The New Anti-Terrorism Act of South Korea

If we continue discussion on the matter of the Anti-Terrorism Act, it is impossible to avoid noticing how the authorities reinforced the attempts to push it through in light of the inter-Korean aggravation, loudly stating that “the enemy is on the watch,” and the Act should be adopted as soon as possible.

Here is a chronicle of recent events. On February 18, 2016 the Secretary of the Parliamentary Intelligence Committee, Representative of the ruling Saenuri Party in the National Assembly Lee Cheol-woo, citing a source in the National Intelligence Service, said that on the personal order of Kim Jong-un the North Korean military intelligence prepares cyber attacks, use of toxic substances against certain South Korean citizens, their kidnapping and sending them threatening letters. Anti-North Korean activists and leaders of the country may become the aim for the Pyongyang. Terrorist attacks against such critical objects as the subway, water supply facilities and power plants are possible as well.

On February 19, 2016 the President of South Korea Park Geun-hye avowed the possibility of terrorist attacks, including the use of biological weapons, or at least cyber attacks. On the same day it was repeated by the presidential speaker Chung Yong Guk and press secretary Kim Sung Woo. Simultaneously in Pyeongtaek, Gyeonggi Province of South Korea the Navy Second Fleet in conjunction with the civil sector services completed the counter-terrorism exercises. The actions in response to the sudden terrorist attack were trained. The Marine Corps Special Forces, combat engineers, land special forces, the police and fire combat service took part in the exercise. It is noted that the exercise allowed working out coordination of involved agencies in case of a terrorist attack.

On February 22, 2016 in his speech at the meeting of the Cabinet the Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn noted again that South Korea should be ready for provocative acts, cyber- and all kinds of terrorist attacks, but the attempts to accelerate the discussion failed. On February 23, 2016 the opposition sabotaged the discussion of the Act, using the filibuster rule.

On February 24, Lee Cheol-woo again told the terrible story that DPRK collects information on key infrastructure facilities, and recalled that (as it turned out!) the security services had repeatedly prevented attempts to tamper the operating systems of airports, nuclear power plants and other critical facilities: “We have secret evidence, and we’ll show them some day. Meanwhile, just trust and rather adopt the Act. “

On the propaganda website “Uriminzokkiri” DPRK called such statements of the National Intelligence Service “absurd.” However, on February 24, 2016 they had widely spread the “Statement of special importance, made by the Supreme Command of the Korean People’s Army”, related to the upcoming exercise, at which it was planned to develop the elements of the Operation Plan 5015. “From this moment all the powerful strategic and tactical strike means of our revolutionary armed forces will go into preemptive and just operation to beat back the enemy forces to the last man if there is a slight sign of their special operation forces and equipment moving to carry out the so-called
“beheading operation” and “high-density strike.” Our primary target is the Chongwadae, the centre for hatching plots for confrontation with the fellow countrymen in the north, and reactionary ruling machines. The U.S. imperialist aggressor forces’ bases for invading the DPRK in the Asia-Pacific region and the U.S. mainland are its second striking target. The DPRK is possessed of the most powerful and ultra-modern strike means in the world which are capable of dealing fatal blows at the U.S. mainland any moment and in any place.”

Of course, this only triggered a new round of screams that Pyongyang openly calls for terrorism.

On February 27, 2016 another attempt was made to speed up the adoption of the Act: the representative of the presidential administration “expressed the hope” that the deputies would take into account the urgent need to adopt a package of Anti-Terrorism Acts due to the threat to the security of the citizens of the country; and that is the reason why I want to speak on whether such South Korean hysteria is justified. More precisely, whether we shall expect the promised terrorist and cyber attacks.

From the point of view of the author, the probability of “something” happening isn’t necessarily equal to zero. However, this “something” could be of a very different nature, although the probability of direct and serious provocative act, approved at the Chongwadae or by the Army / Military leaders of South Korea, is the lowest.

However, a far greater option is that reinforcement of efforts to combat the terrorism in general and the North Korean, in particular, could become a very good way to get extra money or to acquire additional powers. It is no coincidence that one of the biggest problems with the Anti-terrorism Act is the matter of much greater opportunities for the potential terrorists’ surveillance. The opposition believes that in the context of the crackdown it would simply allow to accuse of terrorism the dissentents (and who else, on the letter and spirit of the NSA, may sympathize the North), and will provide an opportunity to engage the preventive censorship of their messages. In such a situation it is likely that the government will do mountain out of any molehill. And no one wants to take into account that in the future the court may reject vast majority of the charges. The main thing is the headlines that another terrorist network is disclosed. We’ve seen this already, both in the case of the United Progressive Party, and in the history of Hwan Son, who got a suspended sentence after 10 of the 12 charges, including pro-North Korean records in the personal (not online!) journal, were rejected by the Court.

The option, when the incident of the uncertain origin would be written off to the North Korean intrigues, is not less probable. In this context, we may recall how the August exacerbation of 2015 began, as well as the numerous stories about the North Korean hackers where further investigation showed that the reason was mainly in retaliation of the disgruntled employees or of the fiery disorder, which they tried to hide, claiming it to be a diversion in order to avoid the possible consequences.

However there is some probability that at the background of a number of declared anti-North Korean actions, the North-Koreans would decide to strike back. It is not necessarily at the level of young Kim: the Pyongyang regime has long ceased to be a perfect authoritative anti utopia, which means that options of a “rogue operation” may be typical for it as well. All in all, according to official North Korean version such were the reasons for the stories with notorious kidnapping of Japanese citizens. After a thirteen year old schoolgirl who saw something that she shouldn’t see, was not killed, but kidnapped, someone among the leaders got the idea to kidnap the Japanese either to use them as instructors, or as a kind of test for special forces: to get to Japan, to kidnap someone in order to prove their ability (not online!) journal, were rejected by the Court.

There is also some probability of provocative actions, organized not by the central authorities, but by the local ambitious representatives. There are the very young officers, who have never been at war, and who truly believe that the South alone would already defeat the North and only politics prevented them from doing so. A significant part of these gentlemen also belong to marginalized Protestant sects or to Korean nationalists, and that imposes a certain imprint on the mentality. Such a person is able to commit a provocative act, knowing that due to the overall tension, he will not be punished. Either the authorities will be forced to admit these acts because it is worse to look like being incompetent, or they will get a long-awaited occasion to move to the more rigid “Plan B”. At the same time, fanaticism rather poorly correlates with the ability to evaluate all complex political consequences of a risky step. Therefore, although the chances are little, it is not impossible (although it is literally “not impossible”), that spring through summer of 2016 may led to a new jump in aggravation. In this regard the author recalls the end of the 1960s when the countries were exchanging the spies, the aims of which could have been the country’s top leadership; although we still hope that the assumptions remain being only the assumptions.

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