

## On Malaysia and the DPRK Breaking of Diplomatic Relations

By [Dr. Konstantin Asmolov](#)

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*On March 19, 2021, the DPRK announced a complete break in diplomatic relations with Malaysia, accusing Kuala Lumpur of illegally extraditing a North Korean citizen to US authorities. The DPRK Foreign Ministry said in a statement published by the KCNA news agency that “Malaysian authorities committed an unpardonable crime by forcibly transferring an innocent DPRK citizen to the United States”.*

The culprit in the scandal was a 56-year-old North Korean businessman named **Moon Chul Myung**, who lived in Malaysia and bought expensive alcohol and watches and sent them to North Korea through dummy companies. These goods fall under the category of luxury goods banned for shipments to North Korea.

Moon has lived in Malaysia for ten years and was arrested in May 2019 after a federal judge in Washington issued an arrest warrant for Moon on May 2, 2019 on money laundering and [conspiracy charges](#).

During the trial, Moon denied all charges, and his defense argued that he would not get a fair trial in the US and that his extradition was politically motivated and intended to increase pressure on North Korea because of the country’s missile program.

In the end, Moon’s appeal was rejected and he became the first DPRK citizen extradited to the United States on money laundering charges.

On March 22, Moon Chul Myung was taken to federal court in the District of Columbia. The charges were brought on a total of six counts. According to the US Department of Justice press office, the court documents contain evidence that between April 2013 and November 2018, Moon Chul Myung conspired with several other individuals to gain access to the US financial system. The money laundering activity is believed to have involved transactions in amounts exceeding \$1.5 million.

North Korea believes that Malaysia has failed to provide a single [shred of evidence](#) to accuse Moon of engaging in “legitimate foreign trade activities,” and warned that Malaysian authorities would be fully responsible for any consequences that arise between the two

countries. "This world-shocking incident is the clear product of a conspiracy against the DPRK, created by the abhorrent hostile policy of the United States to isolate and strangle our country, as well as pro-American subordination on the part of the Malaysian authorities."

The KCNA warned that the US would "pay their due price" as the "behind-the-scenes manipulator and [main perpetrator of the incident](#)", and stated that shortly after the incident, the US Ambassador to Malaysia invited Malaysian law enforcement officials to a banquet where they were given a substantial tip. Also, coincidentally or not, it was revealed on March 22 that SKC Inc., the chemical division of South Korean conglomerate SK Group, intends to spend 700 billion won to build its first overseas plant in Malaysia to produce copper foil, one of the key materials for [electric car batteries](#).

On March 21, 33 North Korean citizens, including embassy officials and their families left Malaysia on a flight to Shanghai. The Malaysian authorities declared the North Korean diplomats personae non grata and demanded that they leave the country within 48 hours.

The night before, the DPRK flag was removed from the embassy, after which the embassy's interim chargé d'affaires Kim Yu-sung issued a statement saying that the action was "the result of a US-led plot against North Korea, which has undermined the basis of bilateral relations between the DPRK and Malaysia."

To some, this response seemed unusually harsh. But we should recall that after the assassination of Kim Jong Nam, the two countries were already on the verge of severing diplomatic relations. An important element of the investigation at the time was the case of another North Korean businessman who, as it turned out later, was also involved in complicated schemes to deliver to North Korea various equipment, and possibly even banned goods. A chemical engineer named Lee was portrayed by the South Korean media and intelligence as the main organizer of the murder, but no incriminating evidence has been discovered. So Lee was simply deported, and when he returned home, he said that South Koreans were present at his interrogations, who actively pressured him to escape to the ROK.

Let's not forget the story of the "12 escaped waitresses". The high-profile escape ended up being a story about a corrupt manager who tricked the women into leaving for the South, but what is important is that the group left China again for Malaysia, after which they were escorted by special forces to the Korean embassy and then back to their "home country".

At the same time, up to a certain time, North Korean business was doing quite well in Malaysia. There have been cases when Malaysian trading companies turned out to be in fact North Korean, and there were even cases of military equipment being sold through such structures.

This, however, is but a preamble to the real story. In essence, it was the first time that a citizen of the DPRK found himself in the hands of American justice, and the latter will likely not be particularly shy about getting information out of him. This, in turn, could have several unpleasant consequences for the DPRK, with those types of consequences looking much the same.

The first option is that such a person really has something to tell and these secrets will be forced out of him. It is not clear what this information is, but in any case it will be a hurtful loss for Pyongyang. The second option is that some amount of information obtained illegally

from classified sources can be “legitimized”: say, he might have confirmed such information, or we might have just reached similar conclusions as a result of interrogations. The third scenario is that now it is possible to throw in scary secrets of any degree of unreliability, which could lead to the formation of an entire flock of “Pyongyang ducks”. That said, it would not technically be an anonymous source in North Korea who told his story to an anonymous DailyNK volunteer, but someone with a specific name.

Pyongyang cannot punish Washington for such a move, but the door has been slammed on Malaysia, and another weight has appeared on the scales of further aggravation of the relations between the United States and the DPRK, so we will try to follow the developments closely and get ready for likely sensational confessions.

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**Konstantin Asmolov**, PhD in History, leading research fellow at the Center for Korean Studies of the Institute of the Far East at the Russian Academy of Sciences, exclusively for the online magazine “[New Eastern Outlook](#)”.

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