Pyongyang's Survival Strategy

Tools of Authoritarian Control in North Korea

Daniel Byman and Jennifer Lind

In the early 1990s, many observers predicted that Kim Il-sung's regime would not survive the cessation of Russian aid and the resulting downward spiral of North Korea's economy. Speculation about regime collapse intensified when the less charismatic Kim Jong-il succeeded his father in 1994, and again after the 1996–97 famine that killed upwards of a million North Koreans. Gen. Gary Luck, commander of U.S. forces in Korea, declared in 1997 that North Korea would "disintegrate." That same year, a U.S. government and outside team of experts predicted regime collapse within five years.[1] Another decade brought more prognostications: in 2000 Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet warned that "sudden, radical, and possibly dangerous change remains a real possibility in North Korea, and that change could come at any time."[2] Three years later, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz said that North Korea was "teetering on the edge of economic collapse."[3] Contemporary accounts warn that the regime is threatened by the growing flow of information into the country or by popular outcry touched off by the government's 2009 bungling of currency reform.[4]

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1. Quoted in Bruce Cumings, *North Korea: Another Country* (New York: New Press, 2004), p. 199. For reviews of this literature, see Marcus Noland, "North Korea after Kim Jong-il," No. 71 (Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 2004), pp. 12–15; and Kongdan Oh and Ralph Hassig, "North Korea between Collapse and Reform," *Asian Survey,* Vol. 39, No. 2 (March/April 1999), p. 289 n. 4.
2. George J. Tenet, director of Central Intelligence, statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "The Worldwide Threat in 2000: Global Realities of Our National Security," 106th Cong., 2d sess., March 21, 2000, https://www.cia.gov/news-information/speeches-testimony/2000/dci_speech_032100.html.
3. U.S. Department of Defense, "Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz Q&A Following IISS Asia Security Conference," Singapore, Singapore, May 31, 2003, http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2704.
4. Choe Sang-hun, "Economic Measures by North Korea Prompt New Hardships and Unrest," *New York Times,* February 3, 2010. On information flows, see Andrei Lankov, "Changing North

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Reports of the Kim regime's death, however, have been greatly exaggerated. What has kept the regime in power despite the many challenges it confronts? What are the implications for the regime's future durability and for its foreign policy? Understanding the answers to these questions is vital for informing U.S. policy, which at times has been predicated on predictions of the regime's short lifespan. In 1994, some officials in Bill Clinton's administration reportedly agreed to support the provision of light water reactors to North Korea under the assumption that the country's imminent collapse meant that Washington would not have to deliver on its promises.[5]

Furthermore, knowledge of what underpins the regime's power is essential for understanding which coercive levers are more or less likely to influence its decisionmaking, particularly with regard to North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Indeed, the significance of this topic goes well beyond North Korea: the United States regularly confronts a range of autocracies that endure despite their cruelty and mismanagement (Iran being another prominent example).[6] Washington must understand what keeps these regimes in power as it strives to weaken or contain them. Understanding Kim Jong-il's tenacity is also vital for social science, which often regards famine, economic disasters, legitimacy challenges, and other crises as death knells for an authoritarian regime.

Drawing from a literature about authoritarian control, we argue that the Kim regime relies on several tools to stay in power: restrictive social policies; manipulation of ideas and information; use of force; co-optation; manipulation of foreign governments; and institutional coup-proofing. These tools help to explain its seemingly puzzling survival and suggest that a revolution or coup d'état in North Korea remains unlikely.

When designing coercive strategies, such as economic sanctions, U.S. and international policymakers should target the regime's elite core rather than the country as a whole. Most traditional means of coercion, such as broad sanctions or limited military strikes, are likely to fail or may even increase the Kim regime's control. With regard to North Korea's nuclear program, in particular, the United States must recognize that much of its logic is internal to the regime, helping it to win the support of key constituents: therefore security guar-

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Korea," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 88, No. 6 (November/December 2009), pp. 95–105; and Choe Sang-hun, "North Koreans Use Cellphones to Bare Secrets," *New York Times,* March 29, 2010.

5. Selig S. Harrison, *Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 4.

6. Richard Bernstein, "In Tehran, Shades of Tiananmen," *New York Times,* July 1, 2009. Many U.S. officials expected Saddam Hussein's regime to fall in the aftermath of his Desert Storm defeat. Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin, 2007).

antees or other inducements that try to reduce Pyongyang's external threat environment will be of only limited effectiveness.

The literature on authoritarian control applied to the North Korean case predicts the Kim regime's continued resilience. Does this mean that the regime will survive indefinitely? Not necessarily. What this body of theory does, at its best, is allow scholars and policymakers to identify which categories of events are more or less likely to occur. As is always the case in social science, there are factors that affect politics on the ground, which even the best theories do not capture, and which this analysis will thus not consider. There is always, as Niccolò Machiavelli put it, *fortuna* whose whims a leader may or may not survive.[7] Nevertheless, to contribute to the debate about the Kim regime's future, we argue that a substantial theoretical literature would hold that the factors that promote regime stability continue to be present in North Korea.

In the next section, we outline theories about how dictators stay in power, support them with additional evidence from autocracies in the Middle East and North Africa, and apply them to the North Korean case to understand the strength of the regime's position there. We show that the Kim regime, far from being sui generis or led by erratic leaders, has pursued a wide range of policies that have sustained dictators all over the world. Before concluding, we address several important counterarguments to our findings. In the final section, we discuss the implications of this analysis for regime stability and for U.S. policy toward Pyongyang.

The Authoritarian Toolbox in North Korea

Authoritarian regimes are threatened by popular revolution (whether peaceful or violent) or by a coup led by the military or other elites.[8] A large literature has identified and substantiated how dictators survive in the face of these threats.[9] From this literature, we develop a "toolbox" that dictators rely on to

7. On contingency, see Richard J. Samuels, *Machiavelli's Children: Leaders and Their Legacies in Italy and Japan* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 4; and Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule:* Vol. 4, *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

8. Authoritarian regimes may also be toppled by a foreign power. This article does not examine how leaders protect themselves from this threat; we consider external forces only insofar as they influence a leader's ability to defeat domestic opponents.

9. Classic works on revolution include Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987); Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978), and Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971). Particularly important for our work are studies that look at crises within a regime and how these produce

stay in power. This toolbox contains the following instruments: restrictive social policies; manipulation of ideas and information; use of force; co-optation; manipulation of foreign governments; and institutional coup-proofing.

PREVENTING REVOLUTION IN NORTH KOREA

To prevent popular unrest from toppling the regime, the Kim family has relied heavily on three tools: restrictive social policies that prevent potentially hostile social classes from forming and create society's dependence on the state; manipulation of ideas and information to increase the regime's legitimacy and weaken that of potential opponents; and the heavy use of force to deter or crush potential resistance.

RESTRICTIVE SOCIAL POLICIES. Authoritarian regimes use restrictive social policies to engineer a society in which organized dissent is both dangerous and difficult, if not impossible. First, scholars have argued that certain social groups are highly influential in sparking revolution: Misagh Parsa finds that the interaction of four groups—clergy, workers, students, and businesspeople—influences revolutionary change, with students in particular playing a key role.[10] Second, scholars have emphasized the role of the middle class in promoting democratic change.[11]

The size, power, and independence of social groups, and thus the threat they pose to a regime, are shaped by government policies. In other words, authoritarian regimes stunt the development of potential challengers.[12] Within communist systems, as J.C. Sharman notes, "The circumstances are hostile to dissenting collective action because of revolutionary changes that have been made to social structures by the state itself, including the dissolution of the possessing class, expropriation of the national patrimony, and suppression of independent associations."[13]

In the Arab Gulf monarchies, social policy neutralizes the middle class as a potential source of opposition. Regime control of oil income has made the mid-

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breakdown. See O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule;* and S.N. Eisenstadt, "The Breakdown of Communist Regimes and the Vicissitudes of Modernity," *Daedalus,* Vol. 121, No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 21–41.

10. Misagh Parsa, *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of Iran, Nicaragua, and the Philippines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

11. Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon, 1966), p. 418; and Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989).

12. Jan T. Gross calls such repressive states "spoiler states." Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988).

13. J.C. Sharman, *Repression and Resistance in Communist Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 40–41.

dle classes dependent and docile: in Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, oil-rich regimes need not draw revenue from taxation, which provides a common source of popular input into decisionmaking. The continued good fortune of the middle class depends on regime largesse. Thus, rather than serving as the backbone of revolution, these middle classes are highly vulnerable to even modest regime pressure.[14]

Authoritarian regimes also prevent the development of independent civil society, which has long been noted as a building block for democratic institutions.[15] Thus they inhibit the creation of "coordination goods" that limit the scope of opposition or prevent it from mobilizing in the first place.[16] They restrict free speech and rights of assembly; they outlaw any organization independent of the regime. The goal at the heart of this policy is to prevent people from developing relationships and networks of trust that can be used as the basis for mobilized political opposition.

Social policies in the Arab world have deliberately undermined (or prevented the creation of) institutions. Whereas some groups are simply banned outright, in other cases, the state takes over the organizational function. In Morocco under Hassan II, for example, even innocuous organizations such as soccer clubs had to be state-run.[17] In many Arab countries, mosques must be registered with the government, and their imams approved. Government infiltration and control of such organizations allow the government to prevent the emergence of anti-regime activity, and to direct agendas in ways that benefit the regime.[18] Where independent civil society is nonexistent, the system revolves entirely around the regime's leader. As Tunisia's late president Habib Bourguiba once told an interviewer, "What system? I *am* the system!"[19]

North Korea is no stranger to such social manipulation. From its inception,

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14. For a review, see F. Gregory Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994); and Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics,* Vol. 36, No. 2 (January 2004), p. 144.
15. Gideon Baker, "The Taming of the Idea of Civil Society," *Democratization,* Vol. 6, No. 3 (Autumn 1999), pp. 1–29; Larry Diamond, "Toward Democratic Consolidation," *Journal of Democracy,* Vol. 5, No. 3 (July 1994), pp. 4–17; and Minxin Pei, *From Reform to Revolution: The Demise of Communism in China and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).
16. See Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and George W. Downs, "Democracy and Development," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 84, No. 5 (September/October 2005), pp. 82–83 at p. 84.
17. Daniel L. Byman, *Keeping the Peace: Lasting Solutions to Ethnic Conflicts* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).
18. Deborah B. Balser, "The Impact of Environmental Factors on Factionalism and Schism in Social Movement Organizations," *Social Forces,* Vol. 76, No. 1 (September 1997), p. 218.
19. Clement Henry Moore, *Tunisia since Independence: The Dynamics of One-Party Government* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), quoted in Lisa Anderson, "Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East," *Political Science Quarterly,* Vol. 106, No. 1 (Spring 1991), p. 11 (emphasis in the original).

Kim Il-sung's regime conducted extensive social engineering: upending the social order by lifting the long-abused North Korean peasants into the position of the favored caste and creating an elite class composed of revolutionaries who had fought in the anti-Japanese insurgency in Manchuria from 1931 to 1945. As part of this social engineering, the Kim regime reduced the chances of a popular revolt by stunting the development of societal groups whose role is often significant in revolution. At the most basic level, North Korean communism stripped the possessing class of ownership of the factors of production, thus preventing the development of a bourgeoisie. Communism also eliminated the clergy, another group that often provides important leadership during revolution.[20] The regime has relied on intellectuals to craft propaganda, but North Korean intellectuals "certainly have not been engaged in a 'quest for the truth,'" writes Helen-Louise Hunter: "They are technically trained bureaucrats, imbued with Kim Il-song's teachings."[21]

The activities of intellectuals, students, and all other social groups are tightly restricted because the government has quashed the development of an independent civil society. All organizations are created, operated, and monitored by the Korean Workers' Party (KWP). Students, for example, are organized into the Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League, which is responsible for political indoctrination of all youths aged eighteen to twenty-eight.[22] By inserting the party into every organized social interaction, the regime obstructs the development of revolutionary political thought or activity.

IDEAS AND INFORMATION. Authoritarian regimes also use ideas and the control of information to legitimize their rule. As Max Weber noted, power needs to justify itself.[23] Regimes often provide an ideology—religious legitimacy, socialism, Arabism, and so on—to justify their hold on power. Ideology provides a way of understanding the world and a model for future action.[24] If it is successfully inculcated, leaders can legitimize their priorities, rationalize their mistakes, and convince the people that they should be followed simply because it is the right thing to do, even if the followers would suffer no consequences if they did not obey. Ideology and legitimacy also inhibit opposition.

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20. The regime's early tolerance for Christianity was short-lived, and religious leaders ultimately fled south. Charles K. Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945–1950* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 117. See also Andrei Lankov, *North of the DMZ: Essays on Daily Life in North Korea* (Jefferson, N.C.: Macfarlane, 2007), pp. 204–209.
21. Helen-Louise Hunter, *Kim Il-song's North Korea* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1999), p. 212. See also Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution,* p. 169.
22. Hunter, *Kim Il-song's North Korea,* p. 60; and Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution,* p. 213.
23. Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 953.
24. See, in particular, Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), pp. 193–233.

Revolutions require a flag under which to rally, without which they are inchoate and ephemeral.[25] A regime with a robust ideology inhibits opposition from forming because rivals will find it more difficult to gain popular support. With this in mind, it is not surprising that a commonality of many successful revolutions is the prominent role of intellectuals.[26]

Another way a leader can gain legitimacy is through developing a cult of personality. The cult often tries to create charisma where none exists or where it is at risk of being undermined or routinized. As Weber noted, when charisma is accepted, the charismatic leader can break all rules and norms.[27] Perhaps equally important, the cult of personality weakens the position of other elites who might be rivals to the leader.

Nationalistic credibility is a particularly important form of regime legitimacy. Leaders emphasize the idea that "the people" should have sovereignty and should be the locus of political loyalty and identity.[28] Even governments that justify their rule in the name of credos that have little to do with "the nation" (religion, pan-Arabism, the consent of the governed) often highlight their nationalistic credentials. Iran's theocratic regime, for example, regularly emphasizes Persian nationalism in its rhetoric, and communist China and the Soviet Union often played to Chinese and Russian nationalisms.

Nationalism often has a xenophobic nature, as authoritarian regimes cultivate legitimacy by denouncing foreign enemies.[29] Leaders dodge responsibility for the country's problems by decrying foreign machinations, cast domestic political rivals as traitorous pawns of foreign enemies, and use these enemies to justify high military budgets. This credo also rationalizes an aggressive security service that, in the name of defeating foreign-backed traitors, can monitor and disrupt internal political activity.

All of these ideational tools require control of the information environment.

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25. Eisenstadt, "The Breakdown of Communist Regimes and the Vicissitudes of Modernity," p. 35; Carlos M. Vilas, "Between Market Democracies and Capitalist Globalization: Is There Any Prospect for Social Revolution in Latin America?" *Socialism and Democracy,* Vol. 16, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 137–151; and Jeffrey Berejikian, "Revolutionary Collective Action and the Agent-Structure Problem," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 86, No. 3 (September 1992), p. 655. On the significance of ideology in communist regime resilience after 1989, see Martin Dimitrov, "Why Communism Didn't Collapse: Exploring Regime Resilience in China, Vietnam, Laos, North Korea, and Cuba," pp. 20–26, paper presented at the conference "Why Communism Didn't Collapse: Understanding Regime Resilience in China, Vietnam, Laos, North Korea, and Cuba," Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, May 25–26, 2007.
26. Eisenstadt, "The Breakdown of Communist Regimes and the Vicissitudes of Modernity," p. 22.
27. On cults of personality, see Weber, *Economy and Society,* pp. 215, 241–254, 1112–1115.
28. This draws on Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 3.
29. Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

The "marketplace of ideas" in liberal democratic states should puncture a cult of personality and challenge xenophobic myths.[30] By controlling ideas and information, authoritarian regimes increase their legitimacy in the eyes of the governed and inhibit the formation of opposition.

Authoritarian leaders in the Middle East have relied heavily on ideological tools of control. In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Egypt, Syria, and Libya portrayed themselves as leaders of a socialist and Arab nationalist camp, whereas Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Jordan tried to placate Arab nationalism while presenting their legitimacy in terms of monarchical tradition and religion. Some leaders depended heavily on their charisma. Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini appears almost to have sprung from the pages of Weber, compelling near-fanatical loyalty among many of his people.[31] In Iraq Saddam Hussein created a cult of personality, in an effort to achieve godlike status. Other regimes were less extreme, but they too extolled the wisdom of the political leadership and refused to tolerate direct criticism of the king or president.

Middle Eastern regimes also exploit foreign intervention to stir up nationalism to bolster their domestic positions. For Iran the history of foreign intervention, including the toppling of Mohammad Mosaddeq's regime in 1953, made subsequent regime claims of U.S. and British meddling more credible.[32] The 1956 Suez War (in which Egypt went to war with Israel, France, and the United Kingdom) was a military defeat but a resounding political victory for Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. His defiance in the face of outside pressure lionized him at home and among many Arabs outside Egypt. As Robert Pape writes, "External pressure is more likely to enhance the nationalist legitimacy of rulers rather than to undermine it."[33]

North Korea's highly indigenized ideology and, in particular, nationalism helped to sustain the regime amid the collapse of other Marxist-Leninist regimes in the 1990s.[34] The regime inculcates its ideas into the North Korean people through every possible medium, including education, arts and enter-

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30. Stephen Van Evera, "Hypotheses on Nationalism and War," *International Security,* Vol. 18, No. 4 (Spring 1994), pp. 32–33.
31. See James Jankowski, *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2001); and Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
32. Mark J. Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, eds., *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2004); and Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004).
33. Robert A. Pape, "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work," *International Security,* Vol. 22, No. 2 (Fall 1997), p. 107.
34. Cumings, *North Korea;* Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution,* p. 4; Dimitrov, "Why Communism Didn't Collapse"; and Kongdan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), p. 17.

tainment, monuments and memorialization, and the epic Mass Games stadium shows. *Juche* ideology, created by Kim Il-sung, is "the absolute given of North Korean life, the defining characteristic of the nation and of any 'good' North Korean."[35] *Juche* is typically translated as "self-reliance," or as solving your own problems under all circumstances.[36] It prescribes citizens to use creativity and independence to build a thriving society, so North Korea can protect itself from its capitalist enemies. Economically, *juche* prescribes autarky.[37]

Another important aspect of North Korean ideology is the Supreme Leader (*suryong*) system, which established Kim Il-sung as the "sun of the nation" and the "eternal President of the Republic."[38] Charles Armstrong writes that the Kim family, with patriarch Kim Il-sung, "became a kind of substitute and symbol for the family of the Korean nation." As B.R. Myers argues, the North Korean narrative limns its people as childlike innocents in a hostile, impure world, protected by their "Parent Leader." Bruce Cumings emphasizes the compatibility of the *suryong* system with fundamental Korean values such as Confucianism: "Loyalty and filial piety," he notes, "form the deepest wellsprings of Korean virtue."[39] Regime mythology represents Kim Il-sung as a filial son of an anti-Japanese fighter, descended from a pantheon of revolutionary ancestors; Kim's filial son, Kim Jong-il, carries on in this tradition.[40]

The *suryong* system is propagated through a ubiquitous cult of personality. Even after his death, Kim Il-sung remains the Supreme Leader and head of the North Korean family. His birthday (April 15) is still the most important ceremonial day of the year; the year of his birth (1912) marks Year 1 of the North Korean calendar. In 1995, while people were perishing from food shortages, Kim Jong-il spent $1 billion to expand the Kumsusan Memorial Palace, where his father's body is entombed. Upwards of 35,000 statues of Kim Il-sung dominate public squares around the country, notably the sixty-five-foot bronze statue in Pyongyang. The International Friendship Exhibition showcases gifts from world leaders as evidence of global reverence for the Kim regime.

As for Kim Jong-il's personality cult, the regime reports that the Dear Leader

35. Oh and Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass*, p. 15.
36. Cumings, *North Korea*, p. 158. This section draws on Bradley K. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2004), p. 123.
37. Quoted in Nicholas Eberstadt, *The End of North Korea* (Washington, D.C.: American Economic Institute Press, 1999), p. 13.
38. Samuel S. Kim, "Introduction: A Systems Approach," in Kim, ed., *The North Korean System in the Post–Cold War Era* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 14.
39. Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution*, pp. 222–223; B.R. Myers, *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves—And Why It Matters* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Melville House, 2010); and Cumings, *North Korea*, p. 107. See also Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), pp. 409–411; and Selig S. Harrison, "Time to Leave Korea?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 2 (March/April 2001), pp. 70–71.
40. Oh and Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass*, p. 100; and Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution*, p. 226.

was born on Mount Paektu, a beloved Korean national symbol (historians say he was born in the Soviet Union during the Korean insurgency). Kanggye, where the mountain is located, is replete with "Kim Jong-il Slept Here" markers; one entire district of Kanggye city is essentially a monument to him.[41] A badge bearing the visage of one of the Kims is mandatory for every lapel, symbolizing citizenship and membership in the North Korean family. Giant portraits of father and son gaze down on all public squares and are required in every household and office.[42]

The Kim regime also rests on the mythology of the anti-Japanese insurgency in Manchuria: the heart of Korean propaganda, storytelling, and arts.[43] Kim Il-sung fanned his anti-Japanese guerrilla experiences in Manchuria into a heroic anti-imperialist struggle. The mythology serves as North Korea's "Genesis," justifies Kim's position as *suryong,* and legitimates the exalted status of the guerrilla elite, without which North Korea could not have expelled the imperialists and achieved its liberation. (No allies toward this end are acknowledged.) The Manchurian mythology also legitimates the military's powerful role in North Korean society: propaganda constantly links the Korean People's Army to the heroic band of guerrillas.

At the core of the Manchurian mythology, and prevalent in North Korean nationalism more broadly, is pronounced xenophobia. In its modern history, Korea has experienced constant invasion and domination by great powers; it has been a thoroughfare they cross to fight one another and a zone over which they vie for control. Cumings argues that North Korea "is first of all, and above all, an anti-Japanese entity," and that anti-Japanese sentiment "is drummed into the brains of everyone in the country."[44] Propaganda demonizes the United States for dividing the peninsula, for engaging in various kinds of aggression and atrocities (real and imagined), for attempting to subjugate Korea and turn it over to the Japanese imperialists, and for preventing national unification. Myers describes the deeply racist overtones of North Korean nationalism: how propaganda denigrates the Japanese and Americans as bastards, jackals, and swine—who have "snouts" rather than noses and who "croak" rather than die.[45] The North Korean narrative depicts South Koreans as contaminated by association with the impure Americans and as *juche*'s mirror

41. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader,* p. 390.
42. Hunter, *Kim Il-song's North Korea,* p. 14.
43. This paragraph draws from Cumings, *North Korea,* pp. 124–127. See also Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution,* pp. 227–228.
44. Bruce Cumings, "Why Didn't North Korea Collapse, and Why Did So Many Influential Americans Think It Would?" paper presented at the conference "Why Communism Didn't Collapse," pp. 19–20; and Lankov, *North of the DMZ,* pp. 45–49.
45. Myers, *The Cleanest Race,* chap. 5; Cumings, *North Korea,* chap. 1; Lankov, *North of the DMZ,* pp. 45–48; and Harrison, *Korean Endgame,* chap. 2.

image—servile flunkeys to American masters. Thus, according to this view, only North Koreans truly represent Korean nationalism.[46] Pyongyang stokes such xenophobia to increase regime legitimacy, fan fears of threat and encirclement, and cast domestic political opponents as traitors. Xenophobia justifies high military spending and the "military first" ideology (*songun*) promulgated by Kim Jong-il after his father's death.

As the regime inculcates its ideologies and cult of personality, it strives for tight control of information. North Korean schools educate the people in *juche* and Kim worship. One study estimates that 35 percent of elementary school education is political education; this ratio rises to 40 percent at the university level.[47] All subjects are imbued with nationalistic content: for example, one primary school mathematics textbook queries: "The brave uncles from the Korean People's Army destroyed six tanks of the wolf-like American bastards. Then they destroyed two more. How many tanks did they destroy all together?"[48] Schoolchildren and adults alike must participate in daily political study groups, where they are quizzed about *juche* thought and history and instructed to memorize lists of significant dates and long speeches by Kim Il-sung. The party-appointed neighborhood chiefs monitor attendance and performance.[49] People who the government believes are particularly at risk (e.g., those with contact with the outside world, political prisoners, and high-level officials) undergo the highest levels of political indoctrination and monitoring.

Pyongyang goes to great lengths to deny its people the ability to access foreign information. All media are state-run, with radios and televisions (luxury items) fixed to government-run stations. People can tinker with their radios to access foreign stations, but if inspectors discover such treachery during a surprise home search, the accused will be severely punished. North Korea has almost no internet access, except among a few elites, whose computer usage is closely monitored. Cellphone usage is similarly and severely curtailed, despite the limited successes of human rights groups to distribute phones to northerners to break the regime's information grip.[50]

The regime also tries to deny its people direct contact with foreigners. Ordinary citizens are not permitted to travel abroad; visitors to North Korea are

46. Harrison, *Korean Endgame,* p. 11; and Myers, *The Cleanest Race,* chap. 6.
47. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader,* p. 167.
48. Quoted in Lankov, *North of the DMZ,* p. 47. This section also draws on Oh and Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass,* pp. 140–142; and Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution,* pp. 174–180.
49. Hunter, *Kim Il-song's North Korea,* p. 21; and Oh and Hassig, *North Korea,* pp. 136, 142.
50. Joseph S. Bermudez, "Information and the DPRK's Military and Power-Holding Elite," in Kongdan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig, eds., "North Korean Policy Elites," IDA Paper, P-3903 (Alexandria, Va.: Institute for Defense Analysis, June 2004), pp. I-14 to I-15; and Sang-hun, "North Koreans Use Cellphones to Bare Secrets."

permitted no unaccompanied or spontaneous contact with its people. During the famine, foreign relief workers were escorted and were kept out of whole swaths of the country.[51] The regime tightly restricts the few areas in which North Koreans might interact with foreigners. North Korean workers in the special economic zones or in Russian timber or mining industries are told to avoid foreign contact and are constantly watched by informers.

Many observers testify to a profound decrease in information control since the 1996–97 famine.[52] With officials such as border guards and train conductors desperate for funds and food, bribes are common, so the regime's legendary efforts at control are said to be growing more lax. As a result, North Koreans are increasingly crossing borders in search of food and livelihoods from smuggling, and are thus witnessing China's and South Korea's relative prosperity. Additionally, the goods that smugglers carry—particularly South Korea's cast-off VCRs and videotapes of South Korean movies and television shows—spread the word to the people back home. Thus contemporary accounts suggest that the regime's ability to control information is decreasing.

USE OF FORCE. In the event that the information campaign fails, nationalism wanes, and independent social classes emerge, authoritarian leaders retain their most important tool for staying in power: the regular and often brutal use of force. Loyal and effective security forces are a vital component of this strategy.[53] Through their apparent willingness to use force, authoritarian regimes create a collective-action problem for would-be revolutionaries. Force makes protest more costly. Effective repression can compel individuals not to support an insurgency, even if they sympathize with the anti-regime agenda.[54]

Authoritarian regimes monitor the population and use force to suppress both individual and mobilized opposition. They traditionally rely on infiltration and informers to discover anti-regime activity. Saddam Hussein's Iraq, for

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51. Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, *Famine in North Korea: Markets, Aid, and Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 92–97.

52. Lankov, "Changing North Korea"; Christian Caryl, "The Other North Korea," *New York Review of Books,* August 14, 2008; Bonnie Glaser, Scott Snyder, and John Park, "Keeping an Eye on an Unruly Neighbor: Chinese Views of Economic Reform and Stability in North Korea" (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2008), p. 16; "Survival of the Fittest," *Economist,* September 27–29, 2008, pp. 13–15; and Barbara Demick, "Trading Ideals for Sustenance," *Los Angeles Times,* July 4, 2005.

53. On the use of force, see Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf Jr., *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts* (Chicago: Markham, 1971); Ian Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980); Mark R. Thompson, "To Shoot or Not to Shoot: Posttotalitarianism in China and Eastern Europe," *Comparative Politics,* Vol. 34, No. 1 (October 2001), pp. 63–83; and Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2000), pp. 100–101. On the role of the security services, see James T. Quinlivan, "Coup-proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," *International Security,* Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 148, 153–154; Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions,* pp. 284–328; and Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East," p. 143.

54. Leites and Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority;* and Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution,* p. 100.

example, penetrated society with overlapping layers of security services that reported on every conceivable activity as well as on one another. Iraqi intelligence regularly used provocateurs to test individual's loyalty, fostering an atmosphere of fear and suspicion.[55] Regimes that suspect individuals of disloyalty to the government use force against them, both to prevent their involvement in any future activity and to deter others from similar behavior. Authoritarian regimes also demonstrate (or suggest) a willingness to use force against organized protest.

An important distinction exists between regimes that are totalitarian and, in Vaclav Havel's words, those that are "post-totalitarian." In post-totalitarian regimes, disloyalty might cause people to, for example, lose their jobs, see their children refused higher education, or suffer other sanctions that are serious but far from the mass liquidations of classic totalitarian regimes such as Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union. By contrast, totalitarian regimes punish disloyalty through torture, orchestrated disappearances, exile to gulags, or execution. The family members of individual suspects may suffer similar punishment. The totalitarian/post-totalitarian distinction has important implications for regime stability: as Mark Thompson argues, only in post-totalitarian regimes "[is] organized dissent thinkable, and the question of whether or not it will be suppressed worth posing."[56]

Force has promoted the resilience of many Middle Eastern regimes. The regime closest to totalitarian was Saddam's Iraq, but virtually every Arab regime relies heavily on security services to preserve itself.[57] As Eva Bellin argues, the "robust coercive apparatus" of Middle East states explains the persistence of authoritarianism there.[58] In Syria, for example, almost every facet of political activity is stifled: the opposition cannot establish political parties, hold marches, disseminate literature critical of the government, or otherwise act without risking brutal punishment. Such policies kept the regime of Hafez al-Assad in power for twenty-nine years and now uphold the reign of his son. Each Arab state varies in its use of force, but in all of them restrictions on political opposition remain severe, and dissent is brutally punished.

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55. Regis Matlak, "Inside Saddam's Grip," *National Security Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 5, No. 2 (June 1999), electronic version.
56. This paragraph draws from Thompson, "To Shoot or Not to Shoot," p. 71. See also Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956); and Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
57. Security service control is less robust in Lebanon and post-Saddam Iraq, but the level of civil violence in these countries has at times been extreme, with both of them labeled "failed states."
58. Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East," p. 143.

Of course, there are cases in which the use of force has failed or backfired (in the Middle East, the 1979 Iranian Revolution is a prominent example).[59] Such regimes have allowed greater political pluralism (as opposed to charismatic leadership). The leader has agreed to some limits on power and to some safety assurances for subordinates. The regime is steered by a generation of leaders who are less identified with the revolutionary ideology that brought it to power. Society is more socioeconomically modernized and interacts with the outside world. In certain ("frozen") post-totalitarian regimes, Thompson argues, popular dissatisfaction (perhaps based on economic problems or regime illegitimacy) may find the political space to develop into organized dissent, and similar dissatisfaction among the security services may lead them not to defend the regime. Thus fell the regimes of Eastern Europe and the shah's Iran.[60]

As defector Kim Young-song commented, "Everybody's watching each other in North Korea."[61] Dissent is detected through an elaborate network of informants working for multiple internal security agencies. Kongdan Oh and Ralph Hassig note how the system of informants confounds resistance against the government: "A basic principle in North Korea is that two people who trust each other may discuss sensitive issues, but when a third joins them, nothing can be said."[62] Every North Korean belongs to an *inminban*, a neighborhood grouping of thirty to fifty families, watched over by an official who is usually a middle-aged woman who makes sure that nothing improper is going on within her group. To support (and monitor) her, the police conduct surprise home checks. For workplace surveillance, party officials are installed in factories, offices, and colleges.[63]

Punishment for suspected disloyalty is severe. People accused of relatively minor offenses are assigned a short period of "reeducation." Those accused of more serious transgressions are interred in political prison camps: perhaps 200,000 North Koreans are in such camps. Conditions in the camps are said to be appalling, a situation that was particularly true during the famine. Inmates routinely die from malnutrition, disease, overwork, beatings, or execution.[64]

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59. This paragraph draws from Thompson, "To Shoot or Not to Shoot," at p. 71.
60. On the Iranian Revolution, see Mohsen M. Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994); and Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*.
61. Quoted in Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader,* p. 291.
62. Oh and Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass,* p. 140.
63. Quoted in Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader,* pp. 399, 274. Lankov describes the *inminban* and home checks in *North of the DMZ,* pp. 173–179.
64. Haggard and Noland, *Famine in North Korea,* p. 6; Blaine Harden, "N. Korea's Hard-Labor Camps: On the Diplomatic Back Burner," *Washington Post,* July 20, 2009; and Kang Chol-hwan and

People accused of the most serious offenses are either executed immediately or dispatched to camps from which no release is possible, where inmates are starved or worked to death.

According to the "three generations" policy, the regime punishes not only the individual responsible but his or her whole family. Parents, spouses, children, aunts, uncles, and cousins may be punished to varying degrees of severity: by having the incident entered into their permanent records, by banishment, or by the entire family's imprisonment in a prison camp. Oh and Hassig comment, "This form of punishment has proved extremely effective in deterring all but the most brave, selfish, or reckless individuals from going against the Kim regime."[65]

preventing coups against the kim regime

Authoritarian regimes rely heavily on security forces for repression, but the army and security services are also their greatest potential threats. Aside from a popular revolt, authoritarian regimes may be unseated in a coup d'état by members of the military or the government. In theory at least, armies are well organized and disciplined. Most important, they are armed. United, the army can oust a civilian government and defeat its supporters, regardless of whether that government enjoys widespread legitimacy. Even a small group within the army can successfully seize power by killing or neutralizing the existing leadership and preventing a rival from taking power.[66] To defuse the threat of coups d'état, authoritarian leaders rely not only on the tools discussed above; they also employ co-optation, the manipulation of foreign governments, and institutional coup-proofing to weaken the political power of a military in order to reduce the chances of a successful coup.

co-optation. To protect the regime against a coup, authoritarian leaders co-opt elites, whose acquiescence is crucial to political stability.[67] Organized opposition and violence require effective leadership. After the central government co-opts elites, they shift from independent spokesmen to docile functionaries who depend on the government for their position and fortune.

Regimes distribute economic rewards not to the country as a whole but to a politically important "selectorate." Democratic leaders pursue policies pleasing to a mass electorate: their ability to provide public goods (e.g., a healthy

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Pierre Rigoulot, *Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag,* trans. Yair Reiner (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

65. Oh and Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass,* p. 139.

66. See Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1988); and Eric A. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1977).

67. V.P. Gagnon Jr., "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia," *International Security,* Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/95), pp. 130–166.

economy or military victory) drives their ability to stay in power. By contrast, Susan Shirk has argued that the political fortunes of communist leaders depend on their provision of private goods to a selectorate of party and military officials. Private goods include lucrative government posts for one's family members, preferred housing, leisure, luxury goods, access to rents, and funding for pet projects. The rewards to elites can be political as well as economic, including, for example, limited influence in decisionmaking.[68] Building on this theory, other scholars have found that a small selectorate can favor regime stability even when overall economic performance is poor, because the regime needs fewer resources to co-opt elites.

Governments throughout the Arab world are expert at co-opting elites to silence critical voices. Critics of all sorts, both secular and religious, are often given jobs or government contracts in exchange for their acquiescence. In Saudi Arabia it is common for a hostile religious leader to receive a lucrative position in exchange for his support or for an academic critic to become the head of a government-sponsored institute. Any continued dissent would jeopardize government patronage. As the Baath Party consolidated power in Syria in the 1960s, those admitted to the official Syndicate of Artisans could buy inputs from state agencies, participate in the social security fund, and obtain export licenses—healthy incentives for any business. Political and military elites used their power to enrich themselves and become members of the bourgeoisie, while the merchant elite used its wealth to buy political influence. As access to the state became the key to wealth, Sunni merchants sought ties to government and military figures. Over time a "military-mercantile complex" of officers and merchants developed.[69]

A strategy of co-optation has its drawbacks. Its scope is limited to elites; rather than address grievances, it merely seeks to limit opposition rather than stop it altogether. Co-optation may not endure: Israel found that its co-optation of Israeli Arab notables worked for many years, but that over time the co-opted leaders became discredited and could no longer sway the community they represented.[70] Co-optation is based on the provision of private goods, and when the funds for these goods dry up, or if the elites believe they can get a better deal from a rival leader, there is little left to tie them to the regime. In

68. Susan L. Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James D. Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003); and Benjamin B. Smith, "Life of the Party: The Origins of Regime Breakdown and Persistence under Single-Party Rule," *World Politics,* Vol. 57, No. 3 (April 2005), p. 449.
69. Raymond A. Hinnebusch, "State and Civil Society in Syria," *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 47, No. 2 (Spring 1993), p. 252.
70. For a review of the use of co-optation, often coupled with control, see Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State.*

the post-totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe, the middle ranks of the military forces abandoned their communist masters even though they benefited greatly from their patronage.[71]

Economic crises need not shatter a strategy of co-optation, and they may even enhance it. Rulers can protect their core supporters and transfer the brunt of economic hardship to their opponents. In Panama the government reacted to a U.S. cutoff of the flow of dollars by paying less important supporters (such as government employees) with a cash substitute while ensuring that more important actors, such as the armed forces, remained well paid.[72] Even famine can become a tool of authoritarian control. Most of the 7 million victims of the Soviet Union's 1933 famine were Ukrainians; Stalin prevented food from entering the Ukraine as he sought to impose control over its restive population.[73] In the 1990s, international sanctions, the collapsing price of oil, and general graft and mismanagement caused considerable economic hardship in Iraq. Although this devastated Iraq's population, Saddam's regime controlled Iraqi food stockpiles and used them to bolster the population's dependence on the government. Those with the guns ate first.[74]

A command economy, disastrous in the long term for economic growth, enhances dependency on a regime. As Sharman points out, in communist Europe citizens depended on the regime for their careers, education, and daily consumption: "People had very little that could not be taken away with a minimum of effort by the state apparatus."[75]

As many dictators have done before him, Kim Jong-il cultivates an elite selectorate to stay in power. Under this strategy, the health of the overall economy is less important than the regime's ability to bribe elite supporters. The North Korean selectorate can be conceptualized as a key group of elites—somewhere between 200 and 5,000 people, depending on how wide the circle is drawn—that includes military leaders, party officials, and bureaucrats. This group acquiesced to Kim's succession after his father's death; they keep Kim in power and will influence his choice of successor.[76]

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71. Eisenstadt, "The Breakdown of Communist Regimes and the Vicissitudes of Modernity," p. 24.
72. Jonathan Kirshner, "The Microfoundations of Economic Sanctions," *Security Studies,* Vol. 6, No. 3 (Spring 1997), p. 52.
73. See Eberstadt, *The End of North Korea,* p. 62.
74. F. Gregory Gause III, "Getting It Backward on Iraq," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 78, No. 3 (May/June 1999), p. 57. This problem of shifting the impact of sanctions from elites to the people in general is common. See Pape, "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work," p. 107; and Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion: American Foreign Policy and the Limits of Military Might* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 105–117.
75. Sharman, *Repression and Resistance in Communist Europe,* p. 15.
76. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, James D. Morrow, Randolph M. Siverson, and Alastair Smith, "Testing Novel Implications from the Selectorate Theory of War," *World Politics,* Vol. 56, No. 3

The regime formally divides North Korean society into classes ("core," "wavering," or "hostile").[77] Class, or *songbun,* is determined by socioeconomic origin. At the top is the working class with family members who fought against Japan or South Korea. The bottom caste includes those with relatives who had been landed elites or Japanese collaborators, who fought for the South, or who were judged as disloyal to Kim Il-sung. Although upward mobility is difficult for most and impossible for some, one's *songbun* is easily demoted for perceived disloyalty, marriage to someone in a lower class, or a relative's transgression.[78]

In North Korea your class determines where you live, how much food you eat, and whether you are assigned to sit in a comfortable office or toil in a dangerous mineshaft. Since Kim Il-sung created the class system, people considered wavering or hostile have been assigned a low quality of life. Perceived enemies of the regime (if spared) were banished to the countryside or imprisoned in camps, where the incidence of malnourishment is high, and where most of the famine deaths occurred.

By contrast, Kim Jong-il bestows a comfortable life on the core class in exchange for its loyalty. Members of this class receive the safest and most desirable jobs working for the regime. The most favored among the elite receive positions in Kim's network of trading companies, giving them coveted access to hard currency.[79] Members of the elite are granted residency in Pyongyang and housing in the "special class," at the top of the five levels of housing in the country.[80] They receive more plentiful and better food (e.g., more rice than corn). Those receiving the most and best food are members of the internal security services and the military as well as high-level officials.[81] A further benefit is that the core class is not supplied through the general Public Distribution System but rather through the "court economy." This includes special stores that sell coveted products such as leather shoes (North Korean

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(April 2004), p. 375; Oh and Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass,* p. 37; and Haggard and Noland, *Famine in North Korea,* p. 54. Estimates of the North Korean "elite" defined more broadly are higher (1–3 million), but this group would include family members protected by the regime who do not have influence over policy decisions per se.

77. Oh and Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass,* pp. 133–134; and Haggard and Noland, *Famine in North Korea,* p. 55. For a deeply personal description of how class affects people's daily lives, see Barbara Demick, *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2009).

78. Hunter, *Kim Il-song's North Korea,* p. 3.

79. Harrison, "Time to Leave Korea?" p. 70; and John S. Park, "North Korea, Inc.: Gaining Insights into North Korean Regime Stability from Recent Commercial Activities," Working Paper (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, April 22, 2009).

80. Oh and Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass,* p. 57; and Hunter, *Kim Il-song's North Korea,* p. 131.

81. For ration data, see Haggard and Noland, *Famine in North Korea,* p. 54.

shoes are made of vinyl), wool rather than synthetic clothing, red meat, liquor, candy, and eggs. Whereas most North Koreans at best obtain such luxuries on holidays, elites buy them year round at discounted prices and without standing in long lines.[82] The regime also bestows lavish gifts on the members of the selectorate: coveted imports such as luxury cars, watches, stereos, and television sets. Defectors even report that cadres are rewarded with wives, who enjoy large (by North Korean standards) pensions, having retired in their twenties from the "Happy Corps": a group of beautiful young women who serve Kim Jong-il as staffers and entertainers.[83]

During the famine, Kim Il-song's regime used the class system to shift hardship away from its selectorate onto its political opponents. The core class—rewarded with residence in Pyongyang—was protected: residents of the capital received the largest and highest-quality food rations, sometimes double the rations received by people in the provinces.[84] For the hostile or wavering classes, life in the countryside meant a much higher risk of starvation. Scholars and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have estimated that the most starvation occurred in the approximately thirty-five rural counties (concentrated in the northeast) to which the World Food Program was denied access. NGO workers and scholars have speculated that those counties continue to house internal exiles and political prison camps. In so doing, Kim Jong-il shielded his selectorate and concentrated the famine's devastation on the people deemed the least loyal.

Kim Jong-il has co-opted the military by bestowing on it policy influence and prestige, as well as a large share of the national budget. Government spending is highly opaque, but analysts estimate that North Korea directs upwards of 25 percent of its gross domestic product on military expenditures (compare this to 4 percent in the United States and 3 percent in South Korea).[85] To feed, clothe, and equip its troops, the military operates its own economy, which is accorded higher priority over national resources than the civilian economy.[86]

Kim Jong-il also accords the military great policy influence. His "military first" reforms of 1997 shifted the locus of political power in North Korea to the Korean People's Army. The institutional redesign elevated the National Defense Commission (of which Kim is chairman) to be the country's most

82. Hunter, *Kim Il-song's North Korea,* p. 130. On the court economy, see Oh and Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass,* p. 66.
83. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader,* pp. 198–200, 312–317.
84. Haggard and Noland, *Famine in North Korea,* p. 68.
85. Statistics from World Bank, World Development Indicators Database, 2006.
86. Oh and Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass,* p. 115.

powerful body. Kim has proclaimed the military the "pillar" of socialism and at the forefront of the revolution. North Korean officials are ranked on lists for attending state events, and since Kim Jong-il assumed power, the rankings of Politiburo and party officials have fallen, with military officials rising to replace them. Similarly, military men have elbowed KWP officials out of Kim's entourage.[87]

The Kim regime's acquisition of nuclear weapons is another tool for cultivating the military's support. To be sure, external factors played an important role in the decision to acquire nuclear weapons: such weapons bolster North Korea's deterrent against foreign adversaries with far superior conventional military forces. They also enhance the Kim regime's internal security.[88] They bring prestige to an institution whose morale has been challenged by hunger and shortfalls. Nuclear weapons have particular significance in this case because of the ongoing status competition between North and South. The generals can tell themselves: our soldiers are hungry; our tanks are World War II vintage; but we have nuclear weapons—and Seoul does not.[89] In these ways, nuclear weapons have both an external and an internal security function: they protect the regime from coups d'état by building support among the military.

Given North Korea's dire economic straits, how does Kim Jong-il finance the largesse toward his selectorate? Legitimate revenue is difficult to come by. North Korea generates little hard currency from its low levels of international trade, and—having defaulted on its international debt—Pyongyang cannot receive loans from the international financial community. Pyongyang earns some hard currency through its arms exports (largely in missile technologies, with countries such as Iran, Libya, Pakistan, and Syria).[90] Additionally, a department known as Room 39 presides over the export of the country's few lucrative exports (i.e., gold, silver, steel, fish, and mushrooms). Room 39 is also said to preside over illicit trade: the trafficking of narcotics, endangered spe-

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87. Ken E. Gause, "North Korean Civil-Military Trends: Military-First Politics to a Point," (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, September 2006), p. 9.

88. Kongdan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig, "North Korea's Nuclear Politics," *Current History,* September 2004, pp. 273–279; Han S. Park, *North Korea: The Politics of Unconventional Wisdom* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2002), pp. 135–136; and Michael J. Mazarr, *North Korea and the Bomb: A Case Study in Nonproliferation* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), p. 19. On nuclear weapons and regime stability, see Etel Solingen, *Nuclear Logics: Contrasting Paths in East Asia and the Middle East* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).

89. We thank Michael Green for comments on this point.

90. Marcus Noland, "How North Korea Funds Its Regime," testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, and International Security, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, 109th Cong., 2d sess., April 25, 2006; "Hands across the DMZ," *Business Week,* March 20, 2006, p. 48; and David E. Sanger, "Bush Administration Releases Images to Bolster Its Claims about Syrian Reactor," *New York Times,* April 25, 2008.

cies products, and counterfeit cigarettes, pharmaceuticals, and currency. North Korean embassies are said to finance themselves through their diplomats' drug dealing, counterfeiting, and other black-market activities. Analysts report that North Korea's illicit trade increased significantly in the 1990s; this trade is estimated at 40 percent of the size of North Korea's legitimate exports.[91]

MANIPULATION OF FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS. Political scientists note that all governments regularly use their foreign policy for domestic advantage.[92] As argued above, authoritarian regimes use external threats as a means to whip up xenophobic nationalism that helps to legitimize the regime. External governments (usually allies) can also be used as a source of financial aid, enabling a regime to gain resources without having to make concessions to domestic constituencies in exchange.[93] In Egypt the almost $2 billion in annual U.S. aid gives the regime considerable revenue to win the goodwill of its citizenry and maintain its military and security services. Regimes can then use this largesse to buy off the selectorate or otherwise improve their domestic position. At its extreme, a foreign ally may commit to the regime's survival.[94]

Kim Jong-il's regime also relies on foreign governments to generate the hard currency needed to buy off the selectorate. Under Kim Il-sung, the Soviets provided economic aid, subsidized oil, and a market for North Korea's noncompetitive exports. China came to North Korea's aid in the Korean War, and in subsequent decades sent military matériel, oil, food, and other economic assistance. Recently, Beijing has taken an active diplomatic role in attempting to resolve the nuclear weapons crisis—for example, bribing Pyongyang to participate in nuclear talks by offering cash and energy aid and providing Washington with incentives to sit down at the negotiating table.[95]

Kim Jong-il has also managed to extract extensive aid from adversaries. A

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91. Sheena Chestnut, "Illicit Activity and Proliferation: North Korean Smuggling Networks," *International Security,* Vol. 32, No. 1 (Summer 2007), pp. 80–111; and Joshua Kurlantzick, "Traffic Pattern," *New Republic,* March 24, 2003, p. 12.
92. See, for example, George W. Downs and David M. Rocke, "Conflict, Agency, and Gambling for Resurrection: The Principal-Agent Problem Goes to War," *American Journal of Political Science,* Vol. 38, No. 2 (May 1994), pp. 362–380; and Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization,* Vol. 42, No. 3 (Summer 1988), pp. 427–460.
93. Gause, *Oil Monarchies.*
94. The United States initiated a "countercoup" to restore the shah of Iran to power and provided aid to thugs such as Robert Mugabe to keep him at the helm. Moscow sent troops into Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Hungary to defend pro-Soviet elites. Peter W. Rodman, *More Precious than Peace: The Cold War and the Struggle for the Third World* (New York: Scribner, 1994); and Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).
95. Samuel S. Kim, "Sino-North Korean Relations in the Post–Cold War World," in Young Whan Kihl and Hong Nack Kim, eds., *North Korea: The Politics of Regime Survival* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), p. 190.

significant shift in South Korea's containment policy occurred with the election of Kim Dae-jung in 1998, when Kim launched his "sunshine policy" aimed at expanding exchanges between Seoul and Pyongyang and laying the groundwork for a more peaceful and less costly future unification. Since the late 1990s, North Korea's "nuclear extortion" has generated more than $6 billion in aid from not only South Korea but also the United States, China, and Japan.[96] These countries gave hundreds of thousands of tons of food (explained to the North Korean people as "tribute" to Kim Jong-il).[97] The regime has also extracted outright cash payments (e.g., Kim Dae-jung's government paid Kim Jong-il to attend their much-heralded 2000 summit; Washington paid a fee to inspect one of North Korea's suspected nuclear facilities; a 2008 deal was accompanied by an announcement of 500,000 tons of U.S. food aid, along with the claim that the two were unrelated).[98] Beyond outright aid, economic initiatives associated with South Korea's sunshine policy, such as the Kaesong Industrial Complex and the Hyundai resort at Mount Kumgang, have provided Pyongyang with a significant revenue stream.

Samuel Kim comments that because Kim Jong-il has devastated his country so thoroughly yet developed a large military and nuclear weapons, its collapse would cause "a huge mess that no outside neighboring power would be willing or able to clean up."[99] Leaders in Beijing, Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington fear a highly uncertain and dangerous transition phase featuring humanitarian and refugee crises, a "loose nukes" problem, and the potential for war between nuclear-armed great powers (i.e., a military collision of Chinese and U.S. forces during their efforts to stabilize the peninsula).[100] Moreover, advocates of accommodation toward North Korea argue that a harsher policy would provide incentives for Pyongyang to transfer nuclear weapons or materials or engage

96. North Korean gross domestic product is estimated at $20 billion. On aid totals, see Marcus Noland, *Avoiding the Apocalypse: The Future of the Two Koreas* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 2000), pp. 122–129.
97. Andrew Scobell, *Kim Jong Il and North Korea: The Leader and the* System (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, March 2006), p. 35.
98. Glenn Kessler, "U.S. to Send N. Korea 500,000 Tons of Food Aid," *Washington Post,* May 17, 2008.
99. Kim, "Introduction," p. 3; Chung-in Moon and Yongho Kim, "The Future of the North Korean System," in Kim, *The North Korean System in the Post–Cold War Era,* p. 230; and Marcus Noland, "Why North Korea Will Muddle Through," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 76, No. 4 (July/August 1997), pp. 105–118.
100. Andrei Lankov, "Why Beijing Props Up Pyongyang," *New York Times,* June 11, 2009; Paul B. Stares and Joel S. Wit, *Preparing for Sudden Change in North Korea,* Council Special Report, No. 42 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, January 2009); and Jonathan D. Pollack, "The Korean Peninsula in U.S. Strategy: Policy Issues for the Next President," in Ashley J. Tellis, Mercy Kuo, and Andrew Marble, eds., *Strategic Asia, 2008–09: Challenges and Choices* (Seattle, Wash.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2009).

in a more confrontational foreign policy. The international aid that Pyongyang receives allows the regime "to allocate the savings in commercial imports to other priorities, including military ones and luxury imports for the elite."[101]

COUP-PROOFING INSTITUTIONS. In addition to co-opting elites with jobs, access, and perks, authoritarian regimes design their government and military institutions in ways to obstruct coups d'état. Drawing on the experiences of several Middle Eastern countries, James Quinlivan argues that leaders exploit communal and family loyalties, create parallel armed forces, build rival internal security agencies, and fund militaries lavishly as ways to ensure their loyalty.[102] Institutions are structured to minimize the horizontal flow of information and maximize leader access to information.

Middle Eastern and North African authoritarian regimes have attempted to "coup-proof" their institutions in all of these ways. The monarchs of Jordan and Morocco have long appointed relatives to key military positions, as have the "republican" leaders of countries such as Syria and Tunisia.[103] Syria's regime ensures that key commanders are members of the president's Alawi communal group, just as Saddam Hussein installed his sons, other relatives, and members of his al-Bu Nasir tribe in key institutions and units.[104] Parallel militaries protect Middle Eastern dictators from their own armies' disloyalty: the Iranian regime relies on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (and, indeed, select units within it); the Saudi regime is protected by the Saudi Arabia National Guard.[105] These measures try both to ensure the allegiance of the armed services as a whole and to prevent any faction within the services from seizing power.

Regimes also try to make betrayal extremely costly for the security forces. They seek to make security services complicit in unpopular policies, corruption, and repression, to enhance their loyalty: because of their complicity, members of the security services cannot easily switch allegiances should a rival for power or a popular movement emerge.[106] At the same time, regimes try

101. Haggard and Noland, *Famine in North Korea*, p. 81.
102. Quinlivan, "Coup-proofing"; and Risa Brooks, *Political-Military Relations and the Stability of Arab Regimes*, Adelphi Papers, No. 324 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998). Democratic states, by contrast, try to inculcate an ethos of professionalism into their military. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (New York: Vintage, 1957).
103. Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East," p. 149; and Anderson, "Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East," p. 11.
104. Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society under Asad and the Ba'th Party* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1996), pp. 75–88.
105. On the role of various Iranian security forces in subduing recent protests, see Neil MacFarquhar, "Layers of Armed Forces Wielding Power of Law," *New York Times*, June 22, 2009.
106. Quinlivan, "Coup-proofing," p. 151.

to lavish money on military forces, but as institutions and for key individuals. Such coddled security forces will be threatened even by nonrevolutionary political reform, because accountability and a lack of corruption would deprive officers of their unfair advantages.[107] Leaders of these institutions face a stark choice: loyalty, with all its rewards, or defection—which is both highly likely to be detected and to meet with brutal punishment.

Should co-optation fail and elites grow dissatisfied, the Kim regime has designed North Korea's government and military institutions in ways to deter, detect, and thwart anti-regime activity among elites. First, both Kims carefully staffed key positions with people bound to them by family or other close ties. Kim Il-sung ruled with the help of relatives and the guerrilla elite. As this old guard dies off, Kim Jong-il has methodically replaced them with individuals of known loyalty.[108] Andrei Lankov writes, "The elite is held together by an unusually close network of blood relations. A very substantial part of the Pyongyang rulers are either members of the extended Kim family or descendants of the former guerilla fighters who fought under Kim Il Sung's command in 1930s Manchuria. They occupy top positions chiefly, if not exclusively, due to their personal connections with the Great Leader and his family." Cumings argues that like his father, Kim Jong-il "trusts only his relatives when it comes to the top security organs." For example, Kim installed his brother-in-law Chang Song-taek, and Chang's brothers, in sensitive positions.[109] Kim's network also relies on school ties. Many of his most trusted cadres are fellow alumni of the Mangyongdae Revolutionary School, whose graduates make up 20 percent of the personnel on the KWP Central Committee, 30 percent of Politburo members, and 32 percent of the military commission of the Central Committee.[110]

As Kim promotes those he believes most trustworthy, he keeps a close eye on those whose loyalty is less certain. Whereas the "mainstay of Kim's power" is said to be the second-generation revolutionaries linked to him by family or school ties, the loyalty of the next generation (i.e., up-and-coming field com-

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107. Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East," pp. 145–149.
108. Kenneth E. Gause, "The North Korean Leadership: System Dynamics and Fault Lines," in Oh and Hassig, "North Korean Policy Elites," pp. II-7 to II-12. See also "North Korean Civil-Military Trends," pp. 14–15.
109. Yonhap News Agency, *North Korea Handbook* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), p. 656; Andrei Lankov, "Pyongyang: Rules of Engagement," *Pacific Review,* Vol. 16, No. 4 (December 2003), p. 616; Cumings, *North Korea,* p. 169; Gause, "North Korean Civil-Military Trends," pp. 4, 40–42; and Harrison, "Time to Leave Korea?" p. 70.
110. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader,* p. 493. On school loyalties, see also Jei Guk Jeon, "North Korean Leadership: Kim Jong Il's Intergenerational Balancing Act," *Strategic Forum,* No. 152 (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, December 1998).

manders in the military) is less assured. Kim has thus ordered particularly heavy political indoctrination and monitoring of this group.[111]

Kim relies on multiple and competing internal security agencies to reduce the unity of the security forces and to maximize the information he receives about anti-regime activities. Internal security, intelligence, and espionage missions (both foreign and domestic) are distributed across several branches of the government and military. The Central Committee of the KWP oversees nine bureaus involved in intelligence operations;[112] other agencies tasked with such missions are the Ministry of People's Security, the State Security Department, and, within the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces, the General Political Bureau and the Security Command. Each of these agencies reports to Kim via a different supervising authority within different branches of the government or military. These multiple and overlapping conduits of information are structured so that Kim will be apprised of any stirring of anti-regime thought or activity within the KWP, government, and military.

The Kim regime has created a parallel force to protect itself from a military coup. In addition to its regular armed forces, North Korea has paramilitary forces numbering about 189,000.[113] The Guard Command, about 50,000 men, reports directly to Kim and handles his personal security as well as that of other high-ranking officials (it also engages in surveillance over the latter). Equipped with tanks, artillery, and aircraft, the Guard Command consists of three brigades that would defend Kim against the army in the event of an attempted coup. Another important parallel military force is the Pyongyang Defense Command, which shares with the Guard Command (and the Pyongyang Antiaircraft Artillery Command) the responsibility for countercoup defense and protection of the capital. The Pyongyang Defense Command is a corps-level unit (comprising about 70,000 troops) with tanks, armored personnel carriers, and artillery. Finally, the Military Security Command is a counterweight agency to the General Political Bureau. It provides additional surveillance of the military and high-level officials. A parallel military thus protects Kim in the event of the army's betrayal.

111. Gause, "North Korean Civil-Military Trends," pp. 16–17.
112. This section draws on Oh and Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass*, pp. 135–137; and Gause, "North Korean Civil-Military Trends," pp. 11–12.
113. For paramilitary figures, see International Institute of Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2010* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, February 2010), p. 411. This paragraph draws from Gause, "North Korean Civil-Military Trends," p. 41; and Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., *Armed Forces of North Korea* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), chap. 7.

Counterarguments and Responses

Since the early 1990s, pundits and policymakers alike have predicted that Kim Jong-il's regime—facing succession, economic crisis, and even famine—would fall. We argue that the regime has relied on time-honored tools of authoritarian control that prevent mass revolution or coups d'état. These tools help to explain the regime's seemingly puzzling resilience, and they suggest it will continue to withstand poverty, famine, and even the growing penetration of outside information.

Critics might argue that the tools we identify as contributing to a regime's ability to stay in power are actually indicators that a regime is in power. Namely, the literature on which this analysis is based—which posits that if a regime uses these tools, it will stay in power—may suffer from serious endogeneity problems. To put it differently, unlike weak regimes, powerful authoritarian regimes may be able to wield these various tools. If this is true, then the toolbox we have identified may not necessarily promote regime resilience; rather, a regime's ability to wield these tools depends on its underlying strength.

This criticism has merit, because these tools do seem to promote regime resilience (for example, informants and the infiltration of social networks do make anti-regime activity harder). But because authoritarian regimes realize this, it seems likely that the only regimes that do not implement these tools are those that are too weak to do so.

Studies of regime stability must confront possible endogeneity problems. Toward the goal of understanding the future of the North Korean regime, however, the regime's application of these tools would suggest its strength. The tools identified here reduce the probability of revolutions and coups, and they also indicate a regime's great power.

One might also argue that we understate the import of recent trends that suggest a new vulnerability of the Kim regime.[114] Increased border crossings—and the goods they spread, such as South Korean television dramas—expose North Koreans to their neighbors' prosperity, giving the lie to the socialist paradise. As the North Korean people engage in market activities, they become less dependent on the regime: for example, there are claims that the people today hardly depend on the Public Distribution System for their food. Furthermore, as the North Korean military, police, and other local authorities all

114. Lankov, "Changing North Korea"; Caryl, "The Other North Korea"; Glaser, Snyder, and Park, "Keeping an Eye on an Unruly Neighbor," p. 16; "Survival of the Fittest"; and Demick, "Trading Ideals for Sustenance."

engage in the smuggling trade, corruption threatens to undermine any moral authority to which the regime may cling.

The extent to which these trends jeopardize regime stability, however, is overstated. The regime has adapted its propaganda nimbly: Myers notes that North Korean propaganda now openly acknowledges, even highlights, the South's prosperity. Calling South Korea "a foul whore of America," Pyongyang portrays a polluted and depraved South that stands in stark contrast to North Korean purity. Pyongyang attributes South Korean prosperity to North Korean virtue: because Kim Jong-il's "military first" policies prevented war on the peninsula, the story goes, South Koreans "owe their material comfort to the self-sacrifice not only of the Dear Leader, but all the heroic citizens of the DPRK."[115]

Furthermore, observers who point to greater information flows into the DPRK usually (implicitly or explicitly) expect them to cause regime change through a popular revolt. Our analysis suggests that revolution is unlikely in totalitarian North Korea. Social policies have stunted the development of social classes critical to the onset and success of revolution, and they have squelched any independent civil society. Through an elaborate set of ideas, the regime strives to create legitimacy and popular support. It is possible that the populace is simply cynical and scared and is mouthing slogans of nationalism. But if the populace is dissatisfied with the regime in spite of these tools, the regime's brutal use of force (or threat of force) suppresses individual disloyalty or popular mobilization. The North Korean people may be hungry, may despise Kim Jong-il, and may envy their rich neighbors, but the people are unlikely to mobilize. As Lankov notes, during the famine, "North Korea's starving farmers did not rebel. They just died."[116]

Our analysis also casts doubt on regime change through a coup d'état. The regime has prevented coups by co-opting an elite selectorate; it funds its largesse in part through the manipulation of foreign governments to obtain aid. In the event that elites become dissatisfied, the institutional design of the government and military ensures that coups will be dissuaded, detected, or quashed.

Will the regime continue to have the needed funds to co-opt its supporters? Every indication suggests the answer is yes. In dealing with North Korean nuclear weapons acquisition, the United States' North Korea policy has not significantly changed from Bill Clinton to George W. Bush to Barack Obama.

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115. Myers, *The Cleanest Race*, pp. 154–155.
116. Andrei Lankov, "Staying Alive: Why North Korea Will Not Change," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 2 (March/April 2008), p. 15.

Future U.S. administrations will be similarly fearful of the instability of a Korean transition, and similarly inclined toward a policy of accommodation and engagement. Beijing, which gives 50,000 tons of oil per month to North Korea, is likely to continue to shoulder its ally.[117] Seoul, for its part, has pursued appeasement to an extent that critics have compared it to Pyongyang's "ATM." Of course, North Korea may at some point cross a "red line" that leads to a decision to topple the Kim regime. Short of Pyongyang selling fissile material to al-Qaida, however, one wonders what red lines North Korea has not already crossed—indeed, the discovery of North Korean involvement in Syria's nuclear program suggests that even the transfer of nuclear technology to a country hostile to the United States is not considered adequate provocation.[118] In short, Pyongyang will probably have the funds it needs to continue bribing its selectorate and security forces. With a nod to *fortuna,* we cannot say that revolution or coups in North Korea are impossible. Still, the substantial body of theory about regime stability tells us they are unlikely.

Conclusion

Kim Jong-il is likely to leave power not because of mutinous cadres or angry masses, but because he dies in office. At that point, the regime will face the challenge of succession. Our analysis, and the experience of the previous succession, suggests that the regime has not laid the groundwork for a smooth transition. Kim Il-sung designated his son as successor early enough to permit him fourteen years to prepare for his ascension to power. Kim Jong-il had time to build a coalition of supporters within the military and KWP and to move against those who might oppose him.[119] During those years, the regime used the toolbox on the son's behalf, intensifying his cult of personality. Kim Jong-il began conducting "on the spot" guidance visits that the media reported with a fervor previously displayed only for the Great Leader. His personality cult extended to his mother, Kim Jong-sook: a Manchurian guerrilla fighter, she was

117. Lankov, "Why Beijing Props Up Pyongyang"; Lankov, "Staying Alive"; and Glaser, Snyder, and Park, "Keeping an Eye on an Unruly Neighbor," p. 11. On continuity in U.S. policy toward North Korea, see Mazarr, *North Korea and the Bomb,* p. 179.
118. North Koreans have kidnapped Japanese and South Korean citizens; held U.S. sailors hostage in the *Pueblo* crisis (1968); attacked the South Korean presidential palace (1968); murdered the South Korean first lady while attempting to assassinate President Park Chung-hee (1974); killed U.S. soldiers in the DMZ (1976); murdered members of the South Korean cabinet on a visit to Burma (1983); bombed a KAL airplane, killing everyone onboard (1987); test-fired rockets over Japan (1998 and 2009); tested nuclear devices (2006 and 2009); and sold nuclear technology to Syria (2007). Most recently, North Korea is said to have sunk the South Korean warship *Cheonan* (2010).
119. Oh and Hassig, *North Korea through the Looking Glass,* pp. 88–89.

revered as one of the country's "three generals" along with her husband and son.

By comparison, Kim Jong-il has not taken similar steps to ensure a smooth transfer of power after his death. Kim, at minimum, needs to designate an heir; one of his sons would seem the most likely choice, because within the *suryong* system, the son of the Dear Leader and the grandson of Great Leader, Kim Il-sung, would be regarded as a highly legitimate successor. Rumors abound that Kim has tapped his youngest son, Kim Jong-un, but this remains uncertain.[120] To further increase the successor's legitimacy, the Kim regime would need to manufacture a cult of personality for Kim's heir and that person's mother (Kim Jong-il's oldest son has a different mother than his two younger sons).[121] In the absence of such preparations—for example, in the event of Kim Jong-il's abrupt death—contested succession is more likely, the selectorate may be divided, and the security forces may not know whom to turn to for orders, making regime collapse a possibility.

Our analysis also has implications for coercive methods that might be applied against North Korea, particularly for purposes of counterproliferation. Sanctions aimed at weakening the broader economy are unlikely to have much coercive effect; Kim Jong-il (like Stalin, Saddam, and many other dictators) protects his selectorate while shifting the burden of sanctions to the people. A better economic lever with which to move the Kim regime is to directly threaten its access to hard currency and luxury goods, which it needs to bribe the selectorate. Policies such as the freezing of North Korean assets overseas and the embargo on luxury items are thus the most promising.[122]

Our analysis suggests, however, that Kim Jong-il will not give up his nuclear arsenal easily and is likely to renege on hard-won agreements.[123] Much of the proliferation debate has focused on the question of whether Washington and Seoul can provide Pyongyang with the security assurances that it feels it needs before relinquishing its nuclear weapons. But these weapons not only deter adversaries; they serve as a tool of regime survival. They help to curry the fa-

120. Martin Fackler, "North Korea Appears to Tap Leader's Son as Enigmatic Heir," *New York Times,* April 24, 2010; and Martin *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader,* p. 37.
121. This has been rumored to have begun with Kim Jong-un. See Myers, *The Cleanest Race*, p. 126; and Evan Thomas and Suzanne Smalley, "My Three Sons," *Newsweek,* July 27, 2009, p. 4. Evidence of propaganda lionizing Ko Yong-hee (mother of Kim Jong-un and Kim Jong-chul) appeared in 2003. See Bertil Lintner, "Sons and Heirs," *Asia Times Online,* August 18, 2006, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/HH18Dg01.html.
122. On the freezing of North Korean assets in Macau's Banco Delta Asia, see Anna Fifield and Stephanie Kirchgaessner, "China to Freeze North Korean Accounts," *Financial Times*, July 26, 2006.
123. Jennifer Lind, "Next of Kim," *Foreign Policy,* June 2009, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=5003 .

vor of the military and provide a bargaining chip that earns the regime billions of dollars of hard currency.

Our analysis yields an important lesson about deterring a nuclear North Korea. Although the media persist in portraying North Korea's leader as a madman or an incompetent playboy, some scholars have argued that North Korean foreign policy has been highly calculated.[124] Our analysis bolsters this view with evidence from North Korean domestic policy: Kim Jong-il's meticulous use of the tools of authoritarianism reveals him to be a skilled strategic player. The revulsion people feel for his regime, which has the blood of millions on its hands, should not obscure the strategic logic that its brutality follows. To put it differently, Kim shows every sign of being rational—and thus deterrable.

Should Washington reject a deterrence strategy toward North Korea (as it ultimately did toward Iraq), our analysis suggests that limited military operations undertaken with the goal of inciting a coup or popular revolt are unlikely to succeed. Air strikes against Baghdad did not launch a coup in either 1991 or 2003, and it is implausible that they would succeed against Pyongyang's equally coup-proofed regime. And, as Robert Pape has found, coercive bombing alone never incites a popular revolt and, indeed, often strengthens a regime.[125] It inflames nationalism at the popular level and likely increases the military's loyalty to the leadership. Kim's regime would be able to blame any resulting economic problems on the bombings rather than on its own bungling. Therefore, the only viable military option for overthrowing the regime would be a large-scale invasion.[126]

Our analysis also sheds light on what some aspects of war with North Korea would look like. Open source analyses have argued that the U.S.–South Korea side is stronger and would likely prevail. This article would add that because of coup-proofing, North Korea's military effectiveness is most likely even lower than these analyses suggest.[127] For example, North Korean military

124. See Victor D. Cha and David C. Kang, *Nuclear North Korea: A Debate on Engagement Strategies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Harrison, *Korean Endgame*, chap. 6; David C. Kang, "Rethinking North Korea," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (March 1995), pp. 253–267; and Denny Roy, "North Korea and the 'Madman' Theory," *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (September 1994), pp. 307–316.

125. Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

126. On advocating regime change, see R. James Woolsey and Thomas G. McInerney, "The Next Korean War," *Wall Street Journal*, August 4, 2003; and "U.S. Is Right to Draw the Line in North Korea," *USA Today*, November 8, 1993.

127. On the military balance, see Michael O'Hanlon, "Stopping a North Korean Invasion: Why Defending South Korea Is Easier than the Pentagon Thinks," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Spring 1998), pp. 135–170; and Nick Beldecos and Eric Heginbotham, "The Conventional Military Balance in Korea," *Breakthroughs*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring 1995), pp. 1–8. On coup-proofing and mili-

leaders are chosen for political loyalty rather than military competence; key units would be assigned to regime defense rather than to combat missions. Service and unit leaders would likely not communicate regularly, inhibiting coordination. Thus North Korea's forces are likely to perform poorly in a war.

U.S. decisionmakers and analysts often underestimate the power of tyranny. In recent accounts of North Korea, bustling markets, contempt for leaders, and a busy cross-border trade may indeed spell the eventual downfall of the Kim regime. At the same time, fomenting a revolution or even a changeover among the elite is at best highly risky and at worst doomed to savage repression. A regime's economic, ideational, and particularly coercive instruments all help it cling to power and weather economic crises, foreign policy disasters, or other problems that would lead democratic governments to lose power through the ballot box. Understanding the nature of North Korea's tools of control is important both for understanding the regime's resilience and for crafting U.S. foreign policy toward Pyongyang.

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tary effectiveness, see Quinlivan, "Coup-proofing"; Brooks, *Political-Military Relations and the Stability of Arab Regimes;* and Stephen Biddle and Robert Zirkle, "Technology, Civil-Military Relations, and Warfare in the Developing World," *Journal of Strategic Studies,* Vol. 19, No. 2 (June 1996), pp. 171–212.