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Kim Jong-un's brainwashed North Koreans 'ready to fight to the death'

Catherine Philp, Diplomatic Correspondent

January 12 2018, 12:01am, The Times



North Koreans rally in support of Kim's stance against the US. Levels of indoctrination were staggering, said the South Korean general In-Bum Chun

WON-JIN KIM/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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Invading North Korea to try to overthrow Kim Jong-un would be “like trying to get rid of Allah” in Iraq rather than Saddam Hussein, such is the religious fervour with which his people



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The former deputy commander of South Korea's army, In-Bum Chun, told an audience at the Policy Exchange think tank in London that although a military option to deal with the North did exist, it should be the last option. "It's like having to pull out all of your teeth and putting them back in again."

The first dialogue in two years between North and South is continuing, amid the ever-present threat of war. North Korea insists that its nuclear arsenal is not up for discussion, and the US has dispatched three B2 bombers to the Pacific island of Guam.



General Chun: "North Korea is trying to figure out if Trump is crazy"

DIGITAL

Relations between North Korea and the international community have deteriorated significantly in the past year, exacerbated by frequent missile tests from the rogue regime and threats of military action from President Trump.

Lieutenant-General Chun, who retired 18 months ago after 40 years in the South Korean military, painted a daunting picture of a heavily militarised North Korea where even children undergo military training and every citizen is ready to do battle. "The entire country is a barracks," he said. "I try to explain to America that if we have to go into North Korea it's not going to be like Iraq or Afghanistan. It's not like trying to get rid of Hussein. It's more like trying to get



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North Korea undertook a massive overhaul of its defences after the bruising experience of the Korean War, in an effort to ensure that they were never again “bombed into the Stone Age” by the Americans. This included compulsory military training for all citizens.

“A 14-year-old child in North Korea probably gets more than 100 hours of military training a year,” General Chun said. “By age 14 a child knows how to fire an AK47, fire an RPG, throw a grenade, pitch a tent and march 24 hours.”

The regime enforces universal conscription, with men serving for 11 years and women six or seven years. The standing army of one million is almost one third female.

General Chun, who has interviewed many North Korean soldiers who defected, described staggering levels of indoctrination. “You cannot imagine how indoctrinated they are. These are soldiers who have defected and yet there’s this inner belief in their own system that is ridiculous.”

He told of an incident in the 1980s when a North Korean submarine infiltrated southern waters but broke down, and the sailors “lined up and allowed themselves to be shot in the back of the head”.



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North Korea enforces universal conscription, with men serving for 11 years and women six or seven years

KCNA/GETTY IMAGES

One was captured alive. “It took one day for him to betray information. They are very tightly controlled but once they realise they’ve been lied to, they change very quickly.”

One of the key methods of control is through collective punishment. Five or ten families are grouped together and “if one person misbehaves, all those families go to the gulag or are executed.”

Much of the massive arsenal that North Korea built up after 1953 is now obsolete but it could be still be used to devastating effect by committed fighters. General Chun predicted that a thousand Soviet-era fighter jets might be redeployed as kamikaze aircraft laden with fuel and bombs.

Pyongyang possesses up to 5,000 tonnes of chemical and



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capabilities.

The North's cyberwar capabilities are considerable, he said, thanks to a programme in which children displaying an aptitude for computers are selected at the age of 12 or 13 and trained as programmers or hackers.

The number of defectors has fallen sharply since Kim came to power six years ago. This was a sign that his construction of a wall had made escape to China — the preferred route — harder, but also was a possible indication that living conditions had improved, General Chun said.

He said his greatest fear was “the North Koreans believing their own propaganda”, though he insisted that Kim was a rational actor. President Trump's unpredictable behaviour has “put them a little bit off balance”, he said. “They are trying to figure out: is he really crazy?”

North Korea had shown that its missiles could reach Washington but they were not yet capable of carrying a 500kg nuclear warhead. “If they want to broker a deal with the Americans they need to do it now. This window is closing really, really soon.”

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john payne Jan 13, 2018

They say an army marches on its stomach. There is no food in North Korea

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Stuart Jan 12, 2018

Is that Chun's real name? We need to get to the bottom of this!

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AL Jan 12, 2018

In Bum. What a name!

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Julie Ormiston Jan 12, 2018

A 14-year-old child in North Korea probably gets more than 100 hours of military training a year," General Chun said. "By age 14 a child knows how to fire an AK47, fire an RPG, throw a grenade, pitch a tent and march 24 hours."

Great idea for this country, if I may say so.



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Korea by special forces looks like a good option. With the leadership gone I suspect the Generals would sue for peace.

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Mrs M Newman Jan 12, 2018

@The Dark Lord You're insane.

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SBristol70 Jan 12, 2018

If only the bloody fat kid would die suddenly! Where is God when you need him?

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MargaretB Jan 12, 2018

SB ristol70. But apparently he has a son so there'd be some sort of regency, though that could be messy.

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Collin George Singleton Jan 12, 2018

@SBristol70

Running the USA...!!

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Deep Joy Jan 12, 2018

I doubt very much whether it is a "religious fervour" which keeps his troops loyal. More like a wish to stay alive and survive. I dare say The Great Leader keeps his troops well fed and housed unlike the rest. I don't think it would take much for the walls to come tumbling down.

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nuclear power plants in South Korea that are in range of North Korean artillery.

Back to the drawing board.

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Matthew Twigg Jan 12, 2018

Sorry to be childish, but....In-Bum Chun?

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Keith Harding Jan 12, 2018

Bum Chun. Sounds a queer place to hold a meeting.

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Charles Borthwick Jan 12, 2018

@Matthew Twigg Atten-Chun at the back.

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joeblow Jan 12, 2018

@Matthew Twigg not childish! nothing wrong with a bit of mirth in these rather dark times we find ourselves in!

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James Jan 12, 2018

@joeblow @Matthew Twigg That's true, but pity any poor newscaster who has to pronounce this guy's name and keep a straight face!

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Mandy Moxon Jan 12, 2018

Jeremy Hunt visited In- Bun Chun - if only that meeting could be arranged!



[Double Le Commentator](#) Jan 12, 2018

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Cressida Dick. Sorry, couldn't resist it.

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[Bonneville59](#) Jan 12, 2018

@Matthew Twigg Forget being captured and tortured by North Korean agents, hopefully for him he didn't go to an English public school, especially an all boys one. With a name like that he would have endured years of psychological warfare that would turn even Chuck Norris into a quivering shell of a man.

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[George the Dragon](#) Jan 12, 2018

Military era Soviet fighters are no match for modern ground/air defences let alone US built air to air combat aircraft. Even Western built jets take around 100 hours maintenance for every flying hour, still if you only plan a one way trip i guess reliability is not top of your list!!

There will be a plan in place and most of the equipment will be in theatre all ready, there will be no ground invasion that would be bloody indeed.

Power and infrastructure would be destroyed along with any remaining ground air defence units, when you rule the sky you rule the country, what happens afterwards is China's problem, Kim is playing for time and playing the South, but it won't wash with Trump, he will happily let the South make fools of themselves

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'Talks' sound like a North Korean strategy of playing for time.

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[JP Floru](#) Jan 12, 2018

So how much money is South Korea going to pay this time around to keep



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Jill M-D Jan 11, 2018

Delusional, or what? NK would be turned into the world's largest carpark; even without nukes.

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Guy in Norfolk - but now in Spain Jan 11, 2018

Jeez... Scary stuff.

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Richard Carlson Jan 11, 2018

Their military is of no use unless the country is invaded by the US & SK troops.

One non nuke air strike could drop up to 160 tons of ordinance.

The shock factor could kill thousands of concentrated ground troops a time.

In addition the massive US air power could wipe out the electric power infrastructure including power plants, dams, etc in minutes putting the entire country in the un recoverable darkness for years.

If little Kim ever launched an attack on the US, NK would be wiped out in minutes.

There would be several flashes and and it would be over.

It make take out parts of SK but that would just be considered collateral damage.

But again this is a scenario that the military leaders around Kim well know.

They will be the ones to take him out. Do not think they are stupid.

Kim is playing to his home audience.

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Rob Douglas Jan 12, 2018

@Richard Carlson



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the fallout that would result from that? And even then you wouldn't get an instant win and in the meantime they'd be using their big artillery pieces to bombard Seoul with chemical and biological tipped shells.

The safest (i.e. the least dangerous!) Options are
(1) to try and engage the North Koreans in dialogue/negotiations - something which, for domestic reasons, they might just not be interested in and
(2) to form an alliance with the Russians and the Chinese in an attempt to strangle the regime into submission - although this might very well provoke a military response from Pyongyang in itself.

That said, if the North Koreans do get a nuclear missile working and use it provocatively then pretty much anything could happen.

Recommend Reply

Raidon Jan 11, 2018

I think someone is kidding themselves here.....

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Martin Schofield Jan 12, 2018

@Raidon When he said up to a thousand jets that was the end of the credibility for me. Most sources estimate 500-600 combat aircraft at the most, the vast majority of them representing 1960s/70s technology, and given the state of things generally in North Korea the availability rates are going to mean that many of them are likely to be permanently grounded.

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