

NORTH KOREA: FROM THE INSIDE LOOKING OUT

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Introduction

It should come as no surprise to those of us living in advanced capitalist countries such as Japan or the United States that our media coverage of anything to do with North Korea (the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea — DPRK) is intended to deceive the general public into accepting as objective truth the misinformation we are repeatedly fed, often relying on sensationalism and language bordering on hysteria. Unfortunately, both for us as well as for North Koreans, due to the strength of cultural hegemony in our societies (ruling class values and political/social assumptions accepted as common sense by the public as large), it *does* come as a surprise to the general public to be exposed to a different interpretation of historical and contemporary reality regarding the DPRK. Thus, just mentioning a more critical appraisal of the historical record or offering a more balanced, compassionate portrayal of life in North Korea today will most likely elicit incomprehension by the public in both Japan and the United States and outrage by mainstream scholars and media pundits who are rewarded for being apologists if not outright advocates for the government line of propaganda. This would hold true not only in Japan and the United States but in most advanced capitalist countries that are integrated into the postwar US-led imperial alliance system.

I took advantage of a window of opportunity that at present allows American citizens to travel to North Korea and joined an 8-day “Citizens’ Diplomacy Delegation” tour to the DPRK from Aug. 27 to Sept. 3, 2011 which was organized by the peace and social justice group Global Exchange based in San Francisco. Therefore, in addition to a critical assessment of the ways in which North Korea is portrayed in Japan and the United States and a brief look at historical facts that I feel are important to consider if we are to come to a clearer understanding of why the DPRK has turned into a so-called “garrison state”, I will share some of the insights I gained and reflect on the observations I made during my travel experience in the DPRK.

In preparation for my trip to North Korea, I watched several recently released documentary films and read a number of recently published books as well as articles available on the Internet from a variety of sources that deal with North Korea. Not surprisingly, the information contained in the films and books as well as in the articles available on various websites present a very skewed picture of North Korea, both historical and contemporary, that for the most part follow the US government line of portraying the North Korean state as a “failed state” led by an insane or diabolical leader and populated by a mixture of a brainwashed citizenry and a cowed and starving underclass, thus fully deserving to be a charter member of the George W. Bush administration formulation of the “axis of evil”. For a more nuanced approach that offers an excellent critical scholarly historical overview of the Japanese colonization of Korea and the

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resistance to that occupation, the US-led Korean War, and the aftermath of that war following the signing of the armistice, based on extensive historical documents and insights gained from years of research on the subject, I highly recommend the book by Bruce Cumings, professor of history at the University of Chicago (*North Korea: Another Country*. New York: The New Press. 2003).

In the preface to his book, Cumings refers to an internal CIA study (Hunter, Helen-Louise. *Kim Il-song's North Korea*. New York: Praeger. 1999) that “almost grudgingly acknowledged various achievements of this [North Korean] regime: compassionate care for children in general and war orphans in particular; ‘radical change’ in the position of women with now more college educated women than college educated men; genuinely free housing, free health care, and preventive medicine; and infant mortality and life expectancy rates comparable to the most advanced countries until the recent famine” (Cumings: page ix). He has this to say about mainstream publications and their depiction of North Korea: “Given the mimetic nature of our media, the same stories circulate endlessly; often they are contemporary variations on the same old tales that have been around since North Korea became our enemy sixty years ago: they’re about to attack the South, their leader is nuts, their people are brainwashed, the regime will implode or explode. Literally for half a century, the South Korean intelligence services have bamboozled one American reporter after another by parading their defectors (real and fake), grinding the Pyongyang rumor mill, or parlaying fibs that even a moment’s investigation in a good library would expose” (ibid: xii).

With a strong cultural hegemony, the dominant culture in advanced capitalist countries is confident that by allowing a “freedom of the press” the public will be convinced that they have access to critical or even dissident opinions. Although this existence of a free press is true to a large extent, how many people will actually read the internal CIA study by Hunter published in book form or books or articles by dissident scholars? Most of the public obtain their knowledge of historical and contemporary events from the mainstream media. Most are socialized from an early age to accept as “objective truth” what they are taught in the schools and what they are told is “objective analysis” in the mainstream media. Is it then any wonder that most of the public in advanced capitalist countries are so misinformed or uninformed as to be truly ignorant when it comes to an accurate understanding of social/political issues, whether domestic or foreign?

The purpose of my visit to the DPRK was to gain access to the other side of the picture that we’re constantly exposed to here in Japan or in the United States in order to gain the insights needed to offer a more balanced assessment of North Korean society and a clearer understanding of why the DPRK is so militarized and on the constant alert to a restart of the war by the United States and its South Korean and Japanese allies.

On a personal note that will help to explain why I feel a responsibility to critique both US and Japanese government positions in regard to North Korea, it may be pertinent to state that I was born in Japan (to a Japanese mother and American father) and lived here until the age of seven. I was then raised in the United States and returned to Japan after obtaining a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology from the University of Wisconsin — Madison in December 1995. I have a tenured position as Professor of Cultural Anthropology at university here in Tokyo and the courses I teach range from Anthropology of New Social Movements and Anthropology of Human Rights to Critical Media Studies and Postwar US-led Imperial Alliance System. Being half Japanese with permanent residency status, I am in the unique position of being able to

offer a radical critique of aspects of Japanese society and Japanese government policies without being labeled a “Japan basher”. Likewise, as an American citizen living and teaching in Japan I am again in the unique position of being able to offer a radical critique of aspects of American society and US government policies that most university students here are not exposed to since Japan is closely allied with the United States, militarily, politically, and economically, and thus American culture and society are presented in a very favorable light. I incorporate an engaged/critical pedagogical approach in my classes (which are all discussion-based) that encourage students to develop and utilize their critical thinking skills so they may become engaged citizens, willing and able to evaluate issues after examining differing perspectives and interpretations of social phenomena. By the end of the courses that I teach, students are in position to question the validity of the dominant culture’s truth claims. Similarly, with this short essay, I hope to encourage readers to reassess and reevaluate their own preconceived notions and ideological biases relating to North Korea and to work to overcome the ways in which they have been indoctrinated and socialized to accept the dominant culture’s truth claims.

Having had my fill of Japanese government propaganda as well as US government propaganda pertaining to North Korea, I was ready to be exposed to North Korean government propaganda on my visit there — and I certainly was not disappointed. The Merriam-Webster dictionary definition of propaganda is: 1. The spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person; 2. Ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one’s cause or to damage an opposing cause, also, a public action having such an effect. With this dictionary definition of propaganda in mind, I feel that it is imperative that people are able to recognize their own government’s propaganda as well as that of foreign governments. I turn now to a brief, critical examination of the historical record, relying heavily on the documented evidence provided in the work by Cumings cited above.

Japanese Colonial Occupation

Kim Il Sung was born in 1912 in a village close to Pyongyang. Due to the hardships brought about by the Japanese colonial occupation, his father took the family to exile in Manchuria in 1925. When the depression hit in 1929, the Japanese chose to respond with more imperial expansion and, later, a forced-pace industrialization and militarization of their colonies. Kim joined an underground Marxist group while still a high school student in Jilin, and was imprisoned for several months in 1929. After his release he joined up with a guerrilla group, and engaged in guerrilla combat operations until October 1940. By 1937, he was commander of the 6th Division of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army (NEAJUA), a unit that came to be known as “the division of Kim Il Sung.” By 1940, he was the commander of the second operational region of the First Army of the NEAJUA, and was the most feared guerrilla leader fighting the Japanese in Manchuria (Cumings: 108).

Koreans formed the vast majority of the resistance to the Japanese takeover of Manchuria. By the early 1930s, half a million Koreans lived in the prefecture of Kando (Jiandao in Chinese) alone, long a Korean immigrant community just across the border in China, and since 1949 an autonomous Korean region in the People’s Republic of China. After the establishment of the colonial state of Manchuko by the Japanese, around 80% of anti-Japanese guerrillas and an astonishing 90% of the members of the Chinese Communist Party were Korean (ibid: 109).

The Japanese launched their first major anti-guerrilla campaign in April 1932 in Kando, killing anyone labeled a communist or thought to be aiding communists; many victims were innocent peasants — with as many as 25,000 killed in this campaign alone. Kim Il Sung organized his first guerrilla unit in the spring of 1932 in rapid response to the brutal Japanese counterinsurgency campaign. Parenthetically, during the Korean War, US forces, beset by Korean guerrillas who had fought the Japanese, sought out and used experienced Japanese counterinsurgency specialists to advise them, including two Japanese Kwantung Army colonels who had chased Kim in Manchuria. They depicted Kim Il Sung as the most famous of Korean guerrilla leaders in the late 1930s who was praised by many Korean peasants as a true Korean hero (ibid: 110).

According to the two Japanese colonels, although Kim and other Korean guerrillas cooperated with Chinese resistance leaders, they were under no one else's effective command. They appeared not to care about the relation of their command organ with the Soviet Army or the Chinese Communist Army. They ran back and forth across the Russian border to escape Japanese counterinsurgency units, but the Soviets provided no weaponry or material aid. Instead, the guerrillas took weapons, ammunition, and other supplies from the Japanese army and police units (ibid: 116).

Kim Il Sung's guerrilla unit was involved in many battles over the years and he fought all during 1938 and 1939 mostly in southern and southeastern Manchuria. Maeda Takashi was the head of the Japanese Special Police unit (with many Koreans in it) that tracked Kim's guerrillas for several months in early 1940. Maeda's forces finally caught up with Kim when he and his guerrillas attacked them on March 13, 1940. After both sides suffered casualties, Kim's guerrilla unit released POWs so they could move faster. Maeda pursued him for nearly two weeks, walking into another battle on March 25. Kim threw 250 guerrillas at the 150 soldiers in Maeda's unit, defeating them and killing Maeda, 58 Japanese, 17 others attached to the force, and taking 13 prisoners and large quantities of weapons and ammunitions. This single battle was much bigger and more significant than Fidel Castro's legendary attack on the Moncada Barracks which later became a centerpiece of Cuban political folklore (ibid: 117).

In August 1939, the Japanese mobilized six battalions of the Kwantung Army and 20,000 men of the Manchurian Army and police force in a six-month guerrilla suppression campaign, the main target being guerrillas led by Kim Il Sung and Choe Hyon. Incidentally, one of the Korean officers wearing the Japanese military uniform who was assigned to a unit to track down and kill guerrillas like Kim Il Sung, under the name Lt. Takagi Masao, was the president of the Republic of Korea (ROK) from 1961 to 1979, Park Chung Hee. In September 1940, an even larger force embarked on a counterinsurgency campaign that continued for two years that ended up killing thousands of guerrillas. Kim Il Sung and the surviving dozen members of his guerrilla unit managed to fight their way north across the Amur River and into the USSR. The Soviets set up a camp for them but limited their forays into Manchuria for fear of provoking the Japanese, and reorganized the NEAJUA survivors into the 88th Independent Brigade of the Soviet Red Army (ibid: 121).

After Japan surrendered, the 88th Brigade was disbanded and Kim Il Sung was appointed a deputy commander of Pyongyang in August 1945, and he, along with the surviving members of his battalion, arrived in the port city of Wonsan on September 19, 1945 with no particular plans for his future. However, after the numerous guerrilla units returned to Korea, Kim Il Sung was pushed forward as first among equals (ibid: 122).

When the North implemented a relatively bloodless land reform in 1946, it was a millennial change for the vast majority of the population (about 75% were peasant at the time) — they received titles to the land and the homes sitting on them. The majority of wealthy landlords took off for the South during the late 1940s; if they were willing to work the land, they were given the same size farm as everyone else, but in a county away from their home. At the founding of the Korean People's Army (KPA) on February 8, 1948, only Kim Il Sung's picture was displayed, instead of the usual tandem portraits with Stalin; the KPA was said to have emerged from the traditions of the Kim Il Sung guerrilla detachment. Kim's speech laid emphasis on the necessity for a self-reliant nation to have its own army. He stressed the need of the people to take their fate into their own hands and make all plans and preparations for building a completely self-reliant, independent nation in which they alone are the masters, free from any indebtedness to others. Kim's exposure to Soviet racism and Chinese ethnocentrism during his years as a guerrilla leader led to his belief in the concept of *juche* which means self-reliance and independence in politics, economics, defense, and ideology. He stressed the need for the DPRK to establish and maintain a stance independent of both Moscow and Beijing. A year later at the first anniversary of the KPA, Kim Il Sung was for the first time referred to as *surjong*, an ancient term meaning supreme leader, a term that had been reserved for Stalin until that time. It became his title thereafter, down to his death. The Korean guerrilla resistance to Japanese colonialism in Manchuria has, during the postwar era, provided North Koreans with an epic tale that has promoted national pride, mingling truth with myth in the storytelling, of national loss, struggle, and ultimate redemption. Kim Il Sung and the other guerrilla leaders were thus respected and revered as national heroes who defeated Japanese colonialism and restored the sovereignty of the nation to the Korean people — continuing in the struggle to be independent and self-reliant (ibid: 125).

The Korean War

The United States began planning for a postwar occupation of Korea within six months of Pearl Harbor, and the decision to divide the country in two at the 38th parallel in August 1945 was a follow up to three years of preparation in the State Department. It was the United States that acted first to build up an army, a national police force, and an interim government under Syngman Rhee in the South, all accomplished by the end of 1945.

American troops arrived in southern Korea in September 1945, and 37,000 US military are still stationed there today. It was the Korean War that inaugurated the historically unprecedented US defense budgets (the budget quadrupled from June to December 1950, from \$13 billion to \$54 billion, or more than \$500 billion in current dollars) and initiated the building of the national security state at home and the far-flung archipelago of military bases throughout the world (ibid: 8). The Korean War provided the first postwar economic boom for Japan, gave justification for the permanent stationing of US military troops in Japan, and helped to reinvigorate the Japanese military industrial complex which led to Japanese remilitarization, although that went against the basic war renouncing principle of the postwar Japanese Constitution. The second postwar economic boom in Japan came a decade later with war spending associated with the US war on Vietnam.

The continuation of close ties between Japanese business and military interests in South

Korea and South Korean colonial collaborators was clearly revealed in June 1950, when veteran industrialist Pak Hung-sik showed up in Japan and gave a newspaper interview that was published the day before the war in Korea began. Described as an adviser to the Korean Economic Mission, he was considered to be one of the most notorious collaborators with the Japanese colonial regime and his factories helped to fuel the Japanese war effort. Pak admitted that a lot of anti-Japanese feeling had welled up in Korea in the years immediately after liberation, but that today [1950] there was hardly any trace of it. He stated that the Republic of Korea (ROK) was acting as a bulwark of peace at the 38th parallel and noted that the central figures in charge of national defense in the ROK were mostly graduates of the former Military College of Japan. He said that Korea and Japan “are destined to go hand in hand, to live and let live” (Cumings *ibid*: page 7).

The extraordinary destructiveness of the American air campaigns against North Korea is mindboggling, with the widespread and continuous use of napalm, threats to use nuclear and chemical weapons, and the destruction of huge North Korean dams that destroyed many towns and villages and flooded vast tracts of farmland in the final stages of the war. Napalm was invented at the end of World War II and became a major moral issue during the Vietnam War. However, far more napalm was dropped on North Korea, with much more devastating effect, since the DPRK had many more populous cities and urban industrial installations than did North Vietnam. By 1952, just about everything in northern and central Korea was completely leveled, and what was left of the population survived in caves. Due to the saturation bombing and the well-grounded fears of nuclear attack, the North Koreans created an entire life underground, in complexes of dwellings, schools, hospitals, and factories. Bomb damage assessment at the armistice revealed that 80% to 95% of eighteen out of the 22 major cities in North Korea had been destroyed, resulting in the often agonizingly slow and painful deaths of millions of civilians (*ibid*: 30).

On July 9, 1950, just two weeks into the war, General MacArthur sent General Ridgway a telegram that prompted the Joint Chiefs of Staff to consider whether or not A-bombs should be made available to him. The request was denied in the end mainly because of concerns about world opinion just five years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki and because it was felt that the technological might of the US military using conventional means would be sufficient to win the war in short time. However, at a news conference on November 30, 1950, President Truman threatened North Korea with the use of the atomic bomb and on that day preparations were made to dispatch bomb groups with atomic capabilities to the Far East. In December 1950, MacArthur stated that he wanted commander’s discretion to use atomic weapons in the Korean theater and that he required 26 atomic bombs to carry out his battle plan (*ibid*: 21-22).

By March 1951, everything was set for use of atomic weapons in the Korean theater: atomic bomb loading pits at Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan were once again operational; the bombs had been transported there unassembled and put together at the base, lacking only the essential nuclear cores. President Truman approved the transfer of nuclear cores to military custody on April 6 and signed an order to use them against Chinese and North Korean targets. The 9th Air Force Group was deployed to Guam, but Truman’s order was never sent due in part to confusion arising from Truman’s abrupt dismissal of MacArthur from his command in Korea (*ibid*: 23-24).

General Ridgway, after replacing MacArthur as the U.S. commander in Korea, in May 1951 renewed MacArthur’s request of December 24 for commander’s discretion to use atomic

weapons, increasing the request to 38 atomic bombs. The Joint Chiefs again seriously considered the use of nuclear weapons in June 1951, this time in tactical battlefield circumstances, and there were many more such suggestions as the war continued (ibid: 23).

In order to establish the capability to use atomic weapons on the battlefield, and in pursuit of this goal, a number of lone B-29 bombers were dispatched from Okinawa in September and October 1951 (while being controlled from an American air base on mainland Japan) and sent on missions over North Korea on simulated atomic bombing runs using the attack approaches that had been used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki just five years earlier, dropping either “dummy” A-bombs or very heavy TNT bombs (ibid: 26).

US Strategy of Nuclear First Strike

Although it is a basic principle of the nonproliferation regime that countries without nuclear weapons cannot be threatened by those that possess them, this has never stopped the United States from doing so. After the Korean War ended, the United States introduced nuclear weapons into South Korea in spite of the 1953 armistice agreement that prohibited the introduction of qualitatively new weaponry. It is important to keep in mind that the United States remains technically at war with North Korea; the armistice signed on July 27, 1953 established a truce but brought no formal peace. Thus, annual major war games simulating an all-out attack (using both nuclear and conventional weaponry) on and invasion of North Korea take place, with the South Korean military and the Japanese military subordinated under US military command. In January 1958, the United States positioned nuclear cannons and nuclear-tipped missiles in South Korea, and a year later the US Air Force stationed a squadron of nuclear-tipped cruise missiles aimed at China and the USSR as well as North Korea. By the mid-1960s, South Korean defense strategy was tied to the use of nuclear weapons very early in any new war. The US military keyed their war plans for the Korean Peninsula almost entirely to the early use of nuclear weapons, and for decades the United States planned to use tactical and battlefield nuclear weapons in the very early stages of a new Korean conflict, within one hour of the outbreak of war. Although the United States decided to withdraw all tactical and battlefield nuclear weapons on a worldwide basis after a reevaluation of the role of nuclear weapons following the success of the devastating impact of the “smart” bombs that fairly reliably reached their targets during the Gulf War, it meant no change in the situation confronting North Korea as nuclear-armed submarines could still come right up to the North Korean coast (ibid: 53-55).

North Koreans have been terrorized by the US threat of nuclear annihilation over these past decades of hostility — a fact that the American public is unaware of. The United States never tires of accusing the North of terrorism and assassination plots, but never mentions the fact that the South has mounted thousands of terrorist attacks on the North. Before the Korean War (between 1945 and 1950), they happened all the time, with infiltrators burning down homes, killing party members and police, and sabotaging facilities. After the war, as many as 5,000 South Korean spies and infiltrators died in various attempts at terrorism and sabotage, including a major attempt to assassinate Kim Il Sung in 1971 (ibid: 56).

Thus, the United States has tried everything in its bag of tricks to destroy North Korea, from a war that killed millions to economic sanctions, sabotage, assassination attempts, and use

of South Korean state sponsored terrorism, and has so far failed to bring about capitulation and regime change. The only other country in the world that has taken a path independent of US dictates (for decades) that the United States has failed to overthrow in the postwar era (using similar methods) is Cuba. In the past decade, Venezuela and Bolivia have emerged as independently defiant nations with democratically elected heads of state that are being targeted for “regime change” by the United States.

October Framework Agreement

With the withdrawal of American nuclear weapons from South Korea, the stage was set for the United States to begin pressuring North Korea in regard to its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon. With the US withdrawal of nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula, Kim Il Sung embraced the idea of IAEA inspections as a way to develop improved relations with the United States, and six regular IAEA inspections of its nuclear facilities ensued after May 1992. However, it turned out that good relations were not forthcoming; this was revealed on January 26, 1993 when newly inaugurated President Bill Clinton announced that he would go ahead with the massive annual US-South Korean joint military exercises, Team Spirit, which routinely included the introduction to South Korea of nuclear-capable aircraft and naval ships of all types, backpack nukes controlled by mobile units, practice with nuclear canons and missile launchers, and South Korean units working together with their American counterparts on various nuclear war scenarios (ibid: 65).

In late February 1993, the Pentagon announced it was retargeting strategic nuclear weapons that had previously targeted the former USSR to North Korea, and in response to this announcement, on March 12, 1993 North Korea declared that it would withdraw from the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. Then, in June-July 1993, the North Korean side proposed that their entire graphite reactor nuclear program be replaced by American-supplied light-water reactors (LWRs), which are much less prone to weapons proliferation and which would also require that Pyongyang become dependent on external supplies of fuel. This offer came as a total surprise to American negotiators at the time. However, nothing came of the North Korean LWR proposal in the summer of 1993 (ibid: 64-66).

The two delegations met again in November 1993 and North Korea put on the table a “package deal” in which it called for an American statement assuring against the threat or use of force against the DPRK, suspension of Team Spirit war games, resumption of IAEA inspections, and a termination of antagonism, especially American nuclear threats against the DPRK. The package deal included establishing liaison offices in each capital, a peace treaty to replace the armistice, mutual force reductions, removal of trade restrictions and Trading with the Enemies Act items, a consortium to provide the LWRs, American support for Japanese and South Korean aid and investment in the DPRK, and American willingness to discuss ground force withdrawals from South Korea to coincide with North Korean troop redeployments away from the DMZ (ibid: 69-70).

The two sides continued high-level talks in the attempt to reach a diplomatic settlement. By mid-1994 there was still no agreement so Pyongyang forced Clinton’s hand by shutting down its reactor in May for the first time since 1989, and withdrawing some 8,000 fuel rods and placing them in cooling ponds. This provocative and dangerous ploy called Washington’s

bluff and left administration officials with no apparent room for maneuver. The United States and North Korea actually came much closer to war at this time than most people realize (ibid: 71-72).

By mid-June, the Clinton administration had devised a plan laying out the first steps the US should take to prepare for war, which included the addition of 10,000 American troops in South Korea, dispatching Apache attack helicopters, and moving in more Bradley Fighting Vehicles. To make sure Clinton understood both the human and the monetary costs of a war with North Korea, the Joint Chiefs of Staff arranged to have all four star generals and regional commanders come to Washington to discuss Korea and brief the president. The US commander in South Korea, General Gary Luck, estimated that he would need as many as 80,000 to 100,000 body bags in the field for the American soldiers who would die in a new Korean war, and South Korean troop casualties could reach the hundreds of thousands. Moreover, if the North struck Seoul as expected, the number of civilian casualties would be staggering. The cost of such a war, Luck predicted, would be at least \$50 billion and could top \$1 trillion, far higher than the almost \$60 billion spent on Desert Storm, a sum largely borne by US allies (ibid: 72-73).

At the brink of war with a heavily armed and determined adversary, Clinton and his advisers looked down the barrel of the other side's guns and blinked. Fortunately for all sides, alarmed by what he had learned about the depth of the crisis from briefings by Clinton administration officials, former President Jimmy Carter (who had been invited to visit Pyongyang some years before) decided to fly to Pyongyang in mid-June 1994 and meet with President Kim Il Sung. During discussions with Kim Il Sung, Carter suggested that Pyongyang freeze its Yongbyon facility in return for light water reactors and a new relationship with the United States. This critical breakthrough made possible the accord that was consummated in October 1994. The October Framework Agreement promised Pyongyang that in return for freezing its graphite reactors and returning to full inspections under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, a consortium of nations, including the United States, Japan, and South Korea, would supply light-water reactors to help solve the North's energy problems and provide long-term loans and credits to enable Pyongyang to purchase the reactors. The agreement called for full normalization of relations with a step-by-step upgrading of diplomatic relations, and most important, an American pledge not to threaten or target North Korea with nuclear weapons (ibid: 73-74).

However, under the 1994 Framework Agreement, although the United States promised to give the DPRK formal assurances that it would not threaten it with nuclear weapons, such assurances were never provided (ibid: 87). In fact, American nuclear threats never stopped. In 1996, the International Court of Justice at the Hague stated that the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons should be outlawed as "the ultimate evil". It could not come to a decision, however, whether the use of nuclear weapons for self-defense was justified in which the very survival of a state would be at stake. By this standard, North Korea is more justified in developing nuclear weapons than the United States is in threatening a non-nuclear North Korea with nuclear annihilation (ibid: 101-102).

Recently obtained documents show that in June 1998 the Pentagon staged simulated long-range nuclear attack drills on North Korea out of the Seymour Johnson Air Base in North Carolina. F15E fighter-bombers dropped dummy BDU-38 nuclear bombs on concrete emplacements arrayed like the hundreds that protect North Korean underground facilities. This

new type of “bunker busting” nuclear attack replaced previous plans to utilize nukes based in the South, and this new strategy of targeting hardened underground facilities was to be used as early in a crisis as possible. The 1998 *Defense White Paper* issued by the Pentagon, however, once again suggested that a new war wouldn’t be so easy: 650,000 American soldiers from all branches of the military would be needed to defeat North Korea (ibid: 82-83).

In response to the provocative action by the US military, although North Korea had not tested a missile from May 1993 to August 1998 due to its commitment to honor the Framework Agreement, in late August 1998 it tested a long-range missile that arched through the stratosphere over Japan, leading to virtual panic in Tokyo with the media in war hysteria mode. Watching Japanese television coverage of the missile launch at the time, it soon became apparent that the government was making use of this event to convince the public of the need to prepare for war with North Korea, and it was from this time on that it became publicly acceptable to broadcast programs that debated whether Japan should become a nuclear-armed nation — the so-called “nuclear allergy” of the Japanese populace had finally been overcome.

In a surprise move in September 2002, Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi, a controversial figure and an avowed nationalist who antagonized many Asians as well as Japanese anti-war activists by his insistence on his right to pay an annual visit to honor the war dead at Yasukuni Shrine (where many Class A war criminals are enshrined), flew to Pyongyang and held a summit meeting with Kim Jong Il. This raised the expectation that both sides were ready to reach an agreement for a final normalization of relations.

However, that this was not the intent of the visit was made apparent when Koizumi insisted on discussing with Kim Jong Il, first and foremost, the issue of the disappearances of a dozen or more Japanese citizens over a period of decades, presumed to have been abducted by North Korean agents. Kim, wanting a normalization of relations with Japan, admitted that the regime had indeed kidnapped a number of young Japanese over the years for use in spy operations, offered a direct apology to Koizumi, and stated that those responsible had been severely punished and vowed that such actions would never be repeated. The Japanese media had anticipated that Koizumi would offer an apology for Japanese atrocities during the colonial occupation of Korea and for the abduction of tens of thousands of Korean girls and young women, used and abused by the Japanese Imperial Army as forced prostitutes during wartime rule, and to offer reparations in the form of a large package of aid. This reversal of expectations played into the hands of the right-wing nationalists as well as the military lobby in Japan, and the drum beat for war against North Korea started to beat louder than ever in the Japanese media. The issue of the kidnapped Japanese continued to have wide media coverage for months in Japan, with a media frenzy over the victims and their families, and helped to solidify public distrust and antagonism toward North Korea. Although the North Korean kidnappings of less than 20 innocent Japanese pales in comparison to the atrocities committed by Japanese forces in Korea and the kidnappings of thousands of Koreans, the Japanese media only focused on the Japanese victims and their families and the Koreans victims were conveniently forgotten and effectively erased from public memory.

Interestingly, just after Prime Minister Koizumi returned to Japan triumphant, in September 2002, the US National Security Council released a new “Bush Doctrine” moving beyond the Cold War staples of containment and deterrence toward preemptive attacks against adversaries that *might* possess weapons of mass destruction. The Bush administration’s new preemptive doctrine conflates existing plans for nuclear preemption in a crisis initiated by North

Korea, which have been standard operating procedure for the US military in Korea for decades, with the apparent determination to preemptively attack states such as North Korea because they have or would like to have nuclear weapons (although with much less destructive force compared to those that the United States still amasses by the thousands). As if to make this crystal clear, someone in the White House leaked presidential decision Directive 17 in September 2002, which listed North Korea as a target for preemptive attack (ibid: 99).

One month later, in October 2002, a second nuclear crisis erupted; the North Koreans kicked the IAEA inspectors out, took the seals off and reopened their 30 megawatt reactor, and soon began loading new fuel rods. They again castigated the IAEA for being a tool of Washington, announced their withdrawal from the NPT, and stated that any Security Council sanctions would be interpreted as a declaration of war. In the summer of 2003, they said they had reprocessed the 8,000 fuel rods that they recovered from the IAEA, but did not say whether their reprocessing plant was up and running. Again, the North was asking Washington if it was willing to risk a war with a nuclear-armed DPRK (ibid: 90).

DPRK Today

Given the fact that the United States has continuously targeted North Korea with nuclear missiles and has continued to threaten it with nuclear annihilation, the reason why the DPRK has turned into a “garrison state” should now be apparent. With a population of 24 million, one million are in the military and six million in the reserves. Military service is a compulsory eight years for men at age 18. At any given time about half a million soldiers are detailed to construction work, harvesting, and other labor intensive tasks.

North Korea has approximately 15,000 underground installations related to national security, including hangars for jets, tank revetments, and arms factories, and has built deep, hardened concrete shelters to survive nuclear attack. The North Korean population is constantly drilled to prepare for war, including nuclear attack (ibid: 2).

Since the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994, the North has faced one terrible crisis after another. It has been visited with a near collapse of its energy system (which then caused many factories to close), two years of unprecedented floods in 1995 and 1996, a summer of drought in 1997, and a resulting famine that some say claimed the lives of one million people. North Korean citizens must wonder how much more suffering they will endure before the economy returns to anything like the relatively stable situation observed by foreign visitors to the country in the 1970s and 1980s.

Upon our arrival at Pyongyang International Airport, our delegation (consisting of five members including myself) was met at the airport by Mr. Cha, who runs the tour agency in Pyongyang that organized the tour for Global Exchange, and Mr. Kim, who acted as our guide and who has a position in the North Korean government National Tourism Association. Mr. Kim, as a government official, throughout the duration of the tour gave us a North Korean government interpretation of both historical and contemporary events which I found to be most revealing in regard to the DPRK stance on a variety of issues and for the most part historically accurate. Mr. Kim is fluent in not only English but in German as well as he resided in Germany for three years to further his studies in international relations and foreign languages. The patience and diplomatic generosity he displayed when responding to our many questions

throughout the duration of the tour, even when some of the questions posed were phrased in ways that could be construed as hostile, was extraordinarily remarkable. The tour overall provided a fascinatingly revealing glimpse into the North Korean psyche and a relatively rare and valuable learning experience due to the opportunities presented of seeing and interacting with North Koreans not only in the capital of Pyongyang but in the rural areas of the country as well.

Based on the information I had obtained from the videos I had watched and the books and articles I had read about life in North Korea today, I had expected that any North Koreans I saw in public would either avert their eyes when seeing me or give me expressions of hostility. Much to my surprise, everywhere I went during my visit to North Korea, I saw people who would give me a warm smile or friendly wave and others who were not only *not* camera shy but who appeared to enjoy having their photos taken. I was also led to believe that the hotel we would be staying at while in Pyongyang, the Yanggakdo International Hotel, a huge modern skyscraper of 47 floors would be practically empty of tourists. Much to my surprise, it was completely booked with more than 700 tourists staying there every night we were there. The parking lot was filled with luxury tour buses and the lobby was always packed with tourists from all over the world. The ones I had a chance to talk briefly with were from Malaysia, France, Czech Republic, Italy, China, the US, Japan, Britain, Canada, Germany, Holland, and Sweden. The group I talked with from the Czech Republic was there for a *tae kwon do* match and a group of Americans I met was there to put on an ultimate Frisbee game exhibition.

North Koreans are sports enthusiasts and are ready to try anything new it seems. When we visited the Mansudae Art Institute in Pyongyang I saw some junior and senior high school aged boys on inline skates in the parking lot. When I said hello to one of the skaters who was skating close to where I was, he came over and started talking to me in English, much to my surprise. He asked me where I was from and why I decided to visit North Korea and we had a short but pleasant conversation. He said that he was in his senior year at high school and that he wanted to study to be a pediatrician. I asked him why he and his friends don't have knee and elbow pads or wear helmets and he laughed and said that they were just learning and couldn't skate fast enough to hurt themselves when they fall. He said that the better skaters wear protective gear because they do "crazy stunts" on their skates. He said that one of the better skaters he knows also does "crazy stunts" on his skateboard.

When our group visited an amusement park in Pyongyang, I witnessed families with children and groups of youth laughing and having an exciting time experiencing the thrilling rides (which cost next to nothing to ride). When we went for a hike following a path along a mountain stream that led to the beautiful Guryong Waterfall on Mt. Kumgang, although some of the hikers were foreigners like us, most were North Koreans, dressed in hiking wear, on holiday with family and friends. Two different groups of North Koreans I met on the hike up the mountain actually asked if they could take a picture of me with their group. In exchange, they posed for a group picture for me, smiling and laughing, with some giving the peace sign. Since I had gone on ahead of the rest of the Global Exchange group, Mr. Kim was not available to translate for me so the people I met on the trail communicated with me using sign language and facial expressions. I met a 10-year-old North Korean boy on the trail who was making birdcalls and when I showed him how to make a birdcall resembling the hoot of an owl by cupping both hands together and he succeeded in producing a sound, his parents and older sister who had been watching me work with the boy were so excited that they gave me a large

handful of various snack foods to try; a very pleasant encounter that I certainly won't forget.

Another chance encounter was when we came across a group of farmers picnicking in the woods near a historical site our group was visiting. There were about 10 people in the group and when we saw them they were singing and dancing to Korean folk music playing on a portable stereo. One of the members of our group who is himself a musician and loves to dance joined in their dance, and the farmers and their wives encouraged him to dance more with them by offering him food and alcohol. We would have liked to stay longer with the picnickers, but we were on a tight schedule that day and had to leave them to party on their own. The musician member of our group, however, had his chance to dance to his heart's content when we stopped to observe a dance festival for youth a couple of days later in Pyongyang. All the girls and young women were dressed in traditional Korean attire and all the boys and young men were wearing white shirts and dress slacks. There were probably more than 200 youths there dancing in the outdoor public space to Korean folk music. Everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves and we were made to feel welcome, whether we were just observing or actually participating.

When we visited the Migok Cooperative Farm in Sariwon, we happened to walk past a nursery school just when the children were outside playing. When the children spotted us, the two-year-olds and three-year-olds waved at us from the balcony and the four-year-olds and five-year-olds ran around the playground shouting and waving at us. Foreigners viewed up close is a rare sight for most North Koreans, and children at that age, the same worldwide, have not yet learned how to control their emotions and therefore candidly display their excitement. It was a rare treat for us to have the opportunity to interact, even though it was only for a few minutes, with toddlers and preschool children who are still carefree and innocent.

When we went to the Pyongyang Metro and took the escalator down to the subway station, I was astonished at the depth of the underground station — it was the longest escalator I have ever been on by far! The subway stations serve a dual purpose as bomb shelters, and with 17 subway stations in a 35 kilometer stretch of rail that runs deep underground in the capital of Pyongyang, the residents of the city are never far from a relatively safe evacuation center. We rode the subway for two stops and again saw many friendly faces along with some expressions of frank curiosity.

I asked Mr. Kim if children are told from an early age that the United States might attack with nuclear weapons and he said that the children are told that the state is prepared for war and that the state has provided shelters for the citizens to protect them from the dangers of bombs, including the dangers of radioactive fallout. When he told me that the children believe they are safe, I recalled that at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 in the United States, when I was just 12-years-old, I would make a mental note where the nearest fallout shelters were to where I lived (two churches in the neighborhood) and where I went to school (at the school itself), and knowing that they were supplied with a large quantity of dried and canned foods as well as water and survival gear was reassuring. I remember my friends and I would make fun of the rich kids whose parents spent a lot of money to have bomb shelters installed beneath their basements even though the public fallout shelters were clearly superior and better equipped. Thinking back to those days, I recall the advertisements on television frantically selling fallout shelters and how they were being sold as sound investments in providing safety for one's family in case of nuclear attack. It must have been very stressful

times for the adults who could not afford to have a fallout shelter installed, lived in an area without a fallout shelter in close proximity, or did not believe that they would survive a nuclear war even if they had access to a shelter. Now, imagine a Cuban Missile Crisis that has been continuing for 60 years and we are then transported to the stark reality facing North Koreans. It is not surprising that they want to protect their children from the stress and anxiety associated with acknowledging the real horrors of a nuclear attack.

The most surprising encounter I had was when our group visited the DMZ (demilitarized zone) in Panmunjom and I and another member of our group were invited by two DPRK officers to sit down with them at a table where they were taking a coffee break before leaving for lunch in their barracks. The older officer was a colonel who did not speak English, but the younger officer, a lieutenant, spoke English fluently and interpreted for us. What caught me by surprise was the openness and friendliness of these officers, who had to face off with the enemy on a daily basis. The South Korean and US military guards on the other side of the DMZ that we had just seen had given us hostile glances just because we were tourists on the wrong side of the fence. When I mentioned this to the DPRK officers we were sitting with, the colonel expressed the opinion that they're just doing their job. He said that they all want to go home to be with their families and friends just the same as the DPRK soldiers assigned to duty at the DMZ. He added that he imagined that most of the American soldiers don't want to be stationed in South Korea in the first place, having to train constantly to be prepared to engage in combat operations at a moment's notice. The problem, he explained, was the economic interests and political motivations behind US imperialism, and that if that problem could be overcome the world could realize true peace and happiness for all. He certainly appeared to be sincere and I do not doubt that he believed what he was saying. The lieutenant seemed to enjoy interpreting for us what his superior officer was saying with his undisguised show of enthusiasm and pride. I certainly enjoyed having a cup of coffee with these officers in this warm and friendly atmosphere — another totally unexpected encounter.

Conclusion

My visit to North Korea revealed to me, above anything else, that the United States will not succeed in its efforts to force a collapse of the government. And if the United States is incapable of initiating “regime change” by the various means it has so far employed, including economic strangulation with the use of a severe sanctions regime, various forms of sabotage, numerous assassination attempts, and terrorist attacks, Japan certainly cannot force a collapse of the government. Both Japan and the United States have too much to lose by jointly resorting to a preemptive attack on North Korea using nuclear weapons (as does South Korea). The radioactive fallout, depending on the wind direction, could affect millions living in China, the Korean Peninsula, and even Japan. That would lead inevitably to the collapse of the American empire.

What in my estimation is most needed is for US government leaders to concede to the fact that “regime change” in North Korea is not in the realm of possibility. Remember the “package deal” that the North Koreans put on the negotiating table in 1993? It is my impression, after what I saw and heard on my brief visit to the DPRK, that that is still on the table waiting for a favorable response. The package deal included establishing liaison offices in each capital, a

peace treaty to replace the armistice, mutual force reductions, removal of trade restrictions and Trading with the Enemies Act items, a consortium to provide the LWRs, American support for Japanese and South Korean aid and investment in the DPRK, and American willingness to discuss ground force withdrawals from South Korea to coincide with North Korean troop redeployments away from the DMZ. In addition, what is needed in South Korea is another government in power similar to the government of Kim Dae Jung in 1998 that offers a “sunshine policy” committed to a staged, slow process leading to a confederated reunification. An increased awareness on the part of the citizens of the United States, Japan, and South Korea of the need to pressure their governments to turn to sincere diplomatic negotiations with the government of the DPRK will be of great importance in achieving the peace in Northeast Asia that has eluded the region for much too long.