguing that "from the beginning" the United States has looked for a chance to build up its forces in South Korea "behind the curtain of talks," the statement asserted we had now cast off our "hypocrisy" by openly resorting to military threats. The statement reflected the DPRK's sensitivity to any buildup of US air power in the region, specifically mentioning operations of the *USS Kitty Hawk* and *Independence* in waters around the peninsula.

Apparently throwing down the gauntlet to those in the leadership who support the diplomatic track, the statement claimed that since the United States is headed for a "showdown of force," the North "cannot stick to talks indefinitely." It noted that the army does not "pin hopes" on talks "accompanied by pressure," and that "we do not recognize such dialogue itself."

The statement sounded an especially jarring note in asserting that the army's mission is "to protect the socialist fatherland with guns, not words." Typically, pronouncements by the DPRK military, while representing the tougher end of the North's rhetorical spectrum, soften threats by using stock formula-

lations asserting that the army does not want war but will fight if necessary.

Special inspections

Contradicting the North Korean foreign ministry's attempt to tiptoe around the special inspections issue, the MPAF statement fell back on traditional hard-line rhetoric: "Our People's Army, which has the mission of protecting the country's sovereignty, can never allow any attempt to open up military facilities through special inspections."

Despite the foreign ministry's best efforts to finesse it, the special inspections issue is now front and center. Only last Saturday the chief DPRK delegate in Geneva said the North has "never approved" special inspections but did not repeat the formula that the North would never accept them. His remarks were later replayed by DPRK media.

Reading the tea leaves

The tough MPAF statement is a reaction to perceived "pressure" by the United States and may be intended as much for the domestic audience as for us. But it also may reflect leadership differences coming to a head as negotiations reach a crucial point. Competing policy views may be more visible and less constrained during the slow-motion succession under way in Pyongyang. In any case, brinkmanship is a mainstay of the North's negotiating repertoire. Pyongyang may calculate that the MPAF statement will create a crisis with the United States that will ultimately force a better deal.

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