

Sender: -  
To: "'George Poste"  
      "'Elmo R. Zumwalt'"

Date: Mon, 11 Oct 1999 23:15:06 -0400

October 11, 1999  
North Korea Chemical Weapons Up  
      Fivefold - Seoul  
REUTERS INDEX | INTERNATIONAL | BUSINESS | TECHNOLOGY  
Filed at 10:37 p.m. EDT

By Reuters

SEOUL, South Korea (Reuters) - North Korea now has around 5,000 tons of chemical weapons, or up to five times the previous estimate of its chemical warfare capabilities, South Korea's Ministry of Defense said Tuesday.

In its 1999 White Paper, the ministry said a 1997 U.S.-South Korea study raised its estimate of North Korea's chemical weapons stockpile to between 2,500 and 5,000 tons from the previous year's 1,000 tons.

North Korea is also estimated to have at least 10 different kinds of biological weapons, the paper said.

"We have so far underestimated the North's chemical weapons capacities," the White Paper said.

"If North Korea launched missiles with biological and chemical warheads, they could reach as far as the southernmost cities of Pusan and Mokpo (in South Korea)," the ministry said in a separate press release.

North Korea stunned the region last year by test-firing a three-stage, solid-fuel missile, part of which flew over Japan before splashing into the Pacific.

U.S. defense analysts believed North Korea was preparing to test an even longer range missile, capable of reaching Hawaii and Alaska before Pyongyang agreed to suspend missile tests, while it is in talks with the United States.

The agreement was made in exchange for Washington's relaxation of long-standing trade sanctions.

In the face of the North's potential use of weapons of mass destruction, the ministry said it has been developing comprehensive countermeasures, including strengthening of chemical warfare military units, jointly with the United States.

The ministry said it is spending 350 billion won (\$292 billion) over the next five years to beef up chemical and biological warfare protection equipment and materials.

The White Paper said that despite its famine and economic difficulties, North Korea was estimated to have spent more than 30 percent of its national budget on defense, although Pyongyang's official announcements point to smaller figures.

North Korea has said its military spending for 1999 would be \$1.36 billion, or 14.5 percent of its budget of \$9.39 billion, according to the Defense Ministry report.

South Korea's total defense spending for this year stood at 13.7 trillion won, or 17.1 percent of the nation's budget of 83.6 trillion won.

North Korea's armed forces now total 1.17 million, compared with the South's 690,000 troops. The ministry said that although South Korea's military force was outnumbered by North Korea, its military strength would be more powerful in terms of weapons "quality" and in consideration of joint military stance with the United States.

The United States maintains 36,388 troops in South Korea, operates two air force bases on its own and four others jointly with South Korea, the report said.

It said major U.S. Air Force equipment in South Korea included 70 state-of-the-art fighters and 20 anti-tank strikers. The two Koreas remain technically at war across the world's most militarized frontier because the 1950-53 Korean War ended in an armed truce instead of a peace agreement.