

hate him.” When I suggested that he would probably cry on the day that Castro died, he smiled and murmured, “Of course I will. But they will be tears of joy.”

Communist North Korea Becomes Increasingly Isolated: Kim Jong Il

Richard Worth

Richard Worth is an author of nonfiction, including the book Gangs and Crime.

In 1980 the leader of North Korea was chosen, not by the people or even by a parliament, but by the new leader's own father, who had been dictator before him. According to Worth in the viewpoint that follows, Kim Jong Il used terror tactics before and during his rule, including kidnapping citizens of other countries and imprisoning thousands. Among those he kidnapped and imprisoned were an actress and a film director he needed for a film project. While he was spending millions on his filmmaking and building up the military, Worth explains, the economy was becoming weaker and his people more destitute. Meanwhile North Korea's foreign policy decisions influenced broken alliances, and the nation found itself increasingly isolated under Kim Jong Il's leadership. Under these conditions North Korea began a nuclear weapons program, says Worth, in order to gain the attention and respect of the world's major powers.

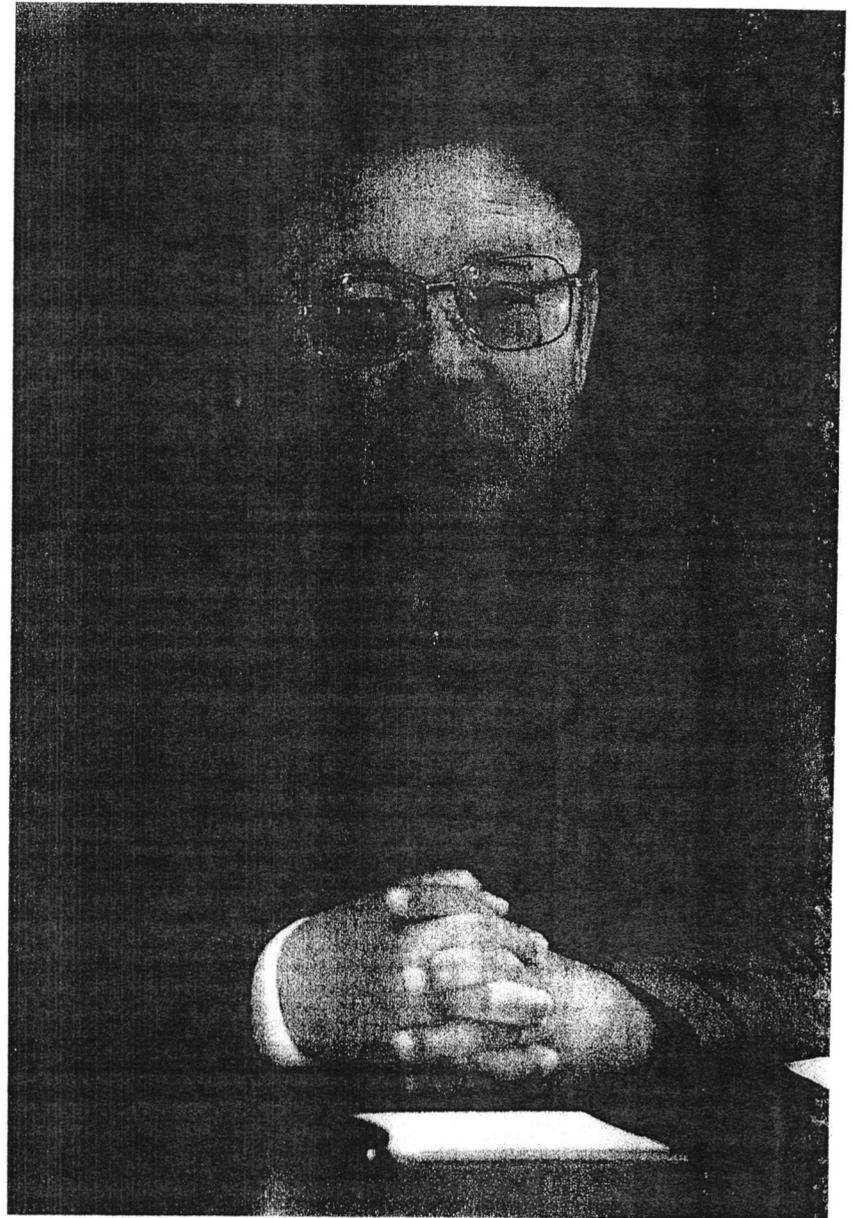
In 1980, Kim Il Sung made an official announcement that his son, Kim Jong Il, would be his successor as head of the North Korean government. Meanwhile, the younger Kim had also become a secretary—that is, a leader—of the Communist Workers' Party. He was known as the Dear Leader to distinguish him from his father, the Great Leader. Portraits of the Dear Leader and the Great Leader appeared side by side inside

Richard Worth, “Chapter 6: The Struggles of the Kim Il Sung Regime,” in *Kim Jong Il*. Chelsea House, 2008. Copyright © 2008 Infobase Publishing. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.

Meanwhile, food shortages in the North continued to grow during the 1980s. By this time, Kim Jong Il was directly in charge of the government, so he was blamed for the problem. Not only was grain and rice being rationed for Korean civilians, soldiers in the armed forces were also short of food. According to Lee Min-bok, a food expert who escaped from North Korea, the rationing grew much worse by the mid-1980s. People were supposed to receive food every two weeks at large distribution centers, but the rations frequently failed to arrive on time. . . .

A Façade of Prosperity

Nevertheless, the North Korean economy continued to struggle. In 1986, author Jasper Becker visited Pyongyang. As his car headed toward the capital, he noticed that the highway was almost empty of cars. There was too little gasoline to run them. The subway stations inside the city were bright and clean, but hardly ever used. "The inhabitants' chief role," he wrote, "is to take part in mass demonstrations of support, and they are constantly in training to perform at some military parade, celebration, or demonstration. . . . You find the same familiar sights as in any big city—department stores, grocery shops, smart hotels, bars, restaurants, and hospitals—but nothing as mundane as shopping or eating goes on in them. From the outside a grocery store looks normal. The windows and glass counters are clean and hygienic, the vegetables are in the baskets, the tins of meat on wooden shelves, and the condiment [spice] bottles are laid neatly in rows. Yet there is nobody there. No one is shopping, and no one ever will. Nothing is actually for sale because when you look closely the vegetables are all made of plastic. . . . On a tour of the maternity hospital, it is the same. The rooms, full of new, modern medical equipment, are for show too. Not even the plastic wrapping on the electrical plug for the . . . heart monitor has been removed."



Under the rule of Kim Jong Il, North Korea became increasingly isolated. AP Images/Chien-Min Chung.

government buildings in Pyongyang and throughout the rest of North Korea. The North Korean people also displayed pictures of both leaders in their homes.

Although Kim Jong Il had achieved enormous power in North Korea, he continued to work behind the scenes and did not show himself in public very much. He rarely met with foreign heads of state who came to North Korea, and he rarely traveled abroad. Kim Il Sung still served as the public leader of North Korea, but during much of the 1980s, his son was actually running the government. To prepare North Koreans for the day that Kim Jong Il would take over from his father, Communist officials began to build up the younger Kim's public image. A museum portraying his accomplishments had already been built in Pyongyang, but new elements of his life suddenly began to appear.

The Dear Leader's Bold Tactics

Meanwhile, Kim Jong Il was also trying to distinguish himself as a movie producer. Kim is a devoted movie fan, with thousands of films reportedly stored in his library. He was eager to increase North Korea's prestige by producing award-winning films. To help him accomplish this goal, Kim decided to bring a famous South Korean director, Shin Sang-ok, to the North. Kim's agents first kidnapped Shin's former wife, the highly successful actress Choi Eun-hi when she was visiting Hong Kong in 1978. After she arrived in Pyongyang, Kim gave her a beautiful home and an expensive car. Although Choi did not know why she had been kidnapped, it eventually became apparent to her. Shin, who had continued to be fond of his wife after their divorce, tried to find Choi after her disappearance. This led him to Hong Kong, where he was grabbed by North Korean agents. When he refused to remain in North Korea and tried to escape, Shin was jailed. Finally, he agreed to write a letter to Kim Jong Il apologizing for his conduct. Eventually, Shin was released, and in 1983, he was reunited with his

former wife. Shin then went to work directing films in North Korea in a multimillion-dollar studio built by Kim. Shin and Choi were permitted to travel abroad to publicize the films. At first, they were heavily guarded, but when they convinced Kim of their loyalty, he removed the guards. In 1986, they escaped and never returned to North Korea.

Kim's Economic Mismanagement

While Kim spent millions on film production, the North Korean economy continued to lag during the 1980s. Instead of improving industrial production, a large amount of money was spent on building up the military. In addition, the North Korean government had focused much of its remaining resources on huge projects that failed. Among these was an expensive dam, called the West Sea Barrage, started in 1981 and finished five years later. The main purpose of the dam was to irrigate several hundred thousand acres of saltwater tidelands along the coast that were to be transformed into productive farms. This supported the government's *chuch'e* program leading to self-sufficiency in food production. But after the barrage was completed, the government never followed through on the plan to expand the nation's farmland, and very little tideland actually became productive farms.

Another plan called for the development of a new vinalon plant. Vinalon was a chemical fiber used to make clothing and shoes. Instead of cotton, which was difficult to grow in North Korea, the *chuch'e* program of self-sufficiency substituted vinalon. In the 1950s, this was produced from coal and limestone, both easily available in North Korea. The new plant called for even greater production. As by-products, the plant was also designed to produce large quantities of fertilizer and food for farm animals. But after the plant was begun at huge cost, it was never completed. A third very expensive project was a fertilizer complex, designed to increase crop production. But this complex also failed to be completed.

During the mid-1980s, North Korea had begun receiving nuclear reactors from the Soviet Union. These were designed to enable the development of nuclear power for generating electricity. At the same time, Moscow required Kim Il Sung to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Begun in 1968, it committed the nations that signed the treaty to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. But while Pyongyang agreed to the terms of the treaty, it was secretly developing a nuclear weapons program. U.S. surveillance satellites had photographed the buildings involved in the program at Yongbyon, north of Pyongyang, as early as 1982. The nuclear facilities included a reactor, and a few years later, a partly completed reprocessing plant. This might have given the North Koreans the capability of separating plutonium from nuclear fuel and building an atomic bomb.

The nuclear weapons program was directed by Dr. Lee Sung Ki, a close friend of the Great Leader. Kim Il Sung and his son believed that as their economy declined a nuclear bomb might force the major world powers to pay attention to North Korea. This would put the Communist regime on an equal footing with the United States, China, and the USSR, each of which had nuclear capability. In addition, it would give North Korea the power to control events on the Korean Peninsula.

A Latin American Leader Becomes a Global Icon: Hugo Chávez

Moisés Naím

Moisés Naím, editor in chief of Foreign Policy magazine, is the former minister for trade and industry of Venezuela.

In the oil-rich country of Venezuela, President Hugo Chávez is classified by many as a benevolent dictator whose charity extends to the poor in other countries, even the United States. In the following viewpoint, Naím explains how distant audiences in India, Lebanon, and South Africa praised Chávez highly. The sympathy that he has garnered in his own country and throughout the world comes from his promise to fight corruption, inequality, and social injustice, asserts Naím. Although he has become an icon among the poor in Venezuela, Chávez has made many enemies there among the power elite, including political leaders, business leaders, labor leaders, and oil company executives. The author notes that Chávez was democratically elected; he did not use force to secure his reforms. Still critics claim that Chávez has bewitched his people and that he rigged his 2006 election. Naím believes that while Chávez has some admirable motives, his policies will ultimately harm Venezuela's economy and political freedoms.

Janetta Morton lives about a half hour away from the White House. Not that she has ever been there. The unemployed single mother of two girls shares a small house with her sister in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. Morton does not know much about Hugo Chávez. But for

Moisés Naím, "Introduction," in *Hugo Chávez: The Definitive Biography of Venezuela's Controversial President*, ed. Cristina Marciano and Alberta Barrera Tyska, trans. Kristina Cordero. Copyright © 2007 by Moisés Naím. Used by permission of Random House, Inc.

Kim's Brutal Practices

While he was dealing with the problems of North Korea's economy, Kim Jong Il was also running North Korea's foreign affairs. To show off the power of North Korea, Kim sent his agents to kidnap citizens of Japan and South Korea. These people were taken to prison camps in North Korea, where they disappeared. As a way of boosting its lagging economy, North Korea had also become a major supplier of arms to other nations, especially in the Middle East. These weapons included tanks, short-range missiles, and missile launchers to countries such as Iraq, Libya, and Syria.

In 1982, Kim had launched an assassination plot aimed at South Korea's president, Chun Doo Hwan. The following year, Chun and senior members of his government were visiting Rangoon, the capital of Burma (now called Myanmar). Some of them had already arrived for an official ceremony at the capital, but Chun was running behind schedule. As the South Korean officials prepared for Chun's arrival, a bomb suddenly exploded, killing four of them. The bomb had been planted by a North Korean army officer, Zin Mo, and several other agents. They were later caught and confessed that the bombing had been planned by the North Korean government.

President Chun and his U.S. allies feared that the assassinations might be followed by North Korean military action along the Demilitarized Zone. Indeed some members of the president's cabinet wanted to bomb North Korea. But Chun refused to allow any attack. Indeed, in 1984, secret talks had begun between North Korea and South Korea aimed at improving relations between the two countries. They were conducted by Park Chul Un, a South Korean diplomat and an expert in foreign affairs, and Han Se Hae, a leading North Korean diplomat.

The two men hoped to lay the foundation for a summit meeting between Kim Il Sung and Chun Doo Hwan. But there were too many disagreements between the two sides, and the

secret talks finally ended. The North Korean government was especially upset by a military training exercise, called Team Spirit, that was scheduled for 1985. Kim Jong Il believed that this exercise, which involved thousands of U.S. and South Korean troops, posed a threat to his father's regime. . . .

Isolation Pushes North Korea to a New Strategy

On January 1, 1991, [Soviet leader Mikhail] Gorbachev established full diplomatic relations with South Korea. Up until this time, the USSR had recognized only North Korea as the legitimate government of the Korean Peninsula. Gorbachev's decision, combined with weakening economic conditions in the Soviet Union, changed the situation in North Korea. In the past, the Soviets had provided crucial oil supplies to North Korea as well as weapons and industrial machinery. These had been sold at specially reduced prices, and the Soviets had even allowed Kim not to pay for much of what he had received.

Suddenly, this special relationship had changed. Oil supplies to North Korea were reduced by 75 percent. Since part of the oil was used in chemical fertilizer, farm production was affected. Gasoline supplies were also reduced for tanks and airplanes. Kim Jong Il turned to China, which had also supplied North Korea with oil. But the Chinese refused to supply oil at the low prices offered in the past by the Soviets. When Don Oberdorfer visited North Korea in 1991, he noticed "deserted roadways and idle construction projects" around Pyongyang. There was no gasoline to run automobiles or heavy construction equipment.

In 1992, the Chinese also decided to establish diplomatic relations with South Korea. This decision, along with the changing policies in the Soviet Union, left Kim Jong Il and his father feeling more and more isolated in North Korea. As a result, they turned to a new strategy—one designed to get the attention of their former Communist allies as well as the rest of the world.