

February 21, 1974
Telegram from Pyongyang to Bucharest, SECRET,
Urgent, No. 060.076

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Summary:

The Embassy of Romania in Pyongyang reports on the February 15 naval clash between North and South Korea, and how the sides had responded to the incident

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Concerning the effects of the February 15th incident between the two sides of Korea, we would like to inform you about the following issues:

As it is [well-]known, Pyongyang announced that two South Korean vessels were caught in the act of spying on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the territorial waters [of North Korea] and that legitimate defense measures were taken against them, while South Korea claims that the North opened fire on two [South Korean] fishing boats, sailing far in the open sea, sank one of them and captured the other, together with 26 fishermen.

In the time that passed since the incident, countless rallies took place on the entire territory of South Korea, gathering hundreds of thousands of people, culminating with the 1-million people rally in Seoul, where the action of the North was condemned en masse and in the most violent terms; [the participants in these rallies] sent protest notes to the Secretary General of the United Nations, to the International Red Cross.

To our mind, there are few moments in the post-[Korean] War period when the psychosis against the North manifested by South Korean [people] reached such high levels of intensity.

After ignoring the echo of the incident in the South for a few days, the propaganda apparatus in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea released the testimony of the captured vessel commander, who, in a unconvincing manner, admits that the two ships were prepared by the Korean Central Intelligence Agency and sent in the territorial waters of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with the premeditated goal to get one of the ships captured by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea defense forces, so as to offer public opinion in South Korea a general shock against the North.

After analyzing the incident through the lens of its destructive implications for the inter-Korean dialogue, for the tension it generated on the [Korean] Peninsula and for the unfavorable international echo around the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, we believe the action undertaken by the North was not justified.

The moment of the incident is totally ill-timed for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which needed to consolidate its influence and its power of attraction on the eve of the foreseeable political crisis in Seoul, to consolidate its authority on the international stage, all of these aspects being seriously affected by the February 15th operation.

We believe the Democratic People's Republic of Korea did not foresee such a large-scale reaction in South Korea, which goes against the interests [of Pyongyang] towards this part of the country.

It is to be expected that tension deepens, due to the firm request of the South Korean public opinion to immediately release the captured fishermen and vessel.

Signed: Dumitru Popa