

PARANOID, POTBELLIED STALINIST GETS NUCLEAR WEAPONS

How the U.S. Print Media Cover North Korea

Hugh Gusterson

Mainstream American print media coverage of North Korea's nuclear weapons program has been deeply flawed, a reality that skews policy debates and confuses public perceptions. Even simple factual descriptions of the parties' obligations under the 1994 Agreed Framework have often been inconsistent and partial, informing readers about North Korea's obligations more than U.S. obligations, and rarely acknowledging U.S. failures. The media repeated allegations about an illicit North Korean uranium enrichment program based largely on anonymous sources, who made what seem now to have been misleading statements. Journalists rely for comment on administration officials or members of Washington think tanks, while making little effort to gather opinions from academics, those on the left (as opposed to centrist liberals), or experts in Southeast Asia. Journalists also frequently present Kim Jong Il in ways that erase the Korean perspective on U.S.-Korean relations. Accurate, nuanced coverage of events on the Korean Peninsula is vital in producing an informed public and a policy-making process that is judicious, supple, and intelligent. This article concludes with various ways in which the media could better report on North Korea.

KEYWORDS: North Korea; nuclear program; news media; Agreed Framework

Ask international security experts which areas of the world give greatest cause for concern, and the Korean Peninsula will rank high on most lists. Indeed, former Secretary of Defense William Perry called it "the most dangerous spot" in the world in 2003.¹ Although the fighting in the Korean War, in which four million civilians died, ended with an armistice in 1953, the two halves of the peninsula, with the United States allied to the South, remain technically at war. In 1993–1994 the peninsula came perilously close to new hostilities when North Korea, suspected of hiding plutonium production activities, refused to allow International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspection of suspected nuclear waste sites, unloaded almost 8,000 spent fuel rods from its reactor, and announced its intention to withdraw from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

As the Clinton administration reinforced its military presence in South Korea and began to explore military options and sanctions against North Korea, the United States and North Korea stood on the brink of a war in which the U.S. commander in Korea, General Gary Luck, estimated possible casualties of one million, including 52,000 U.S. military dead. Most of these casualties would have been in Seoul, which is perilously close to as many as 13,000 North Korean artillery pieces on the border. Only a high-stakes

Nonproliferation Review, Vol. 15, No. 1, March 2008

ISSN 1073-6700 print/ISSN 1746-1766 online/08/010021-22

© 2008 Monterey Institute of International Studies, James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies

DOI: 10.1080/10736700701852894

exercise in personal diplomacy by former President Jimmy Carter averted war and resulted in the 1994 Agreed Framework.²

For reasons that will be illuminated below, the Agreed Framework eventually unraveled. In 2002, the year President George W. Bush named North Korea one of three countries in an “axis of evil,” the United States suspended the Agreed Framework following a confrontation between American and North Korean diplomats over an alleged covert uranium enrichment program in North Korea. This triggered a series of escalatory actions from North Korea over the next four years: expelling IAEA inspectors; reprocessing the plutonium it had sealed under the Agreed Framework; restarting its reactor; and testing ballistic missiles. In 2003, North Korea became the first country to withdraw from the NPT, and in October 2006 it tested a nuclear weapon. In the words of the *New York Times*, it became “the eighth country in history, and arguably the most unstable and most dangerous, to proclaim that it has joined the club of nuclear weapons states.”³

During the last decade, the North Korean problem has worsened as fitful attempts to manage it through diplomacy have failed. Meanwhile, in a situation where North Korea is presumed to have a handful of nuclear weapons and has threatened to turn Seoul into a “sea of fire” if attacked, most experts see the military option as an unworkable way of disarming North Korea.⁴ But the stakes could not be higher: if the North Korean regime were to collapse, we would, for the first time, see a nuclear-armed state with no clear governmental authority, and the region might be destabilized by desperate refugees fleeing the collapsing regime. (Many of these would be armed given that North Korea’s army—with an estimated 1.2 million soldiers—is the world’s fourth largest.)⁵ If, on the other hand, the regime endures with its nuclear program intact, Japan may decide to build its own nuclear weapons, and some commentators believe Kim Jong Il’s regime, strapped for cash, might resort to selling fissile material, or even complete nuclear weapons, on the black market. It is such concerns that led William F. Buckley, for example, to aver that, “it is obvious that Northwest Asia could not survive the materialization of a nuclearized North Korea.”⁶

Given that the Korean dilemma is one of the biggest headaches for U.S. and other foreign policy makers, good, accurate, detailed, and nuanced media coverage of events on the Korean Peninsula is vital in producing an informed public and a policy-making process that is judicious, supple, and intelligent. While the American print media have certainly published a remarkable number of column inches on developments in North Korea, much of the coverage has been repetitive, unimaginative, narrowly sourced, ideological, and, at its worst, baldly inaccurate. Such compromised media coverage can only hobble public debate and the policy-making process, to the detriment of U.S., and international, security.

In the pages that follow, I will anatomize the inadequacies of American print media coverage of Korea, focusing especially on the high end of the print media market that, presumably, has more impact on policy discussions. I leave it largely to the reader’s imagination how much worse things are at the bottom end. This article is structured around what one might think of as both vertical and horizontal slices into the material. I start with a vertical or chronological slice, following media narration of unfolding events, in particular the collapse of the Agreed Framework. The horizontal slice in the second half of the paper brings into view a number of ideological tics—stereotypes, assumptions, and

narrative frames—that repeat over a decade in American media coverage of North Korea. These recurrent representational tics depict Korea in a metaphorical funhouse mirror, making it harder to see clearly the North Korean problem and to find a way through to a solution.

The Agreed Framework

The Agreed Framework, the product of a dramatic eleventh-hour diplomatic mission by former President Jimmy Carter, and four months of intensive negotiations that ensued, not only averted war in 1993–1994, but also became the fuel for a whole new set of conflictual fires. Given that the Americans and North Koreans would later quarrel over whether, and by whom, the Agreed Framework was violated, a good place to begin is with media descriptions of the Agreed Framework itself. What were its terms? Readers will see from the few sample descriptions below that different journalists describe the Agreed Framework quite differently—though all descriptions converge in their mention of North Korea’s obligation to freeze its nuclear programs and in their failure to mention certain American obligations.

Here is how various writers for the *New York Times* characterized the framework. James Dao said that, under the framework, “North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear programs in exchange for food and fuel.”⁷ Seth Mydans wrote: “North Korea agreed to halt its nuclear program in exchange for help in building a nuclear reactor for peaceful purposes.”⁸ Michael Gordon gave a little more detail: “Under the deal, North Korea agreed to freeze and ultimately eliminate its nuclear program. In return, Washington promised a multinational effort to ship fuel oil to North Korea and to build two light water nuclear reactors.”⁹

Walter Pincus, writing in the *Washington Post*, said that, under the Agreed Framework, “North Korea would freeze its nuclear weapons program. In return, it would be supplied with conventional fuel and ultimately with two light water reactors that could not produce potential weapons-grade fuel.”¹⁰

According to one article in the *Boston Globe*, “In return for North Korea’s freezing of its plutonium-based nuclear program in 1993, the Clinton Administration promised 500 metric tons of heavy fuel oil annually. Japan and North Korea helped with energy as well.”¹¹ Another article in the *Boston Globe* said, “North Korea was to have abandoned its nuclear aspirations and was to submit to continuous inspections in exchange for shipments of nuclear fuel from the United States and its allies.”¹²

These characterizations of the Agreed Framework all appeared in articles written in 2002 or later to explain why the Framework had run into trouble. They all have one thing in common: they are strong on reporting North Korea’s side of the bargain, all of them telling the reader that North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear weapons program. They are much more erratic in their characterization of U.S. obligations under the framework. Sometimes the reader hears about the U.S. promise of light water reactors, sometimes not, though timelines for construction are almost invariably left out of the story. One *New York Times* reporter says North Korea was promised one light water reactor, while another says it was promised two. The second *Boston Globe* summary, remarkably, refers to neither the

light water reactors nor the fuel oil, mentioning just one obligation—“nuclear fuel shipments.” Given that we learn in the same sentence that North Korea was “to have abandoned its nuclear aspirations” in exchange, the alert reader is left to wonder what these nuclear fuel shipments are for.

Here, by contrast, is a description of the Agreed Framework in a dossier for arms control specialists put out by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS):

North Korea immediately froze its “graphite moderated reactors and related facilities” . . . which were placed under IAEA monitoring. In return, the US gave assurances—backed by a Presidential letter—that the US would “organize under its leadership an international consortium to finance and supply the LWR [light water reactor] project” and provide interim heavy fuel oil (HFO) supplies to North Korea for heating and electricity production. . . .

The Agreed Framework was structured to require North Korean disarmament in stages, linked to progress in the supply of the LWR project, which consisted of two 1,000MW(e) units to be completed by a “target date of 2003.” . . .

In addition to these specific nuclear disarmament provisions, the Agreed Framework included more general language calling for steps to improve economic and political relations between Washington and Pyongyang. Within three months, the US promised to “reduce barriers to trade and investment” and the two sides agreed to open liaison offices in each other’s capitals and eventually upgrade bilateral relations to the ambassadorial level. . . . The US also agreed to “provide formal assurances to the DPRK against the threat or use of nuclear weapons by the US.”¹³

From the IISS dossier the reader learns all sorts of important information about the Agreed Framework that one very rarely sees mentioned in the mainstream press. We learn that the United States promised not just fuel and reactors, but progress toward the normalization of relations, the lifting of sanctions, and a pledge of nuclear non-aggression. Although rarely discussed in the U.S. press, these parts of the agreement were very important to North Korea. We also learn from the IISS description, but not from most media accounts, that there were timelines for construction of the new reactors, and that North Korean progress on disarmament was to be synchronized over time with reactor construction.

The Agreed Framework Collapses

Given the fragmentary quality of characterizations in the media of the terms of the Agreed Framework, it should come as no surprise that accounts of the framework’s problems and eventual collapse were highly partial. While there had been problems carrying through some of the commitments of the Agreed Framework for eight years, the framework did not collapse until 2002–2003, not long after a highly charged confrontation between the U.S. negotiator, James Kelly, and the North Korean delegation in October 2002 over alleged covert uranium enrichment in North Korea.

For the most part the American media reported the collapse of the Agreed Framework as a straightforward consequence of North Korea’s being caught red-handed

in illicit uranium enrichment. Here they followed a script provided by President Bush himself: "My predecessor, in a good-faith effort, entered into a framework agreement. The United States honored its side of the agreement; North Korea didn't. While we felt the agreement was in force, North Korea was enriching uranium."¹⁴ Thus the *Boston Globe* reported, "[U.S.] assistance was halted after the discovery in 2002 of a uranium-based nuclear weapons program."¹⁵ Or, as the Associated Press put it, the "agreement fell apart in late 2002 with the outbreak of the latest nuclear crisis, when U.S. officials said North Korea admitted having a secret uranium enrichment program."¹⁶ The *New York Times* followed the same storyline, even if it attributed the formal termination of the framework to North Korea rather than the United States: "Last fall [2002], Pyongyang declared that accord invalid after conceding that it was developing a covert program to enrich uranium."¹⁷

All of these accounts converge in representing the Agreed Framework as an accord that ended when it became transparently clear that North Korea was cheating on it by covertly enriching uranium. There is, however, another side to the story regarding who violated the Agreed Framework. It is told in the following passage by Leon Sigal, director of the Northeast Asia Cooperative Security Project at the Social Science Research Council, in a paper published in 2007 by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Center for International Studies:

In fact, it was the United States that reneged on the 1994 Agreed Framework by failing to reward North Korea's good behavior. Washington got what it most wanted up front—a freeze of Pyongyang's plutonium program, a program that could by now have generated enough plutonium for at least fifty bombs. Washington did not live up to its end of the bargain, however. When Republicans won control of Congress in elections just after the October 1994 accord was signed, many of them denounced the deal as appeasement. Unwilling to take on Congress, President Clinton backpedaled on implementation. He did little easing of sanctions until 2000. Washington pledged to provide two nuclear power plants "by a target date of 2003," but concrete for the first foundation was not poured until August 2002. It did deliver heavy fuel oil as promised but seldom on schedule. Above all, it did not live up to its promise in Article II of the Agreed Framework to "move toward full normalization of political and economic relations"—end enmity and lift sanctions.¹⁸

To these failures to meet timelines in delivering fuel oil and in making progress on the promised reactors under the Clinton administration, we might add the new doctrines of the Bush administration. Some officials in the Bush administration spoke openly of their desire for "regime change" in North Korea, while Bush named North Korea as a charter member of the "axis of evil" in his 2002 State of the Union address. In that speech, he characterized North Korea as a "grave and growing danger" and said the United States "will not wait on events while dangers gather" and "will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most dangerous weapons."¹⁹ Around the time of this speech, word leaked that the Bush administration's Nuclear Posture Review listed North Korea among seven states against which it would consider using nuclear weapons.²⁰ Meanwhile, a group of Republican senators publicly applied pressure

to Bush to simply cancel construction of the light water reactors and unilaterally replace them with coal plants.²¹ None of this was consistent with U.S. commitments under the Agreed Framework to move toward normalizing relations with North Korea and to move away from threatening North Korea with nuclear weapons. All of it was seen as highly threatening by the North Korean regime.

I go into this not to simply flip the dominant narrative upside down and suggest that all fault for the collapse of the Agreed Framework lies with the United States. That would be no more accurate than the simplistic narrative in the mainstream media that focuses entirely on North Korean duplicity. My point is that there is another side to the story, a side rarely provided in mainstream American press accounts.²² It is ironic that this side is so seldom encountered in American reporting, since it is a foundational tenet of American journalistic practice to investigate and report all sides of any story, and that stories are more interesting if they are structured around a clash of perspectives.

If one digs even further, the story becomes still more complex. Many of the problems with progress on the reactors, for example, were caused by underfunding of the consortium by other governments as well as the United States, by technical difficulties in the construction process, and by North Korea's obstinacy about accepting a South Korean reactor design. In other words, the problems originated from many places.²³ But American press accounts rarely delve deep enough to let on that the North Koreans had a grievance about the fulfillment of their legitimate expectations, let alone to provide a complex account of the sources of the problem. In hewing to a stick-thin narrative that the Agreed Framework collapsed simply because the North Koreans were found to have cheated by enriching uranium, American media accounts bleed a complex story of all its ambiguity, turning it into a simple morality tale of blameless Americans and bad North Koreans.

Covert Uranium Enrichment?

And what of the claim, routinely repeated by American journalists, that North Korea was engaged in illicit uranium enrichment? That too turns out to be a more complicated story than most media accounts acknowledge. On October 16, 2002, the United States dropped a bombshell when it announced that, almost two weeks earlier, its negotiator, James Kelly, had confronted his North Korean counterparts with evidence that North Korea was covertly enriching uranium in violation of the Agreed Framework, saying the North Korean diplomats had defiantly acknowledged the truth of the allegation. Here is how various reporters from the *New York Times* characterized events: David Sanger referred to "North Korea's stunning admission last week that it had been cheating for years on its commitment to freeze its nuclear weapons program."²⁴ James Brooke wrote of "the revelation that North Korea has been cheating on its promise not to pursue nuclear weapons."²⁵ Michael Gordon wrote, "North Korea has been violating the treaty [the Agreed Framework] for years by engaging in a clandestine program to enrich uranium—indeed, it was evidence of this, and North Korea's defiant claim to a visiting American envoy that it had the right to develop nuclear weapons—that helped precipitate the current confrontation."²⁶

Other leading papers were no different. The *Los Angeles Times* mentioned “North Korea’s surprise confession to the U.S. this month that it has a uranium-based nuclear weapons program.”²⁷ The *Washington Post* said, “the United States and North Korea have been in a standoff since October, when North Korean officials admitted to pursuing a covert program to produce weapons-grade uranium in violation of the 1994 pact.”²⁸ And from the *Boston Globe*: “In recent months, North Korea has taken a series of steps that indicate it plans to resume trying to produce nuclear weapons. The first came last October, when Pyongyang defiantly acknowledged to a visiting American official that it had a program to produce highly enriched uranium.”²⁹

In all these quotes, which are typical of reporting on this issue, the covert enrichment program is simply taken as a given. But when American reporters referred to North Korea’s “confession,” had they asked any North Koreans to confirm the confession? In fact, press accounts of North Korea’s “confession” mostly rely on unnamed U.S. government officials as sources—that is, when they mention any source at all. (Typical in its funneling of the issues through unnamed U.S. government sources is this passage from a Reuters story: “Asked why the North Koreans acknowledged the program, one senior official said: ‘Because we had the goods on them.’”³⁰ Here an unnamed U.S. official speaks for the motives of the North Korean government as well as for his own government.) Yet this is an extraordinarily weighty story to base on a source unwilling to go on the record, especially with no counterbalancing comment from the accused party.

The importance of getting the other side of the story, rather than simply acting as stenographer to unnamed U.S. government sources, is shown in an unusual commentary article in the *Washington Post* published three weeks after the story broke. It was written by Don Oberdorfer, a former *Washington Post* reporter who had developed North Korean contacts and written a book the year before called *The Two Koreas*. He wrote:

Minister Kim [Gye Gwan] told me, during an unusual set of meetings that I attended last week in North Korea, that he had been “stunned” by Kelly’s statement. He reported Kelly’s statements to his superiors at the first coffee break, setting off furious internal consultations. After an all-night meeting of its top officials, North Korea detonated its own verbal explosion the next day. First Deputy Foreign Minister Kang Sok Ju, North Korea’s most important diplomat, told Kelly and the U.S. delegation that the reclusive nation is “entitled to have nuclear weapons” to safeguard its security in the face of a growing U.S. threat. After a debate of their own, the Americans interpreted the statement to be an admission that Kelly’s charge was true. Now it was the Americans’ turn to be stunned by an unexpected declaration and to wonder what to do next.³¹

Suddenly a simple story has become more complicated: the North Koreans say they did not admit to having an enrichment program at all; they merely asserted their right to nuclear weapons to deter U.S. nuclear weapons, and the Americans, after some debate, decided to interpret this ambiguous statement as an admission of guilt. It bears noting, incidentally, that Oberdorfer’s article was published in the *Washington Post*, not an insignificant newspaper, before many of the articles quoted above referred to North

Korea's enrichment program as established fact. The Kelly version of the story had become a standard account that was too entrenched to dislodge—in the short term at least.³²

Eventually there was some backtracking on this story, but it took over a year. Here is how Barbara Slavin and John Diamond framed the backtracking in a remarkable piece of writing in *USA Today*:

A year after North Korea provoked a crisis with the United States by admitting a secret effort to make weapons-grade uranium, U.S. officials say the program appears to be far less advanced than diplomats had feared. . . . A U.S. intelligence official says the CIA, which has conducted extensive surveillance of North Korea, is "not certain there even is" a uranium-enrichment plant. He says North Korea may have overstated its capability as part of a strategy of "bluff and bluster to extract concessions from the United States." . . . The reason it's still unclear whether there is a uranium program is that such efforts are difficult to monitor.³³

I call this writing remarkable because of the nonchalant ease with which it rewrites history. Although James Kelly provoked the crisis in 2002 by making incendiary accusations that seem to have gone beyond the available evidence, and although North Korea had officially denied the enrichment allegations, the article tells us: "North Korea provoked a crisis with the United States by admitting a secret effort to make weapons-grade uranium."³⁴ The popular overestimation of North Korean capabilities that resulted from U.S. officials' exaggeration of the evidence is instead attributed to North Korean "bluff and bluster," and substantial uncertainties about the intelligence on North Korea that should have made the Bush administration exercise caution in its initial brandishing of accusations are instead invoked a year later to soften the edges of the backtracking.

So what, finally, is the truth about North Korea's alleged enrichment program?³⁵ It seems well established that Pakistan's A.Q. Khan did provide North Korea in the late 1990s some sort of starter kit for enrichment. This probably included centrifuge designs and a small number of samples. There is also fragmentary evidence that, after this, North Korea attempted to import some equipment that would have been useful in building a centrifuge program (though some of it had other potential applications as well). But was North Korea definitely building a production facility (as opposed to an R&D program)? Was it definitely enriching to weapons-grade levels (as opposed to the more easily achieved reactor-grade levels of enrichment)? If so, how far has it gotten? Despite the Bush administration official's remark reported above that "we had the goods on them," there have been no publicly reported claims to know where a North Korean enrichment facility is or, indeed, how much progress toward a mature enrichment capability North Korea has made. In 2004, *Arms Control Today* summarized the intelligence community's assessment of the situation:

Public CIA assessments about the program have changed significantly during the past year. The CIA said in November 2002 that North Korea was "constructing a centrifuge facility" capable of producing "two or more nuclear weapons per year," perhaps as soon as "mid-decade." Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly told Congress in March 2003 that the facility could start producing fissile material in "months not years."

Subsequent CIA reports have been increasingly vague. For example, a November report covering the last half of 2002 says only that North Korea “had begun acquiring material and equipment for a centrifuge facility,” with the apparent “goal” of building a plant.³⁶

By early 2007, official assessments had throttled back still more. Again, *Arms Control Today* had the story:

A senior U.S. intelligence official confirmed in early March that Washington has become less confident than it was in October 2002 that Pyongyang is continuing to pursue an enrichment program. Ambassador Joseph DeTrani, North Korean mission manager for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, said in a March 4 statement that all U.S. intelligence agencies “have at least moderate confidence that North Korea’s past efforts to acquire a uranium enrichment capability continue today.”

By contrast, the U.S. intelligence community had “high confidence” in 2002 that North Korea was attempting to acquire a uranium enrichment capability.³⁷

The same article quoted former Clinton administration official Robert Einhorn as saying that “information was sketchy” in the late 1990s as to whether North Korea had been “actively pursuing” such a program. As for the North Koreans’ supposedly truculent confession on enrichment, a 2006 *Newsweek* article reported, with tantalizing brevity, that “diplomats now say that was a translation error.”³⁸

How *should* the media have reported on allegations of a covert enrichment program in North Korea? Given the cloud of uncertainty that surrounds all intelligence assessments—a cloud that seems to have been especially thick in the North Korean case—surely the herd journalistic practice of making strong statements of fact based on single, unnamed sources in the U.S. government was, in retrospect, a mistake. It brings to mind the unfortunate credulity with which the same media were, at about the same time, reporting the Bush administration’s intelligence claims about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.³⁹

Stereotypes, Metaphors, and Plot Lines

One is struck, reading American media coverage of North Korea, by certain recurrent themes, stereotypes, metaphors, and storylines. These suggest an overarching narrative framework shared by many journalists and commentators who write about North Korea. Whichever newspaper one reads, “the story” is roughly the same: North Korea is a backward, isolated country run by a tyrant with comically eccentric, excessive tastes. His regime consistently lies and cheats and is driven by a childish narcissism, while the United States, which must manage the international system, behaves with the steady consistency of a father figure. Nuclear weapons do not belong in the hands of the backward, unpredictable North Korean regime, and the question is whether, despite its duplicity and unreliability, it can be persuaded to give up its weapons, or whether the regime must be isolated until it expires. This narrative construction of North Korea is fashioned out of shards of reality, but they are often assembled into a caricature that simplifies the messy complexity of the real world in a way that makes for entertaining reading but also, if policy

makers believe what they read in the newspaper, unsophisticated policy. In the following sections, I will sketch out the basic elements of “the story,” then explain how this representation of the North Korean problem harms our policy debates and how the media might better cover the story.

A Backward Country Led by a Paranoid Pygmy

Journalists frequently foreground the isolation and poverty of North Korea—“a nation as isolated, dictatorial, and unpredictable as any on earth.”⁴⁰ The *New York Times*’ David Sanger, for example, refers to it as an “isolated, bankrupt Hermit Kingdom,” and a few weeks later indulges a fantasy about North Korea earning foreign currency by walking “plutonium over the Chinese border in an oxcart, assuming that no starving North Koreans eat the ox first.”⁴¹ “The Weird and Scary Saga of How an Isolated, Bankrupt Nation Went Nuclear,” is the subtitle of an October 2006 *Newsweek* magazine article.⁴²

The stereotype of North Korea as isolated coexists uneasily in these accounts with the recurrent assumption that North Korea is part of a vast transnational shadow world. It is often said that North Korea is acquiring enrichment technology, selling missiles, and counterfeiting U.S. currency through this international black market.

Even elite journalists treat North Korean leader Kim Jong Il with an open, scathing contempt that is almost unique in their descriptions of foreign leaders. In this perhaps they are only taking their cues from a president who once, in a famous departure from normal diplomatic protocol, called Kim Jong Il a “pygmy.”⁴³ In June 2003, the *Economist* put him on its cover, under the caption, “Greetings, earthlings.” Bill Keller, executive editor of the *New York Times*, said, “North Korea is a hermit state ruled by a potbellied, five-foot-three paranoid Stalinist who likes to watch Daffy Duck cartoons. He and his father before him have run the country into such a state of abject misery that some people are surviving on boiled grass.”⁴⁴ Jim Hoagland told *Washington Post* readers that North Korea is “led by world-class paranoids and fantasists capable of believing their own propaganda. . . . Such a regime may be beyond reasoning or, even worse, deterring in a conventional sense.”⁴⁵ And then there was this tongue-in-cheek news piece from the *Washington Post* about sanctions targeted at “the diminutive strongman’s high-end tastes.” The article opens with this italicized ditty, written to the tune of “My Favorite Things” from *The Sound of Music*:

*Fake fur and real fur and jewelry and jet skis
Crystal and Segways and bubbly and Caddies
Race cars and leather and plasma TVs—
These are a few of Kim’s favorite things.*

The article continues: “Denying Kim what he craves, the theory goes, might prompt better behavior from a dictator who reportedly spends nearly a million dollars a year on rare cognac. The U.S. list of more than 60 items reads like a letter to Santa Claus from the dictator who has everything. Yachts, water scooters, race cars, motorcycles, even station wagons and Segways won’t be crossing the border this season. There shall be no more DVD players and televisions larger than 29 inches for the man whose film library of 20,000 titles betrays a yen for Bond and Rambo.”⁴⁶ Like many news stories, this one emphasizes

Kim's short stature and his lavish consumption, implicitly represented as absurdly inappropriate in a Third World country.

Narcissism or Blackmail?

On a number of occasions, particularly in 2002 and 2006, North Korea escalated the ongoing diplomatic crisis around its nuclear program. It threw out IAEA inspectors, broke the seals on its spent fuel storage facility, restarted its reactor, reprocessed plutonium, tested missiles, eventually withdrew from the NPT, and tested a nuclear weapon. The question is why, at these various decision points, North Korea elected to escalate. I am aware of at least four plausible explanations for North Korea's escalatory behavior, but only two of them figure prominently in U.S. media coverage. These are: first, that North Korea is driven by a need for attention, and second, that it ratchets up its nuclear activities from time to time as part of a strategy to extort material concessions from the United States and its allies. (I will discuss the other two possible explanations further below.)

A corollary of Kim Jong Il's strange personality in American media accounts is the notion that North Korea seeks nuclear weapons not so much because of rationally calculated national interests but because of a sort of narcissistic personality disorder that drives the country's leadership to behave like an attention-seeking child. Thus, for example, one week after the United States tested a ballistic missile of its own without reproach from the mainstream media, a *New York Times* article suggested that North Korean threats to test a missile in 2006 were "a grab for attention." The article quotes former Clinton administration official Robert Einhorn as saying, "whenever the North Koreans act up, one has to assume in part at least that they are trying to get the world's attention." "We will not be derailed by their temper tantrums," says an anonymous Bush administration official quoted in the same article.⁴⁷ The following day, the *New York Times* editorialized that "maybe North Korea is just jealous of all the attention Iran has been getting as a result of Tehran's recent nuclear bad behavior, and craves a spotlight of its own."⁴⁸

The *New York Times* is hardly alone here. The *Los Angeles Times* ran an article in 2002 in which the ubiquitous Robert Einhorn opined: "the Bush Administration has not placed North Korea at the center of its universe, and I think North Korea would like to get [its] attention." The same article quoted an anonymous State Department official saying, "part of the phenomenon was, 'I am North Korea. Hear me roar! I can make nuclear weapons.'"⁴⁹ The *Washington Post's* Glenn Kessler reported in a news article that "North Korea has a long history of doing things simply . . . to bring the world's attention back to the Stalinist state."⁵⁰ In another article Kessler quoted a "senior administration official" saying "the North Koreans hate being ignored, and they are tempted to do things to get attention."⁵¹ And the *Boston Globe* quoted "Korea specialists" as saying, "the more convinced North Korea becomes that Washington intends to deal with Pyongyang after Baghdad, the more it responds with actions to get attention."⁵² (The logic here is obscure, since one might expect a country fearing attack to lie low rather than act provocatively.)

If media accounts do not attribute North Korea's behavior to a childish need for attention, they portray it as part of a blackmail strategy in which North Korea uses its

nuclear program to extort aid. This explanation is also popular in the White House: Bush has described North Korea as “up to their old blackmail game,” while then-National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice referred to North Korea as “a particular case in which you have a long record of the same kind of behavior: They reach an agreement, break it, and then make an effort at blackmail.”⁵³

This theme has been reprised frequently in the media. An editorial in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* titled simply, “Nuclear Blackmail,” began, “The brutal regime in North Korea, having failed to feed its people, feels it can now prop itself up through nuclear blackmail.”⁵⁴ In a dialogue with Bob Beckel published in *USA Today*, Cal Thomas said: “North Korea’s ‘dear leader,’ or rather its ‘weird leader,’ has apparently tested a nuclear device. This is simply blackmail, Bob. Kim Jong Il wants us to again engage in direct negotiations with him as a ploy for winning aid, but his past promises have been shown to be worth as much as North Korean currency, which is to say nothing at all.”⁵⁵ The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* referred to the “North’s efforts to use nuclear and missile blackmail to get economic goodies.”⁵⁶ An opinion piece in the *Los Angeles Times* speaks of “Pyongyang’s belief in nuclear ICBMs [intercontinental ballistic missiles] as a passport not only to regime survival but also to profitable blackmail.”⁵⁷ A column by William Safire in the *New York Times* described Pyongyang as “a regime that sees its survival only in building nukes and missiles to blackmail the world.”⁵⁸ An opinion piece in the *Washington Post*, by Jim Hoagland, explained, “The North Korean leader uses his nuclear arsenal as a tool of economic blackmail. He must constantly cheat just enough on his current deal to ensure future payments.”⁵⁹ Explaining the February 2007 agreement with North Korea, the *Boston Herald* said, “North Korea gets hundreds of millions of dollars in energy assistance—proving apparently that nuclear blackmail pays—big time.”⁶⁰ In regards to the same agreement, the *San Francisco Chronicle* quoted former U.S. Ambassador James Lilley, who said, “Is this blackmail? Yes, I guess. There will be walkouts and cheating and tantrums, but this is a formula that has a chance of success.”⁶¹

The portrayals of North Korea as seeking attention or as engaged in a strategy to use its nuclear technology to blackmail the United States and its allies into giving aid are certainly plausible. However, there are two other plausible interpretations of North Korean behavior that get less airtime in the media. One is associated with Leon Sigal, who wrote a well-reviewed book, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea*, about the crisis of 1993–1994 and the negotiation of the Agreed Framework.⁶² Sigal has directly attacked the blackmail interpretation of North Korea’s behavior, saying, “it’s blackmail when you’re in a dark alley and a man menaces you with a baseball bat, demands that you hand over your wallet, and you do. It’s not blackmail when he hands you his bat and says, let’s play ball, and you don’t, which is what happened after October 1994 and is happening again now [2003].”⁶³ Sigal argues that North Korea is in principle willing to follow through on the terms of the Agreed Framework and that it has followed a consistent “tit-for-tat” pattern in its post-1994 diplomacy: if the United States makes a concession, or adheres to its side of the bargain, then so does North Korea. If the United States threatens North Korea, or fails to meet the terms of a prior agreement, then North Korea retaliates and escalates. (Many game theorists, incidentally, regard this tit-for-tat pattern as the optimal, most rational strategy in prisoner’s dilemma situations that are

paradigmatic of nuclear standoffs.)⁶⁴ If Sigal is right—and he has certainly adduced a lot of evidence in support of his argument—then the interaction pattern between the United States and North Korea is predictably disastrous: when North Korea retaliates against the United States, its behavior enters White House debates between moderates and neoconservatives in the administration as evidence that North Korea cannot be trusted to cooperate, tipping the balance in favor of the neoconservatives and provoking a stiff response that only provokes another tit-for-tat reaction from the North Koreans in an escalatory feedback loop. As Mikhail Gorbachev demonstrated in the 1980s, the only way to short-circuit these feedback loops is to make aggressive, unilateral concessions that shatter conservative narratives about the enemy and invite reciprocal concessions. This is, however, a difficult strategy to sustain in terms of domestic politics.

Sigal, whether or not one agrees with his arguments, is one of the leading American specialists on North Korea's nuclear program and on diplomatic negotiations between the United States and North Korea. One would expect his interpretation of North Korea's actions to be referenced in American media accounts, alongside other interpretations. This is, however, rarely the case. Despite his book, despite his publications on North Korea in *Arms Control Today* and the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, a Lexis-Nexis search for Sigal over the past five years turned up just eight instances in which he was quoted in American news stories on North Korea—often in low-profile newspapers such as the *Newark* (New Jersey) *Star-Ledger*.⁶⁵ By contrast, Einhorn, the assistant secretary of state for nonproliferation in the Clinton administration, was quoted in 56 stories on North Korea, many of them in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Sigal has only been able to win more attention for his views through energetic writing of op-eds. In five years, he has published ten op-eds on North Korea, six of which appeared in the *Boston Globe* (the remainder ran in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *International Herald Tribune*). Absent a friendly editor at the *Globe*, he would have an even more truncated public profile. Meanwhile, for reasons that can only be a matter for speculation, he has not benefited from the usual ricochet effect whereby published op-eds generate requests for comment from beat reporters.

There is, finally, a fourth plausible explanation for North Korea's behavior. One finds allusions to this explanation much more often in foreign than in American mainstream newspaper accounts. According to this theory, North Korea's leaders calculated that it was impossible to implement an agreement with the Bush administration and that their best path to security lay, instead, in securing a nuclear weapons capability with which to deter the United States from doing to North Korea what it had done to Iraq. This would explain the timing of North Korea's most provocative behavior—from 2002 onward. North Korea may have decided that it could not achieve the security it sought after watching a Democratic administration fall years behind on providing the reactors promised under the Agreed Framework, only to be supplanted by a more conservative Republican regime that labeled North Korea part of the "axis of evil," spoke publicly about regime change in Pyongyang, and adopted a new Nuclear Posture Review that provided for targeting North Korea with nuclear weapons.⁶⁶ Such an explanation would, of course, point the finger more at the United States than at North Korea, so maybe we should not be surprised to encounter it so rarely in the news or opinion pages of American newspapers.

The dominant media focus on the narcissism and blackmail frames is unfortunate because it deprives policy makers and the public of plausible alternative explanations for North Korean behavior that would excite more vibrant debate about that country's motives. The narcissism and blackmail frames that predominate in the media also subtly legitimate the Bush administration policy, until recently, of not talking bilaterally with the North Koreans. If it were true that the North Koreans were just seeking attention or were trying to extort more aid from the United States and its allies, then talking with them would only encourage them. Of course, if North Korea was genuinely interested in a settlement with the United States and was deviating from the path to settlement either because it felt threatened by U.S. policy or because it was practicing tit-for-tat diplomacy, then talks would have been more useful. Although media news and commentary often featured critiques of the Bush administration's stubbornness in refusing to talk to North Korea outside the six-party framework, these critiques were implicitly undercut or neutralized by the media embrace of the narcissism and blackmail frames within which talking to North Korea becomes a form of capitulation.

Liars and Cheats

Based largely on the Kelly version of the story about North Korea's alleged illicit uranium enrichment, it has also become part of the common sense among pundits and journalists that North Korea is a country that does not abide by its agreements. The *New York Times* quotes an unnamed U.S. diplomat as saying, "their willingness to cheat is unquestioned."⁶⁷ It also quotes Henry Sokolski, executive director of the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, as saying, "You don't give cheaters the benefit of the doubt by trying to coddle them with incentives when they aren't behaving. It's like dealing with an alcoholic."⁶⁸ "North Korea is as unpredictable and untrustworthy as a state can be," says an editorial in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*.⁶⁹ The *Christian Science Monitor* editorial page says, "As it has done with agreements since the early 1990s, the North might still cheat on this one."⁷⁰ The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* opens its editorial by saying, "Pyongyang will try to cheat. It always does."⁷¹ And an op-ed in the *Chicago Sun-Times* says, "There is some uncertainty about whether the North Koreans will actually get rid of all their nuclear facilities, or merely some, especially since they cheated last time. . . . [Kim Jong Il] may not be able to stop himself cheating."⁷²

Obviously one would be hard-pressed to defend North Korea as a country that has transparently complied with all its treaty obligations over the last two decades. However, North Korea's behavior has been complex enough, and there are sufficient uncertainties about its record of treaty compliance, that we might make three observations before simply dismissing the North Koreans as inveterate cheaters. First, setting aside for a moment the allegations about North Korea's alleged illicit enrichment program (and questions about whether it had fully declared its plutonium reprocessing in the early 1990s), it is widely accepted that the North Koreans complied with their core obligations under the Agreed Framework (to shut down their reactor and forego reprocessing) until the United States terminated the agreement at the end of 2002. Second, as Selig Harrison, director of the Asia Program at the Center for International Policy and author of the 2002

book *Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement*, points out in an important *Foreign Affairs* article, "All of the operative provisions of the accord [the Agreed Framework] relate to freezing the North's plutonium program and make no reference to uranium enrichment."⁷³ (This does not get the North Koreans completely off the hook, however. As Harrison notes, the Agreed Framework reaffirmed and incorporated the 1992 Joint North and South Korean Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, which prohibited enrichment facilities. Whether the North Koreans were in violation of this accord is still a matter of dispute even within the U.S. government.⁷⁴ Undisputed is the fact that all the while South Korea had its own secret nuclear research program.)⁷⁵ Third, and finally, the common sense among American journalists and pundits that the North Koreans are cheaters begs the question of how the Americans look to the North Koreans. The Americans and their allies were several years behind schedule building the promised reactors, in a context where the CIA was known to have advised the Clinton administration that the North Korean regime would collapse if the United States could wait them out.⁷⁶ Meanwhile the Americans, in their new Nuclear Posture Review, were secretly laying plans to attack North Korea with nuclear weapons, despite their pledge under the Agreed Framework to move away from such planning. If there were a North Korean Jim Hoagland, he would have ample material from which to fashion some scathing op-eds about congenitally untrustworthy Americans.

The Decoy

I have argued here that mainstream American media coverage presents North Korea as a country that lies and cheats under the eccentric leadership of Kim Jong Il, while downplaying ambiguities around allegations of North Korean cheating as well as North Korea's own grievances about U.S. compliance with the Agreed Framework. When it comes to discussing U.S. policy options for the future, it is generally accepted in the mainstream media that a military attack on North Korea is off the table. The dilemma, then, is usually portrayed as whether to isolate North Korea and hope its regime either collapses or comes to heel (as the hardliners around Vice President Dick Cheney suggest), or whether to engage North Korea in talks aimed at achieving its denuclearization (as many former Clinton administration officials and moderates in the Bush White House advocate). But the years of reporting that have preceded the current policy debates have created a skewed frame around this question that begs the question of why one would talk to a country that never keeps its agreements. The result is passages like this one from the *New York Times*: "As distasteful as it may be to negotiate with North Korea after it failed to abide by the terms of the first nuclear pact it signed in 1994, this [pro-engagement] camp believes that ultimately there is little choice."⁷⁷ While reporters try to be even-handed in reporting the debate about engagement, and the editorial pages often explicitly advocate renewed talks with North Korea, the frame is askew from the contents. "On the one hand, on the other hand" articles about the pros and cons of engagement are subtly undermined by a frame that prejudges the fate of agreements with North Korea.

Reporters love debates and conflicts, and they made the most of the multi-year struggle between the hardline faction of Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld,

and Undersecretary of State (and later UN Ambassador) John Bolton on the one hand and the pro-engagement faction of Secretary of State Colin Powell, his successor Rice, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, and such ex-officials as Einhorn on the other. But in setting up the choice before the American people as one between these two points of view, the media have, whether deliberately or not, created a sort of decoy narrative. The decoy narrative about North Korea sets up a compelling conflict between a left and a right in U.S. policy debates that encourages readers to align themselves with one side or the other. Self-identified liberals are encouraged by this decoy narrative to side with all those people quoted in the media who say that we must talk to North Korea despite its rotten record of compliance with past agreements. This compromised stance becomes “the” liberal position.

But the decoy debate obscures a third position to the left of the dial that gets little coverage in the mainstream media. We might identify this position with such analysts as Sigal and Harrison, who point out the deficiencies both in U.S. allegations of North Korean cheating *and* in the U.S. record of compliance with the Agreed Framework. Some versions of this position suggest that North Korea has ample reason to fear a White House under the sway of its hardliners. It would be wrong to suggest that this third perspective is completely censored out of American media accounts, but it is so marginalized that it requires special effort—a sort of reading between the lines and against the grain—to develop this point of view, to bring it into focus and nourish it with the facts and quotes that make a point of view rich and sturdy. It is much easier, reading lazily, to allow oneself to be washed over by repetitive narratives about Korean cheating and blackmail and to assume that, if we talk to the North Koreans, it is out of a generous U.S. forbearance rather than because the North Koreans have legitimate grievances and contentious points that we must somehow grapple with.

Conclusion

All of this matters deeply. At times while reading news coverage in researching this article, I have felt that U.S. policy makers might be better off relying only on policy briefs and not reading even our best newspapers. How can we make policy about another country if we are so oblivious to that country’s point of view? And if U.S. diplomats, doing what diplomats do, make necessary compromises to secure agreement with that country, how can we build public support for those compromises if the public understanding of these issues has been so warped by patronizing and selective media coverage that erases the other country’s grievances, arguments, and interests? This is not to say that the American media should turn to America-bashing. But surely they can do a better job of capturing the nuances, complexities, and differences of opinion that make the North Korean problem so difficult to resolve, rather than making it still harder to solve by broadcasting weakly sourced and inflammatory allegations, by editing out the full range of expert opinion, and by using rhetoric that, however entertaining, communicates U.S. condescension toward its negotiating partner.

By way of conclusion, then, I suggest four simple ways in which American newspapers might improve their coverage of this issue. First, end or greatly minimize

the bad habit of allowing U.S. government officials to be quoted anonymously. The most inflammatory and inaccurate allegations about North Korea's alleged enrichment program and its supposed preparations for missile and bomb tests have come from anonymous government officials. Even if the claims are retracted months or years later, the damage is done. While there is a legitimate place for anonymous quotes in journalism if, say, a whistleblower is being protected, in much North Korea coverage highly placed officials are simply using anonymity as a way of avoiding responsibility for weak, often politically motivated, assertions. If, in a different example of skewed media coverage, the controversy over former *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller's coverage of Iraq's nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons programs in the run-up to the Iraq war taught us anything, it is that the media should not enable this kind of behavior.

Second, the media should diversify the pool of people from whom it solicits analysis and comment in its news stories. At present, the most favored opinions are those of current or former government officials and of the axe-grinders at Washington think tanks. Academics are less often consulted, and nonproliferation experts seem to be preferred to North Korea experts. The views of nongovernmental organization staffers are rarely quoted. But when government policy is being reported and analyzed, it surely helps to get perspectives from outside the circles of government, government-in-waiting, and its ancillary think tank policy-making apparatus. Academics may not have such finely polished soundbites, but they often have more expertise and a fresh perspective.

Third, journalists should make some international phone calls. It is striking that most of the opinions quoted in American media articles on North Korea are American opinions. North Korean officials are rarely, if ever, asked for comment in stories that then treat North Korea as a black hole of inscrutability. One of the most fascinating articles I have found on North Korea appeared in an obscure journal for materials scientists. It was written by the former director of Los Alamos, Siegfried Hecker, who visited North Korea at the invitation of its government, and it is fascinating because it contains so much reported speech from North Korean officials.⁷⁸ We need to hear what they have to say more often.

Reporters will surely protest that it is very hard to get the phone numbers of North Korean officials, and harder still to get comments from them. However, writers such as Don Oberdorfer and Selig Harrison and nuclear experts like James Walsh and Robert Alvarez have succeeded in cultivating contacts in North Korea, showing that it can be done. And the North Koreans have a UN delegation in New York that is listed in the phone book and in the same time zone as the East Coast press. At the very least, it would be refreshing to see the phrase "North Korean officials did not return phone calls seeking comment" in more U.S. media stories.

And if the North Koreans cannot be reached, there are other countries in the region with points of view that too often go unreported in the U.S. press. It is unusual to see a quote from a South Korean, Japanese, or Chinese analyst. But South Korean analysts in particular often have much more information about North Korean factional struggles and perspectives. If these blind spots were corrected, readers would encounter a much richer mix of perspectives in stories about North Korea's nuclear program.

Finally newspaper editors should reevaluate where they draw the boundary between news and opinion. Surely we want a rich array of pungently expressed opinions

on the editorial and op-ed pages. But we would be better served by news stories that omitted sneaking editorializing by journalists expounding on Kim Jong Il's untrustworthiness—surely what should be at stake rather than what should be assumed in a news story. This kind of surreptitious editorializing is like commercial product placement that advertises products outside the advertising zone, slipping past our cognitive defenses. When news is laced with opinion, opinion becomes harder to resist; editors should be on guard against this.

Some of these recommendations go against the tide at a moment when American news corporations are closing foreign bureaus, cutting space for foreign news, and experimenting with more in-your-face writing styles that may appeal to younger readers. At the same time, some American media consumers are becoming disenchanted with American media coverage and, enabled by the internet, are turning to independent and foreign news sources in unprecedented numbers. It is hard to think of a more important issue for the media than how they cover a country whose actions, unless reversed, threaten to blow apart the nuclear nonproliferation regime. If we are to understand the difficulties, but also the possibilities here, we need fewer paranoid, potbellied Stalinists and more sober analyses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author thanks Robert Alvarez, Marvin Miller, and James Walsh for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

NOTES

1. James Dao, "Criticism of Bush's Policy on Korea Sharpens," *New York Times*, March 6, 2003, p. A16.
2. On the 1993–1994 crisis and the negotiation of the Agreed Framework, see David Albright and Kevin O'Neill, eds., *Solving the North Korea Nuclear Puzzle* (Washington, DC: Institute for Science and International Security, 2000); Marion Creekmore, *A Moment of Crisis: Jimmy Carter, The Power of a Peacemaker, and North Korea's Nuclear Ambitions* (New York: Public Affairs Books, 2006); Selig Harrison, *Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); International Institute for Strategic Studies, *North Korea's Weapons Programmes: A Net Assessment* (London: IISS, 2004), <www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/north-korean-dossier>; Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); Charles L. Pritchard, *Failed Diplomacy: The Tragic Story of How North Korea Got the Bomb* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007); Leon V. Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Leon V. Sigal, "Jimmy Carter Makes a Deal," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 54 (January/February 1998), pp. 40–46; Joel S. Wit, Daniel B. Poneman, and Robert L. Galluci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004). The figure of 13,000 artillery pieces comes from Nicholas Kristof, "Secret, Scary Plans," *New York Times*, February 29, 2003, p. A29. The casualty estimates are cited in Michael Hirsh, Melinda Liu, and George Wehrfritz, "'We Are a Nuclear Power': The Weird and Scary Story of How an Isolated, Bankrupt Nation Went Nuclear—and How the United States Failed to Stop It," *Newsweek*, October 23, 2006, pp. 38–39, and Sigal, "Jimmy Carter Makes a Deal."
3. David E. Sanger, "North Koreans Say They Tested Nuclear Device," *New York Times*, October 9, 2006, p. A1.
4. Kim Jong Il quoted in Howard F. French, "Carefully Chosen Inveective," *New York Times*, January 19, 2003, *Week in Review*, p. 3.

5. Department of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, "Background Note: North Korea," September 2007, <www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2792.htm>.
6. William F. Buckley, "North Korea's Nuclear Potential Still Makes South Nervous," *Albuquerque Journal*, May 30, 1992.
7. Dao, "Criticism of Bush's Policy on Korea Sharpens."
8. Seth Mydans, "North Korea Says It Is Withdrawing from Arms Treaty," *New York Times*, January 10, 2003, p. A1.
9. Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Readies Plan to Raise Pressure on North Koreans," *New York Times*, December 29, 2002, p. A1.
10. Walter Pincus, "N. Korean Nuclear Conflict Has Deep Roots," *Washington Post*, October 15, 2006, p. A16.
11. Barry Schweid, "US, Negotiating Partners Eye Economic Aid to N. Korea," *Boston Globe*, June 22, 2004, p. A5.
12. Peter Goodman, "North Korea Tells UN Inspectors to Leave," *Boston Globe*, December 28, 2002, p. A1.
13. IISS, *North Korea's Weapons Programmes*, p. 11.
14. Quoted in Leon V. Sigal, "North Korea: Negotiations Work," MIT Center for International Studies, Audit of Conventional Wisdom Series, 07-03, February 2007, <web.mit.edu/cis/pdf/Audit_02_07_Sigal.pdf>.
15. Schweid, "US, Negotiating Partners Eye Economic Aid to N. Korea."
16. Burt Herman, "North Korea Agrees to End Nuclear Programs," *Associated Press*, September 19, 2005.
17. Dao, "Criticism of Bush's Policy on Korea Sharpens."
18. Sigal, "North Korea: Negotiations Work." More detailed information about U.S. failures in implementing the terms of the Agreed Framework can be found in the Stanley Foundation's policy dialogue brief, "What Did We Learn From KEDO?" (November 2006), and in IISS, *North Korea's Weapons Programmes*, pp. 13–20. See also Robert Alvarez, "North Korea: No Bygones at Yongbyon," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 59 (July/August 2003), pp. 39–45.
19. Quoted in Alex Wagner, "Bush Labels, North Korea, Iran, Iraq an 'Axis of Evil,'" *Arms Control Today* 32 (March 2002), <www.armscontrol.org/act/2002_03/axismarch02.asp>. Don Oberdorfer, a journalist who has, unusually, cultivated North Korean sources, reported: "In our conversations in Pyongyang, the North Korean diplomats whom Kelly saw and Lt. Gen. Ri Chan Bok of the Korean People's Army repeatedly denounced the Bush administration's hostile rhetoric. They expressed concern that the administration, by labeling North Korea a part of the 'axis of evil,' is paving the way for a preemptive strike aimed at forcing the same kind of 'regime change' here that some Americans seek in Iraq." Don Oberdorfer, "My Private Seat at Pyongyang's Table," *Washington Post*, November 10, 2002, p. B3.
20. See Indira Lakshmanan, "'Axis' Nations' Nuclear Aims Test US," *Boston Globe*, December 15, 2002, p. A1. Lakshmanan's reporting on North Korea has been consistently among the most balanced and insightful of any major journalist.
21. Alex Wagner, "Bush Puts N. Korea Negotiations on Hold, Stresses Verification," *Arms Control Today* 31 (April 2001), <www.armscontrol.org/act/2001_04/korea.asp>.
22. On rare occasions where North Korean grievances are alluded to, it is at the end of the article, where few readers venture. For example, in the twenty-seventh paragraph of a twenty-nine-paragraph story in the *New York Times*, on the paper's tenth page, we encounter this quote from Alexandr Rummyantsev, a Russian minister: "No construction work has been carried out in Korea for the past 10 years. As a result, Korea has been left without energy" (James Brooke, "North Korea Says It Plans to Expel Nuclear Monitors," *New York Times*, December 28, 2002, p. A1). One of the few op-ed pieces I have been able to find giving the North Korean perspective was written by former President Jimmy Carter ("Solving the North Korean Stalemate, One Step at a Time," *New York Times*, October 11, 2006, p. A27). Presumably presidents have a special privilege in getting their views published. The North Korean perspective is more often aired in foreign news accounts. A particularly strong example is Gregory Clark, "Pyongyang Is the Real Victim," *Japan Times*, January 10, 2002. Recurrent delays in shipping fuel oil and constructing the reactors were also reported accurately in the specialized press that few read. See, for example, Howard Diamond, "'Canning,' Fuel Deliveries on Track in North Korea," *Arms Control Today* 27 (November/December 1997). (The article's sunny title is not completely consistent with its content.)
23. Under the terms of the agreement, the United States provided no funding for the construction of the reactors.
24. David E. Sanger, "A New Front Opens, But It's Still One War," *New York Times*, October 20, 2002, p. A1.

25. James Brooke, "North Korea's A-Arms Project Jeopardizes Aid, Japan Says," *New York Times*, October 22, 2002, p. A6.
26. Michael R. Gordon, "White House Adds a Crisis," *New York Times*, January 11, 2003, p. A1.
27. Sonni Efron, Henry Chu, and Mark Magnier, "U.S. Begins Diplomatic Offensive on North Korea," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 2002, p. A1.
28. Glenn Kessler and Walter Pincus, "N. Korea Stymied on Plutonium Work, Reprocessing Lab Called Antiquated," *Washington Post*, March 20, 2003, p. A24.
29. David L. Greene and Mark Matthews, "Bush Mentions Force in N. Korea Standoff," *Boston Globe*, March 4, 2003, p. A5.
30. Carol Giacomo, "US Says N. Korea Acknowledges Nuclear Arms Program," *Reuters*, October 16, 2002.
31. Don Oberdorfer, "My Private Seat at Pyongyang's Table." While Kelly told *Arms Control Today* that his counterpart, Kang Sok Ju, "definitely admitted that North Korea was pursuing a uranium-enrichment program," Oberdorfer told the same publication that the North Koreans said they had provided him "the exact words Kang used," which were "that the D.P.R.K. was entitled to possess not only nuclear weapon but any type of weapon more powerful than that so as to defend its sovereignty and right to existence." See Paul Kerr, "KEDO Suspends Oil Shipments to North Korea," *Arms Control Today*, December 2002, <www.armscontrol.org/act/2002_12/kedo_dec02.asp>. Another version of the conversation between Kelly and the North Koreans is relayed by Selig Harrison: "According to Kelly, the North Korean official, First Deputy Foreign Minister Kang Sok Ju, acknowledged the existence of such a program at the time. But Kang has subsequently denied this; what he actually told Kelly, according to Foreign Minister Paek Nam Sun, was deliberately ambiguous: that North Korea is 'entitled' to have such a program or 'an even more powerful one' to deter a pre-emptive U.S. attack. According to Paek, Kang also stated that North Korea is entitled to pursue an 'ncnd' (neither confirm nor deny) policy concerning the specifics of its nuclear capabilities, just as the United States does—especially since the two countries remain belligerents in the technically unfinished Korean War." Selig Harrison, "Did North Korea Cheat?" *Foreign Affairs* 84 (January/February 2005), <www.foreignaffairs.org/20050101faessay84109/selig-s-harrison/did-north-korea-cheat.html>.
32. Surprisingly, North Korea even offered to give up both its nuclear programs in return for diplomatic recognition, legal assurances of nonaggression (including non-use of nuclear weapons), and not hindering its economic development: "They did suggest after this harsh and—personally, to me—surprising admission that there were measures that might be taken that were generally along those lines," Ambassador James Kelly told a reporter. Kelly rejected North Korea's overture. See Doug Struck, "North Korean Program Not Negotiable, U.S. Told N. Korea," *Washington Post*, October 20, 2002, p. A18. See also Yoichi Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question: A Chronicle of the Second Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), pp. 94–95.
33. Barbara Slavin and John Diamond, "N. Korean Nuclear Efforts Looking Less Threatening," *USA Today*, November 4, 2003, p. 18A.
34. On North Korea's denials, see Lakshmanan, "'Axis' Nations' Nuclear Aims Test US."
35. A detailed discussion of publicly available evidence can be found in IISS, *North Korea's Weapons Programmes*, pp. 39–42. See also Mary Beth Dunham Nikitin, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons: Latest Developments," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, November 21, 2007, pp. 10–13, <www.fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/RL34256.pdf>.
36. Paul Kerr, "Deconstructed: North Korea's Nuclear Programs," *Arms Control Today* 34 (January/February 2004), <www.armscontrol.org/act/2004_01-02/Deconstructed.asp>.
37. Paul Kerr, "Doubts Rise on North Korea's Uranium-Enrichment Program," *Arms Control Today* 37 (April 2007), <www.armscontrol.org/act/2007_04/NewsAnalysis.asp>.
38. Hirsh, Liu, and Wehrfritz, "'We Are a Nuclear Power,'" p. 38. This is not the only example of the press trumpeting claims about North Korea's program that were later quietly withdrawn. For example, on May 6, 2005, in a story picked up by many other newspapers, the *New York Times* reported in a front-page article that there was activity at a suspected North Korean site that indicated an imminent nuclear test. The construction of a luxurious viewing stand, clearly visible to satellites, was the most spectacular smoking gun. By July the *New York Times* was reporting that "one senior administration official said he believed an image was initially 'misinterpreted' as part of the suspected test site. . . . Officials who initially spoke about the reviewing stand, and described it as luxurious, backed away beginning in late May after the *Times* asked further questions, saying additional reviews of the

- evidence raised serious doubts about whether the structure was a reviewing stand or even related to the test site" (Douglas Jehl and David E. Sanger, "North Korea Nuclear Goals: Case of Mixed Signals," *New York Times*, July 25, 2005, p. A1). Similarly, in 2006 "intelligence reports" showed that North Korea had fueled a missile and, given that the missile could not be defueled, a missile test was reported by the *New York Times* as imminent. The missile test never took place. A few days later the *Times* reported that "two officials said the intelligence could, at best, be interpreted as offering only a prudent assumption that the missile was fueled, and that intelligence analysts had described an already fueled missile as a worst-case scenario" (Thom Shanker and David E. Sanger, "Senator Says North Korean Missile Firing May Not Be Imminent," *New York Times*, June 28, 2006, p. A5).
39. See Selig Harrison, "Did North Korea Cheat?" for an argument exploring the parallel with intelligence on Iraq that "the Bush administration presented a worst-case scenario as an incontrovertible truth and distorted its intelligence on North Korea (much as it did on Iraq), seriously exaggerating the danger that Pyongyang is secretly making uranium-based nuclear weapons." Harrison suggests that North Korea may have been in the early stages of acquiring a capability to enrich uranium to the low levels needed for nuclear energy generation.
 40. Steven R. Weisman, "Weighing 'Deterrence' vs. 'Aggression,'" *New York Times*, October 18, 2002, p. A6.
 41. David E. Sanger, "Nuclear Chat: Deciding on the Enemy Worth Talking To," *New York Times*, February 18, 2007, Week in Review, p. 1; David E. Sanger, "Next Question: How to Stop the Nuclear Blackmail," *New York Times*, March 9, 2003, Week in Review p. 1.
 42. Hirsh, Liu, and Wehrfritz, "'We Are a Nuclear Power,'" pp. 28–39.
 43. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
 44. Bill Keller, "At The Other End of the Axis: Some F.A.Q.s," *New York Times*, January 11, 2003, p. A33.
 45. Jim Hoagland, "The Squeeze on North Korea," *Washington Post*, October 12, 2006, p. A27.
 46. Elizabeth Williamson, "Hitting Kim Right in the Cognac," *Washington Post*, November 30, 2006, p. A1.
 47. Helene Cooper and Michael Gordon, "North Koreans Reported Closer to a Missile Test," *New York Times*, June 19, 2006, p. A1.
 48. Editorial, "North Korea's Incredibly Bad Idea," *New York Times*, June 20, 2006, p. A20.
 49. Sonni Efron, "Fear Seen as Driving N. Korea Disclosure," *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 2002, p. A1.
 50. Glenn Kessler, "N. Korea Warned on Testing Missile," *Washington Post*, June 20, 2006, p. A11.
 51. Glenn Kessler, "N. Korean Move Comes Amid Bid for Talks," *Washington Post*, October 4, 2006, p. A20.
 52. Indira Lakshmanan, "N. Korean Issues Threat to US," *Boston Globe*, February 7, 2003, p. A8.
 53. Nicholas Kristof, "Empire of a Devil," *New York Times*, April 29, 2003, p. A 29. Rice is quoted in David E. Sanger, "2 Nuclear Weapons Challenges, 2 Different Strategies," *New York Times*, June 21, 2003, p. A3.
 54. Editorial, "Nuclear Blackmail," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 13, 2006, p. C12.
 55. Cal Thomas and Bob Beckel, "RX for North Korea: Blockade, Regime Change," *USA Today*, October 12, 2006, p. A13.
 56. Editorial, "Dear Leader's Bomb," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, October 4, 2006, p. B8.
 57. Gary Hufbauer, "Confronting the 'Dear Leader,'" *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 2006, p. B17.
 58. William Safire, "Korea's Golden Unwedding," *New York Times*, July 3, 2003, p. A23.
 59. Jim Hoagland, "Two Perfect Storms for Iran and North Korea," *Washington Post*, September 25, 2005, p. B7.
 60. Editorial, "Trust but Verify," *Boston Herald*, February 14, 2007, p. 20.
 61. James Sterngold, "How Deal on North Korea Nuclear Program Was Cut," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 14, p. A1.
 62. Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea*.
 63. Leon V. Sigal, "Allies Resist Bush Arm-Twisting on N. Korea," *Boston Globe*, May 23, 2003, p. A15.
 64. See Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Knopf, 1984).
 65. The situation is even worse for the other leading expert on North Korean political culture and its nuclear program—Selig Harrison. In five years he was quoted just six times in the American press. Like Sigal, Harrison is quoted much more often in the Australian and British media than in his own country's. In fact he did better with London's (conservative) *Financial Times*—two opinion pieces and eight articles quoting him in five years—than he did with the entire print media apparatus of the United States.
 66. Walter Pincus, "U.S. Nuclear Arms Stance Modified by Policy Study," *Washington Post*, March 23, 2002, p. A14.

67. Weisman, "Weighing 'Deterrence' vs. 'Aggression,'" p. A6.
68. James Dao, "The Pact That the Koreans Flouted," *New York Times*, October 17, 2002, p. A8.
69. Editorial, "North Korea: Will U.S. Really Negotiate in Beijing?" *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, April 27, 2003, p. A14.
70. Editorial, "North Korea Comes in From the Cold," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 14, 2007, p. 8.
71. Editorial, "Nuclear Headway," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, February 15, 2007, p. B8.
72. John O'Sullivan, "'Success' in N. Korea Will Fail in Long Run," *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 20, 2007, p. 27.
73. Harrison, "Did North Korea Cheat?"
74. David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, "U.S. Had Doubts on North Korean Nuclear Drive," *New York Times*, March 1, 2007, p. A1; Glenn Kessler, "N. Korea Offers Evidence to Rebut Uranium Claims," *Washington Post*, November 10, 2007, p. A1.
75. Harrison, "Did North Korea Cheat?" For the text of the Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, see <www.state.gov/t/ac/rls/or/2004/31011.htm>. For more on South Korea's clandestine nuclear research, see Dafna Linzer, "S. Korea Nuclear Project Detailed," *Washington Post*, September 12, 2004, p. A24; Jungmin Kang, Peter Hayes, Li Bin, Tasujiro Suzuki, and Richard Tanter, "South Korea's Nuclear Surprise," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 61 (January/February 2005), pp. 40–49.
76. Mark Mazzetti, "In '97, U.S. Panel Predicted a North Korean Collapse in 5 Years," *New York Times*, October 27, 2006, p. A6.
77. James Laney and Jason T. Shaplen, "Talking is Better than Fighting," *New York Times*, September 2, 2003, p. A23.
78. Siegfried S. Hecker, "The Nuclear Crisis in North Korea," *MRS Bulletin*, November 2004, pp. 782–785.