

This Book Turns Everything You Thought You Knew About North Korea Upside Down

By [Jeremy Kuzmarov](#)

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Region: [East Asia](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Media](#), [Politics](#)

How 70 years of CIA deceit and mainstream media complicity convinced the American public that North Korea was the Bad Guy and the U.S. was the Good Guy—when it was almost always the other way around

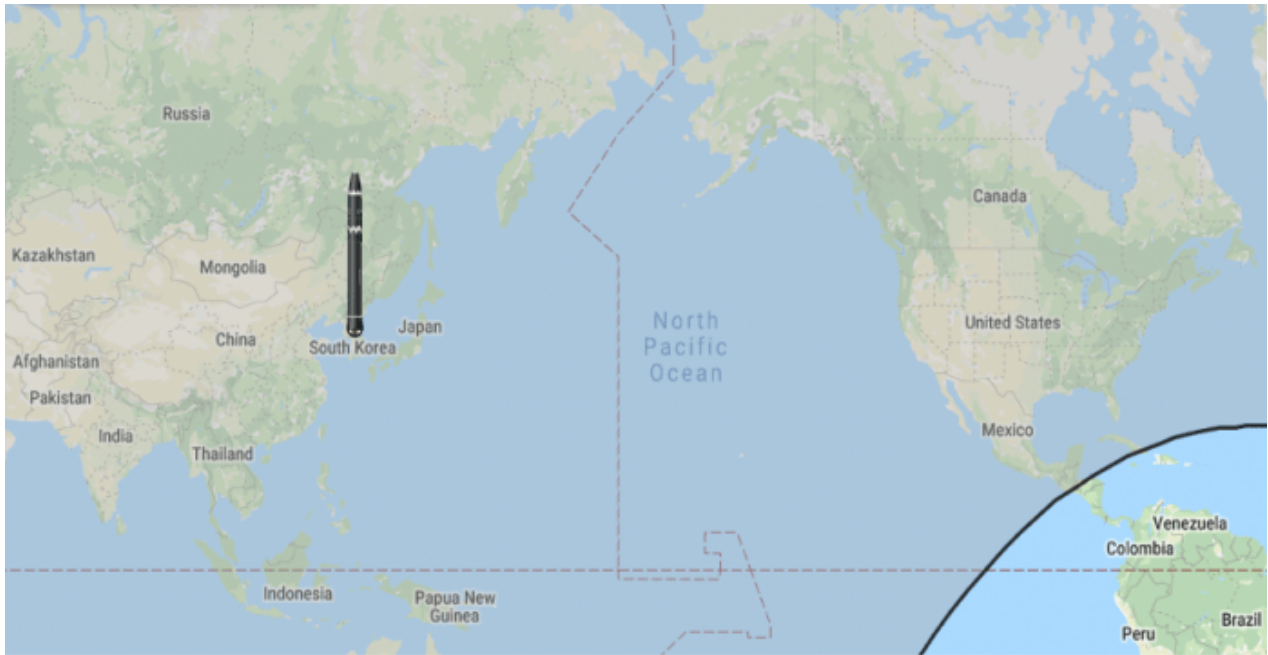
In the United States today, North Korea is the standard reference point for modern-day totalitarianism: a land of darkness that is considered a dangerous security threat because of the development of nuclear missiles capable of striking the U.S.

A.B. Abrams' new book, [Immovable Object: North Korea's 70 Years at War with American Power \(Clarity Press, 2020\)](#), shows that the common perceptions in the U.S. of North Korea are mostly wrong.

Though the Kim dynasty has ruled through autocratic methods, it has also adopted rational and at times intelligent policies, which have enabled North Korea to weather unprecedented outside hostility and develop into something of a military powerhouse.

Between July and November 2017, North Korea successfully test-fired three intercontinental range ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and a more sophisticated miniaturized thermonuclear warhead, which demonstrated beyond much reasonable doubt that one of America's oldest adversaries had gained the capability to strike the U.S. mainland, with U.S. intelligence later confirming the viability of both ICBM designs tested as well as their warheads.^[1]

North Korea as such is no military pushover and may be gaining the upper hand in the long war with the United States—which is a source of pride for its people.



Engagement Range of Hwasong-15 ICBM [Source: militarywatchmagazine.com]



Amidst the backdrop of U.S. sanctions, Pyongyang has recently undergone a major construction boom.
[Source: 38north.com]

Roots of the Conflict

The conflict between the U.S. and North Korea, or Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), is rooted in North Korea's defiance of the U.S.-led world order.

The DPRK's founding father, Kim Il-Sung, was the son of prominent Korean nationalists Kim Hyong Jik and Kang Pan Sok and a leader of the Manchurian partisan exiles in the Soviet Far East who fought against Japanese colonial occupation.

During Japan's colonization of Korea from 1910 to 1945, it promoted industrialization and

built the Suiho dam—the second largest in the world after the Hoover dam—while also developing a draconian surveillance apparatus and repressing political dissent.

The United States followed Japan in its hostility to left-wing, nationalist movements, and construction of a police state apparatus in South Korea, which relied on many former Japanese collaborators.

The U.S. had divided the Koreas artificially at the end of World War II and installed a client regime in the south led by Syngman Rhee, who was flown in on General Douglas MacArthur's plane after having spent years in exile.

CIA reports from the time showed a stark contrast between Kim and Rhee's leadership.

Under Kim's direction, industrial output and state industry increased exponentially in the DPRK, with average salaries of factory and office workers increasing by 83 percent. A successful program of land reform also offered new opportunities for rural farmers, and many benefited from state-subsidized health care and education.



Syngman Rhee (right) waltzes with General Douglas MacArthur. [Source: wilsoncenter.org]

The Rhee government, by contrast, triggered a social rebellion through economic policies that were designed to tie South Korea's economy with Japan—which the U.S. was trying to build up as a junior partner in the Cold War—along with a heavy reliance on Japanese collaborators and intolerance for dissent.

Before the official outbreak of the Korean War, the Rhee regime, with the support of U.S. military and police advisers, had killed at least 100,000 of its own people, including through the brutal suppression of a left-wing uprising in the southern island of Cheju-do.

In the late 1940s, the Kim regime promoted the peaceful reunification of the Koreas through free elections. The U.S. government blocked these elections because they knew that Kim would win—similarly to Vietnam in 1956 when they knew that Ho Chi Minh would win at least 80 percent of the vote.

Despite a professed commitment to democracy, the U.S. trampled on Korea's sovereignty in order to fulfill its imperial ambitions in Southeast Asia, which the U.S. had ringed with military bases due to its victory in the Pacific War.

The Korean War

The official narrative maintains that the North started the Korean War by invading South Korea on June 25, 1950. However, Abrams' account provides strong evidence that it was the other way around.

Bent on achieving what he could never do through the ballot box, Rhee's forces staged raids into the North, and then on June 25th struck first when they attacked the border city of Haeju. The South Koreans would later amend their claim to state that they had attacked Haeju at a later date as part of a counter-offensive—long after announcing the successful capture of the city.

American government officials at the time were elated by the outbreak of the Korean War—Secretary of State Dean Acheson said that “the Korean War came along and saved us.”

This was because it gave an excuse to prevent major cutbacks in military spending after World War II, and strike a blow at communist China, which entered the war in support of the DPRK.

Furthermore, the United States military used Korea, like Vietnam subsequently, as a testing ground for new weapons systems, including super-bazookas and napalm, or jellied gasoline, which burns the flesh.

The North Korean population also served as guinea pigs for medical experiments on prisoners of war (POWs), and for techniques of germ warfare that had been learned from Japanese war criminals who had been secretly invited to give lectures at the U.S. Army Biological Warfare Center at Ft. Detrick, Maryland, at the end of World War II.



Fig. 3. Women organised into insect-catching teams to exterminate the insects dropped on the snowy ground by the American planes.

[Source: whowhatwhy.org]

General Douglas MacArthur, who had previously led the war effort against imperial Japan, stated that as one who had seen as much “blood and disaster as any living man,” he had never seen such devastation as that experienced in Korea during the Korean War. “It just curdled my stomach the last time I was there.” Subsequently MacArthur referred to the war as “a slaughter never heard of in the history of mankind.”

According to the Truth Commission that was established decades after the war ended, South Korean (ROK) troops committed six times more atrocities than the North Korean People’s Army (KPA). American troops also torched villages, raped local women, and committed dozens of massacres, some of which were motivated by pure racial bigotry.



Summary executions carried out by the South Korean army under U.S. oversight at Taejon in the summer of 1950. [Source: [wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Summary_executions_in_Taejeon)]

A fighter pilot, David Tatum, told *Time* magazine that “I figured if we had to kill ten civilians to kill one soldier who might later shoot at us, we were justified.”

Retreating American forces destroyed cultural relics such as the shrine of Mo Ran bon and the Yen Myen Sa temple of the Buddha in Pyongyang and tortured and mistreated POWs far more systematically than the North Koreans and Chinese.



Painting of American brutality at the Sinchon Museum of American War Atrocities in North Korea. [Source: peacehistory-usfp.org]

The losses North Korea suffered during the war had few parallels in history, with conservative estimates placing the death toll at 20 percent of the population. The U.S. Air Force dropped between 635,000 and 698,000 tons of bombs compared to 503,000 tons dropped on the Japanese empire during the entirety of the Pacific War.



Thatched huts go up in flames after B-26 bombers unload napalm bombs on a village near Hanchon, North Korea, on May 10, 1951. [Source: peacehistory-usfp.org]

In November 1950, a single American firebombing raid on the city of Sinuiju destroyed 2,100 of the 3,017 state and municipal buildings, 6,800 of 11,000 houses, 16 of 17 primary schools, and 15 of 17 places of worship. Eighty percent of the deaths caused by the bombing were women and children, with survivors forced to live in underground caves. The attack was intended to maximize casualties beginning with the use of incendiaries followed by explosives, and time bombs which prevented rescue work.

General Emmet O'Donnell, the head of the bomber command in Asia who formerly oversaw the firebombing of Tokyo, testified that within three months of the war's outbreak "almost all of the Korean peninsula was just a terrible mess"; as a result of the air campaign "almost everything is destroyed. There is nothing standing worthy of the name."

In 1953, the U.S. Air Force targeted crucial Yalu river irrigation dams—flooding whole towns and destroying the DPRK's rice crop which the already malnourished population needed to subsist. One report stated that "the westerner can little conceive the awesome meaning which the loss of this staple commodity has for the Asian—starvation and slow death." These comments epitomize the horrible human consequences of the Korean War, which ended in stalemate with the country permanently divided at the 38th parallel.

Afterwards, General MacArthur and other military commanders acknowledged that they had underestimated the fighting capabilities of the Chinese and North Koreans whom MacArthur described as "a tough opponent, well led."

Today, North Koreans consider the Great Fatherland Liberation War a victory, which solidified the legitimacy of the Kim dynasty. In the U.S., by contrast, the Korean War is little commemorated or talked about—largely because it contradicts the nation's righteous self-

conception.



Monument in Pyongyang commemorating Great Fatherland Liberation War. [Source: uritours.com]

The War Continues

After the Korean War ended, U.S. intelligence reports indicated that the Rhee government was actively contemplating launching another attack on the North and had threatened use of the hydrogen bomb.

The Eisenhower administration's Korea policy under NSC 5702/2, dated August 9, 1957, allowed U.S. forces to provide support for a unilateral ROK military initiative against the DPRK.

By January 1958, the U.S. had stationed approximately 150 nuclear warheads across four different weapons platforms in the ROK, which stimulated development of the North's own nuclear program through collaboration with the Soviet Union.

Tensions boiled over in January 1968 when the KPA captured a U.S. Navy surveillance warship, the U.S.S. Pueblo—allegedly in coordination with the Vietminh who just seven days later launched the Tet offensive against U.S. forces in South Vietnam.



[Source: usspueblo.org]

Cables since declassified show that the Pentagon was ready to use nuclear weapons to force Pyongyang to comply with American demands over the incident—much as threats to use them had helped to facilitate favorable terms to the Korean War armistice.

In April 1959, when a U.S. Navy aircraft was shot down over the Sea of Japan by North Korean MiG-21 fighters after it had penetrated North Korean airspace, President Richard Nixon in a state of inebriation gave authorization for a nuclear attack that, according to CIA agent George Carver, the military took seriously.

The Weather
 Today—Cloudy, chance of rain, high near 78. Thursday—Cloudy and warm. Probability of rain is 40 per cent today and 20 per cent tonight. Temp. range: Today, 54-74; Yesterday, 52-67. Details on Page D1.

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N. Korea Claims It Downed U.S. Plane

Nixon Sends \$192.9 Billion Budget to Hill

By Don Oberdorfer
 Washington Post Staff Writer

The Nixon Administration unveiled its \$192.9 billion economy budget yesterday, stripping the mystery from program cuts and from a modest "re-direction" of Government resources.

The 4-inch-thick package of proposed spending changes, transmitted from the White House to Congress by a messenger at noon yesterday, constituted the first available definite details of Mr. Nixon's immediate plans and priorities for the Government and Nation.

The immediate reaction on Capitol Hill was restrained, except for cries of anguish from inveterate economists who declared the cuts weren't half deep enough.

Mr. Nixon had already trimmed \$4 billion from proposed spending by the rekeying of his officials. When the details became known yesterday, there were only a few surprises. For the most part, the new team had wielded the scalpel instead of the broad-axe. Because of the demand for budget cuts to fight inflation, the few new initiatives proposed were carefully re-

A Navy EC-121 reconnaissance plane like this one is missing. Radar bubbles are atop the fuselage and radio antennas are below.

'Spy' Craft And 31 Lost, U.S. Admits

Hunt Is Pressed For Survivors In Sea of Japan

By George C. Wilson
 Washington Post Staff Writer

North Korea claimed yesterday that it had shot down "with one stroke" an American reconnaissance plane that had intruded into its air space.

The Pentagon took note of the report and said a Navy EC-121 reconnaissance plane with 31 men aboard was missing from a mission over the Sea of Japan off North Korea's coast.

The first more or less official confirmation that North Korea shot it down came last night when Vice President Spiro T. Agnew said in Manchester, N.H., that the EC-121 was "attacked by two Mig jets" more than 100 miles off the coast "as far as we know at this time." The Pentagon had no comment on his re-

GIs Repulse 1200 Enemy At Border

By Ronald Clarke
 Dallas

DIAMOND BASE III, South Vietnam, April 15—U.S. troops, aided by air support, reported killing 1200 Communist troops early Tuesday when 1200 North Vietnamese charged this base two miles from the Cambodian border.

Thirteen men of the U.S. 206th Infantry Division were killed in the fighting.

Czechs Dismayed Smrkovsky Shifts To Pro-Soviet Line

By Kenneth Amos
 Report to The Washington Post

PRAGUE, April 15—Josef Smrkovsky, Czechoslovakia's most popular reformist politician, today made a last-ditch attempt to save his position and left the rotten disillusioned and bewildered.

Smrkovsky, 50, in a special article for the Communist Party paper Rude Prava, came out unambiguously against New Smrkovsky's

[Source: washingtontimes.com]

Luckily, cooler heads prevailed, though a tense military standoff endured in which the threat of nuclear war remained high.

Proxy Wars

Besides enhancing the threat of nuclear Armageddon, the U.S.-North Korean conflict resulted in proxy wars like in Vietnam, where North Korea dispatched pilots to fly air defense missions for the Vietnam People's Air Force. Fourteen North Korean pilots were killed.

Former Vietnamese deputy defense minister and former Vietnam War pilot, Tran Hanh, stated: "we found [the North Korean pilots] to be very brave. Their national pride was so high...they feared nothing, even death."

Kim Il-Sung reportedly stressed the importance of assisting the Vietnamese struggle in a 1965 meeting with a visiting Chinese delegation. He stated: "If the American imperialists fail in Vietnam, then they will collapse in Asia ...We are supporting Vietnam as if it were our own war. When Vietnam has a request, we will disrupt our own plans in order to try and meet their demands."

A number of reports indicate that KPA forces participated in ground battles alongside Vietcong insurgents and that KPA psychological warfare specialists aided the Vietminh. President Kim Il-Sung stressed the importance of fortifications in his discussion with the Vietminh leadership, and instructed them to dig caves and place factories half inside.

Besides the Vietnamese struggle, Kim Il-Sung provided economic and military support to Egypt following the 1967 Six-Day War and during the 1973 Yom Kippur War with Israel, which the United States was heavily supporting.

Also in the late 1970s, Kim's regime dispatched 1,500 personnel to train and advise the Cuban-backed People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), which fought against U.S. proxies allied with apartheid South Africa, and supported the African National Congress (ANC) and South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) liberation forces in Namibia, and Robert Mugabe's government in Zimbabwe, which was a target of U.S. sanctions.



Kim Il-Sung with SWAPO delegation in Namibia. [Source: asiabyafrica.com]

In 1982, North Korea contributed to Lebanon's defense after it was invaded by Israel with U.S. backing, and assisted Hezbollah in constructing an underground armory, bunker and communications network that proved decisive in thwarting Israeli war aims in the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War.

Since that time, North Korea has assisted Iran and Libya—before the 2011 overthrow of Muammar Qaddafi—to develop a nuclear deterrent, and dispatched Special Forces units to Syria to engage jihadi forces backed by the U.S. during its war to topple Bashar al-Assad.

The above policies place in context the unremitting U.S. hostility toward North Korea, and plans for regime change, which are designed to remove a principal supporter of Washington's global adversaries.

North vs. South

The U.S. first imposed sanctions on North Korea during the Korean War and then expanded them in the 1980s, with the goal of completely isolating North Korea from the world economy.

The DPRK nevertheless remained a strong economic performer compared to other socialist bloc countries throughout the Cold War. This was in part because of the high technical levels of education, even in rural areas, and construction of amazing hydroelectric dams and the deepest underground public railway system in the world, which benefited from DPRK's experience building underground defenses during the Korean War.



Built in the 1970s, the Pyongyang metro is one of the deepest in the world at 360 feet underground.

[Source: [wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org)]

While the DPRK quickly rebuilt its infrastructure after the war, South Korea remained one of the poorest countries in the world until Syngman Rhee was forced out of power by student-led demonstrations in 1960.

Under Rhee, 24% of ROK's Gross National Product (GNP) relied on prostitution that serviced U.S. soldiers who continued to occupy the country. Kim Ae Ran, a 58-year-old former prostitute, said in 2009 that "our government was one big pimp for the U.S. military."

The South's economy began to boom in the 1970s under General Park Chung Hee, who provided more adept economic management than Rhee, and benefited from massive injections of Japanese capital.

The former Director of South Korea's Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA), Brigadier General Kim Hyong-Uk, testified to the U.S. Congress in 1977, nevertheless, that it was the North Korean population which "most likely feels less deprived than their southern counterparts," because there were "no visible gaps between the haves and have-nots [in North Korea]."

These comments help explain the continued viability of the Kim dynasty in a period when the North's economic output was being eclipsed.

Surviving the 1990s

The 1990s were a particularly trying decade for the DPRK. In 1994, Kim Il-Sung died, and was replaced by his son, Kim Jong-Il. The DPRK had recently lost many of its key trading partners with the collapse of the socialist bloc.

To add insult to injury, the country suffered a series of natural disasters, including devastating floods in the breadbasket provinces in the south and west, which destroyed 1.5

million tons of grain reserves that had been stored underground. As well, 85% of the country's power generating capacity was lost and around 5.4 million people lost their homes.



Propaganda poster depicting Kim Jong-il's leadership during the arduous march. [Source: [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)]

Under normal circumstances, the international community would have intervened to alleviate the humanitarian crisis known in North Korea as the "arduous march."

Rather, however, the Clinton administration pushed for the ratcheting up of economic sanctions and blocked oil from coming into the country in an attempt to sow discontent and facilitate regime change.

CIA agents stationed on the Chinese border offered desperate farmers a bag of rice for cow's tails in an attempt to further ruin North Korea's agricultural economy. Without oil or electricity and the use of tractors, cows were being used to plough the local fields, and so their removal was designed to induce starvation.

Deadly Geopolitical Game

The North Korean people had long been pawns in a deadly geopolitical game in which all measures of cruelty were adopted. A parallel was with Iraq, where sanctions designed to undermine Saddam Hussein's regime led to the deaths of at least 500,000 children.

In the North Korean case, UNICEF and the World Food Program were prevented from providing vitamin A supplementation to children, which resulted in the deaths of at least 2,772 of them.

The impact of the sanctions on medical equipment related to reproductive health was estimated to have killed 72 pregnant women and 1,200 infants in the late 2010s.

The imperative of North Korea's developing a nuclear deterrent in the face of the sanctions and America's regime change efforts was recognized by top U.S. officials such as James Clapper, the director of national intelligence under Barack Obama. He referred to the North Korean nuclear program as "their ticket to survival."

In June 1994, the Clinton administration nearly went to war over North Korea's nuclear program. The crisis started when Kim Il-Sung's government refused an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) request to inspect its nuclear facility at Yongbyon because they felt they were being singled out and that the inspection teams would be infiltrated by intelligence agents.

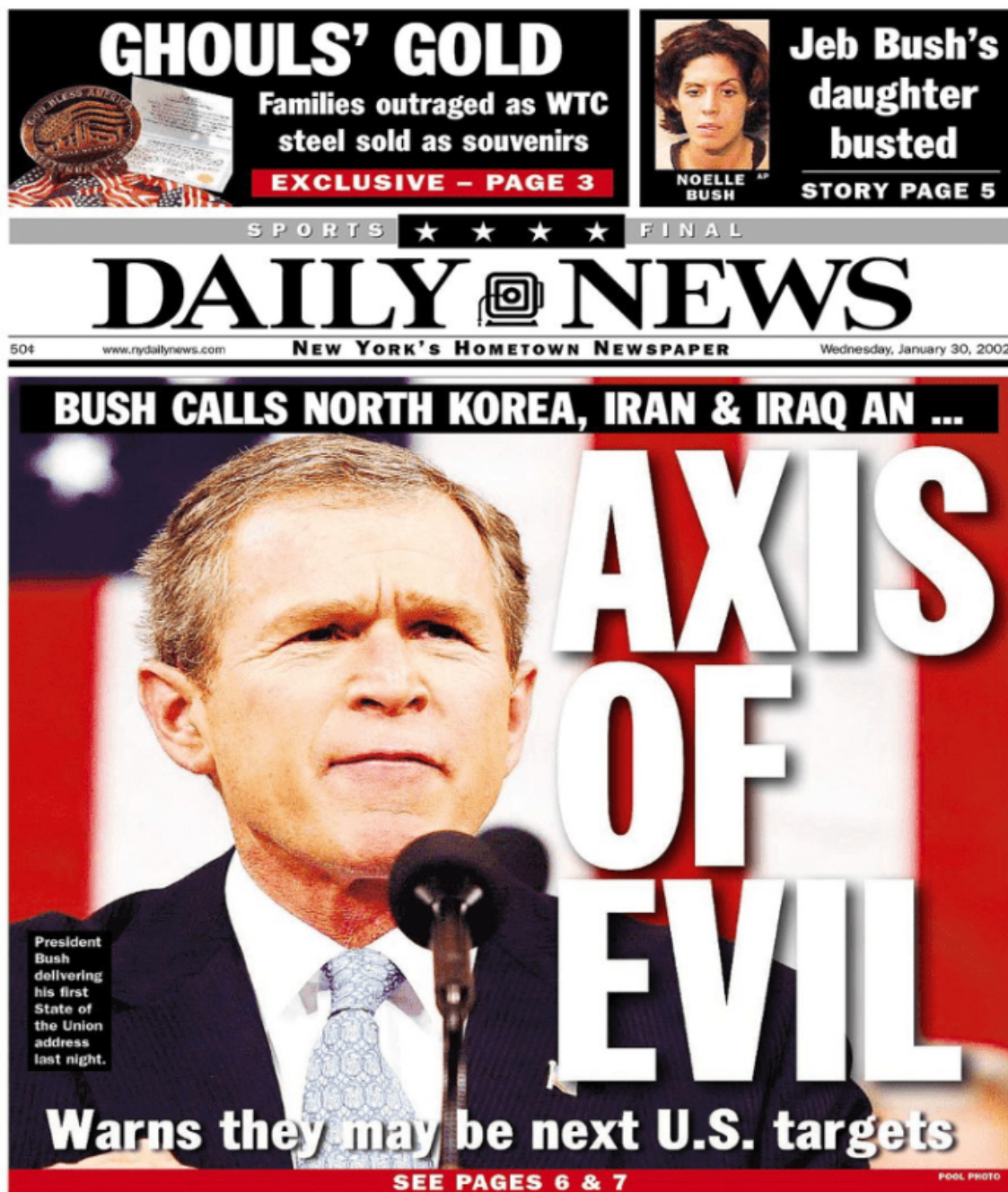
After the U.S. threatened a preemptive military strike, former President Jimmy Carter traveled to Pyongyang, met with Kim, and brokered an agreement in which the DPRK agreed to freeze its nuclear program in return for new nuclear reactors that did not produce weapons-grade plutonium along with oil to help meet its energy needs.

Selig S. Harrison, a State Department official who played an important role in the negotiations, later asserted that, while North Korea had lived up to its end of the bargain and ceased operating the Yongbyon reactor, the Clinton administration failed to adhere to its own commitments, notably by failing to remove economic sanctions which the North saw as crucial to solving its economic problems, especially its food shortage. The Clinton administration further failed to provide promised oil deliveries or fund light water reactors.[2]

Having lost complete trust in the U.S. by this point, North Korea pulled out of the nuclear agreement in 2002 and accelerated its development of a nuclear weapon.

From the Axis of Evil to Trump

The George W. Bush administration poured gasoline on the fire when it designated North Korea as part of its "Axis of Evil," along with Iraq, Iran, and other alleged state sponsors of terrorism.



[Source: usrussianrelations.org]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service's East Asia specialist, Larry Niksch, wrote at the time that "regime change in North Korea [was] the Bush administration's main policy objective," which was to be achieved through renewed economic pressure through sanctions and interdiction of Korean shipping lanes intended to provoke a collapse of government and, if this failed, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was considering a "broader plan for massive strikes against multiple targets."

After a brief thaw in Bush's second term, the Obama administration renewed a hard-line approach, increasing economic pressure and informational war, and launching cyber-attacks—the Stuxnet worm—on the DPRK's nuclear infrastructure.

Obama's liberal base largely supported these policies alongside conservatives because they had been conditioned to think of the U.S. as fighting a good fight against an evil Asian communist regime.

For years, the mainstream media had demonized North Korea and broadcast stories of North Korean defectors, who were paid for promoting disinformation about the DPRK.

In 2017, Kim Jong-Un was condemned for assassinating his half-brother, Kim Jong-Nam, at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Malaysia, though a Malaysian investigation did not find any proof that Kim Jong-Un was involved. The North Korean security services were subsequently accused of torturing to death an American college student, Otto Wambier, though proof was again absent.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright indicated that she had been seriously misinformed by anti-North Korean propaganda and prejudice when visiting Pyongyang in 2000, stating that she had been briefed on what kind of weirdo Kim Jong-Il was, but found him to be well-prepared for their meeting, charming, smart, technically adept with regards to military matters, and well informed.

The public's stereotypical views about North Korea were reflected in the 2014 Hollywood film, *The Interview*, Sony's top-grossing digital release, which adopted "racist images and tropes," according to one reviewer, and celebrated the gory execution of North Korea's caricatured leader.

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Abrams' book is most significant in helping readers to understand the DPRK's long staying power and in debunking media stereotypes, which have helped validate aggressive regime-change policies.

As much as Americans think that the North Koreans are crazy, North Koreans have far more grounds for believing that the reverse holds true.

They are the ones holding the upper moral hand in a conflict that was started by the United States and needs to be ended by it.

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above or below. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

[Jeremy Kuzmarov](#) is managing editor of CovertAction Magazine and author of four books on U.S. foreign policy, as well as an extended essay on the Korean War called ["Barbarism Unleashed."](#)

Notes

[1] Joby Warrick, Ellen Nakashima, and Anna Fifield, "North Korea now making missile-ready nuclear weapons, U.S. analysts say," *Washington Post*, August 8, 2017; Jeffrey Lewis, "The Game Is Over, and North Korea Has Won," *Foreign Policy*, August 9, 2017.

[2] The U.S. claimed that North Korea violated the agreement by proliferating missile and nuclear technology to Iran, Pakistan, and Syria, and in 1998 North Korea began to test three-stage rockets in an attempt to build its long-range ballistic missile capability.

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