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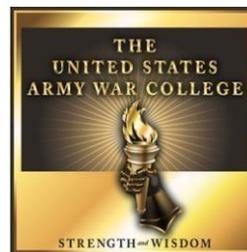
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# North Korea's Ruling Party through an Orwellian Lens

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## North Korea's Ruling Party through an Orwellian Lens

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### Abstract

With the development of nuclear weapons capable of reaching the entire United States (U.S.), the People's Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK) has significantly elevated the threat it poses to U.S. national security. With a historic summit between the U.S. and the DPRK scheduled for May 2018, this paper examines the disposition of the DPRK's ruling elites and how they impact the DPRK's foreign policy. Viewed through an Orwellian lens as a contextual analogy, a case is made that the ruling elites have created a system of governance that reinforces the status quo over ending the state of war between the two Koreas. As a result, the DPRK may be inclined to see negotiations as just another opportunity to extract concessions and buy more time to perfect the DPRK's nuclear arsenal. The paper recommends that information operations tailor the message the U.S. wants to send the DPRK's ruling elites.

## North Korea's Ruling Party through an Orwellian Lens

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat...

—Sun Tzu<sup>1</sup>

After more than six decades, the policies, strategies, and formidable instruments of national power of the United States (U.S.) have been unable to move the Korean Peninsula from the 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement to reunification, demilitarization, or a stable peace without incidents and great tensions. Dealing with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) — colloquially known as North Korea — has been intractable and the DPRK's state ideology of self-reliance known as *Juche* has outlasted the U.S. strategy of strategic patience and all strategies before it.<sup>2</sup> Time appears to be running out as Pyongyang fervently works on perfecting nuclear weapon delivery systems capable of striking multiple U.S. population centers. In theory, the principles of nuclear deterrence and mutually assured destruction suggest that the regime seeks only to ensure its own survival, but its undeterred nuclear ambitions destabilize the entire region and give rise to scenarios in which miscalculations or opportunistic aggression by a totalitarian state seeking to force concessions from its neighbors might lead to nuclear war.

In this regard, the U.S. continues to search for new strategies to alter the DPRK's nuclear trajectory and ideas are hotly debated in national security circles. While decisive answers appear to elude U.S. leaders and decision makers, it is worthwhile for national security professionals to study the DPRK from different perspectives and strive for a better understanding of why its totalitarian regime has been so successful in resisting external pressure to change. The purpose of this paper is to explore the concept of

North Korea as a theoretically perfected Orwellian state and the importance that its senior leadership plays in how it resists the effects of international sanctions and maintains the status quo. Assuming that premise, what conclusions might we draw about how the DPRK's ruling elites see their situation on the chess table of the Korean peninsula, and how might it inform the way we should handle negotiations with the DPRK going forward?<sup>3</sup>

### Resilient and Pressure Resistant

Since 2009, Washington has pursued a policy of "strategic patience" towards the problem of Pyongyang's ominous progress on developing nuclear weapons, believing the U.S. could afford to wait while the DPRK reconsidered its options.<sup>4</sup> While avoiding decisive actions that might risk reigniting the Korean conflict, it put the U.S. in the position of passively waiting for the DPRK to signal a desire to returning to diplomatic talks aimed at denuclearization while continuing to apply pressure through sanctions and coordinating with other members of the failed Six Party Talks. The Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japan were reassured of U.S. commitments to their national security while cooperation was sought from Russia and China to encourage the DPRK to return to the table. It was thought to be a reasonable policy at the time as there was always the chance that the pressure might lead to a change in the DPRK's position.

When Kim Jong-il died in December 2011, the installation of his relatively young third son Kim Jong-un as his successor brought hopes for a change in the DPRK's trajectory, perhaps from his new leadership style or by the possibility the party would depose him and install someone else at the top with different ideas. Had either of those outcomes occurred, strategic patience might have been seen as a success. Instead, Kim Jong-un wasted little time in proving to be ruthless and resourceful. Groomed by his

father, he knew how to exploit the population's loyalty to the Kim dynasty, consolidate power, purge potential rivals, and accelerate the DRPK's pursuit of advanced missile technology and more powerful nuclear weapons.

Despite international sanctions, the DPRK conducted increasingly successful nuclear tests in 2013, 2016, and 2017, the latest involving a significantly more powerful hydrogen bomb.<sup>5</sup> In 2017, the DPRK also successfully tested intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) with ranges capable of reaching the far side of North America.<sup>6</sup> While the DPRK races to fully develop the capability to hold all U.S. major population centers at risk, the U.S. cannot be fully confident that it has reliable countermeasures to answer the threat. An unclassified assessment of U.S. Missile defense systems from the Operational Test & Evaluation Office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense stated that the "Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) system has demonstrated the capability to defend the U.S. Homeland from a small number of [ICBM] threats" in 2017.<sup>7</sup>

While the U.S. demonstrated a successful test under controlled circumstances in early 2017, however, similar tests observed in June 2017 and January 2018 were reported in the media as failures.<sup>8</sup> Given the DPRK's steady gains in advancing its nuclear missile program, it has good reason to question whether the U.S. could stop even one inbound ICBM with certainty, let alone several. After taking office in 2017, the Trump administration announced that the era of strategic patience was over and signaled the U.S. would be looking at all options on the table to denuclearize the DPRK, including by force if necessary.<sup>9</sup> Looking back on strategic patience, it appears that Washington was only ceding the passage of time in Pyongyang's favor. Why has the Kim family dynasty and the DPRK's regime been so resilient in resisting sanctions?

## A Modern Orwellian State

For those familiar with George Orwell's 1949 dystopian fiction novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it can be enlightening to view the DPRK and its senior leadership through an Orwellian lens when considering the DPRK's approach to governance. What comparisons might be made? In the novel, the fictional state of Oceania had come into being during a devastating war that had reshaped the global political map. By controlling all forms of information and historical records while staying perpetually at war with the other superpower states of Eurasia and East Asia, Oceania had figured out how to maintain a political system that exercised total control over its population. To address the relevant comparisons, this section proceeds accordingly: an introduction to Orwell's Oceania; mind control in fiction; mind control in reality; information control; freedom control; social control; and the ruling elites.

### Introduction to Orwell's Oceania

Oceania's population was split between three demographic groups: the proletariat, the outer party, and the inner party.<sup>10</sup> The proletariat consisted of the uneducated masses who toiled as laborers or farmers with the poorest standards of living. The outer party was something akin to a middle class — those who had some degree of education and privilege but only slightly better living standards than the proletariat. The members of the outer party served the interests of the state by performing all the administrative jobs but were required to demonstrate fervent loyalty and patriotism at all times, including attending the daily "two minutes hate" when they were obligated to watch propaganda films in public assemblies and vociferously expressed their hatred towards Oceania's enemies. They were also subject to invasive technological surveillance of their speech and activities at all times.

At the top of Oceania's society was the somewhat mysterious inner party who had visible privileges including the best living standards, finer clothing, abundant rations, luxury items, access to automobiles and aircraft, and even personal servants. Shortly after the inner party came to power during a devastating world war, they instituted a system of government that ensured that the masses could never rise up to change the social order. However, even members of the inner party were at risk of being purged if they stepped out of line. The fictional all-knowing and all-seeing head of state who embodied the party was "Big Brother," whose god-like persona was "the guise in which the Party [chose] to exhibit itself to the world."<sup>11</sup> Images of Big Brother were everywhere and his visage constantly reminded the viewer that he was vigilantly protecting Oceania. In this fashion he provided constant reassurance that the nation was on the right track, yet the look on his face also seemed to convey he would know if you were up to things you should not be doing.

### Mind Control in Fiction

In Oceania, all forms of information and communication in society were under the control of the inner party. All forms of print, speech, and electronic media both past and present were carefully tailored propaganda. Using technology and the bureaucracy of the outer party, any records or archives documenting the past were rewritten or reimaged without any trace of forgery in the present. As the novel artfully stated it, this permitted the state to control the future because it controlled the past.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, human language itself was in the process of being redefined and simplified to make it such that its constituents could speak only in ways that the party wanted individuals to be able to think.<sup>13</sup> Thinking in ways that violated the party's rules was known as "thought crime" and was ruthlessly cracked down on by the state's "thought police."

At school children were taught to spy on their parents and betray them as enemies of the state if they did or said things which might put their loyalty in question, such as uttering anti-party sentiments in their sleep. Individuals who stepped outside these lines disappeared and became "unpersons." Many were "vaporized," while others like the novel's hapless protagonist, Winston, were taken to the Ministry of Truth for re-education through torture. Executions were made into public spectacles for some prisoners, while others were quietly killed inside the walls of the labyrinthine Ministry of Love. Shortly before being taken away by the secret police, Winston reads Emmanuel Goldstein's forbidden book and learns that the real purpose of the ceaseless wars between Oceania and the other great power states is to grind up all the benefits produced by the labors of humanity, keeping the state's people at a level just above minimal subsistence.

As a consequence, the perceived threat of a monolithic external enemy makes it such that collective trust and loyalty must be handed over to the state's leadership without question, to continue fighting the war and supposedly safeguard the people's collective survival.<sup>14</sup> By the end of the novel, Winston's mind is irrevocably broken through torture and he has been reprogrammed to believe the state's propaganda, including the fact that "two plus two equals five" when the state says it does.

### Mind Control in Reality

The Democratic People's Republic of North Korea is not Oceania. The former is a sovereign nation of 25 million real human beings, while the latter is an imaginary totalitarian state conceived in dystopian fiction. They are also set in entirely different cultures, one Western and one Eastern. When making an analogy, one must remember that they are prone to oversimplification and selective application. However, contextually

relevant analogies can provide comparisons that can reshape how we think and possibly grant new insights.<sup>15</sup> How might the foregoing observations from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* aid our understanding as to why the oppressive totalitarian government of the "Hermit Kingdom" has not collapsed or made peace with its southern neighbor in the past sixty-five years?

Founded in September 1948, the DPRK invaded the ROK in June 1950. The Korean Peninsula saw bitter fighting and devastation in which more than two million Koreans were killed or wounded before the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953.<sup>16</sup> Technically, the two Koreas have been at war ever since and the DPRK continues to maintain the most heavily militarized human population on Earth.<sup>17</sup> Like the fictional Oceania, few citizens in the DPRK can remember a time when the nation was not at war, and over the long years since, their leadership has consistently warned that a return to the conflict remains close at hand.<sup>18</sup> At the government's insistence, nearly any effort or sacrifice is justified and could be demanded from the people in preparation for the resumption of hostilities with the U.S. and the ROK, similar to Oceania's use of eternal war to distract its citizens from other issues and create plausible explanations for the constant privations and lack of economic progress in the nation.<sup>19</sup>

In this respect, the absence of a peace resolution to the conflict works in the favor of the ruling elites who enjoy the status quo. Might they be drawing on an Orwellian playbook for totalitarian regime state survival? The Kim regime can foresee that if peace and military disarmament were to come to the peninsula, it is the ROK's form of governance which would ultimately absorb or replace the North's and put the ruling elites out of power if the population turns from the DPRK's endless preparations

for war to focus on economic prosperity as the ROK has done. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the party's slogan "War is Peace" normalized the concept that continually waging war was the best way to keep the peace and the existing status quo in society. Like Oceania's inner party, the DPRK's ruling elites have far more motivation and incentive to avoid peace. Similar in some ways to what the ancient political advisor Kautilya counseled in his opus the *Arthaśāstra*, a state of perpetual war and carefully managed disinformation provides the DPRK's rulers a way to maintain their position in perpetuity and advance their politics from a position of strength rather than weakness.<sup>20</sup>

For the rest of the DPRK's population, daily life and domestic politics are experienced in ways that bear similarities to Oceania's other castes. Like the outer party members in the novel attending the "two minutes hate" and party rallies, intense personal loyalty and unwavering support to the state is indoctrinated in early childhood and expected to be shown from every citizen to the Kim family dynasty. Portraits and statutes of these leaders are ever present in public places, assembly areas, schools, government offices, and even in framed pictures hanging on the walls inside family homes. Growing in strength from each Kim family member to the next, it is often described as the DPRK's "cult of personality."<sup>21</sup> The obsession with pictures and statutes of the Kim family leaders bear some similarities to *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* depictions of Big Brother as the ever-watching personification of the protective patriarchal state over people's daily lives. By 1972, the "cult" surrounding the Kim family dynasty in North Korean society is said to have surpassed the intensities of those which surrounded Stalin in the former Soviet Union and Mao Zedong in China.<sup>22</sup> In terms of its

national scale and pervasiveness in everyday in life, there is no other sovereign state like it anywhere else in the world.

Like Oceania, when the DPRK's leadership holds party events and state parades the masses must attend and show their support. Those who do not show enough enthusiasm put themselves at risk. For example, in 2012 it was reported that North Korean courts had sentenced individuals to six months in labor camps for failing to go to organized public mourning events after the death of Kim Jong-il.<sup>23</sup> Just showing up at an event was not necessarily sufficient, as some citizens also received sentences for failing to cry enough or for failing to appear genuine in their grief for the departed leader. While Oceania prosecuted "thought crime," the DPRK has shown a similar penchant for cracking down on citizens when it suspects their thoughts are not in line with party doctrine. While it may not have the technology Oceania had for the extremely intrusive techniques used in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in June 2015 it was reported that Kim Jong-un was reintroducing controversial laws that would allow children to be interrogated at school for use against their family to investigate whether their parents were committing offenses involving drug usage in the home.<sup>24</sup> The reports raised fears the DRPK might "restore other Orwellian practices" employed by Kim Jong-un's father which "required North Koreans to anonymously inform on colleagues or friends committing crimes."<sup>25</sup>

### Information Control

The ruling party exercises the maximum control and censorship it can over news and information in the DPRK, including television, radio, and Internet access. Only regime elites are permitted to read newspapers and magazines from foreign countries or listen to foreign broadcasts.<sup>26</sup> It would be difficult to rewrite history and the past in the technological way that the Oceania did in the novel, but it is worthy to note that the

DPRK 's museums and history books frame the Korean War as having been started by the U.S. and the ROK. In North Korean libraries, ordinary citizens are not permitted to have access to newspapers and books published before the 1990's. Kept under lock and key in the restricted sections of certain major libraries, an official security clearance is required to access them.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, Russian scholar of Asian studies Andrei Nikolaevich Lankov, who attended Pyongyang's Kim Il-sung University in 1985, has commented on how the DPRK has reshaped political histories to suit desired narratives in the present.<sup>28</sup> Borrowing a page from the rewritten histories the Soviet Union used during the Stalinist purges, citizens of the DPRK do not know that there were actually several other popular North Korean revolutionary leaders in the 1950's who were frequently followed in the state's official newspapers until they were suddenly purged by Kim Il-sung, becoming "unpersons" similar to the Soviet Union's Nikolai Yezhov and Leon Trotsky.<sup>29</sup>

### Freedom Control

Hapless individuals such as the protagonist in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* faced their worst fears after being arrested by the thought police and taken to the government's special ministry for reeducation. In October 2017, the DPRK attracted international attention again when new aerial images showed the DPRK's "extensive network of reeducation camps" documented by human rights organizations.<sup>30</sup> Operated by its Ministry of Public Security, the system of political gulags is thought to contain approximately 120,000 prisoners.<sup>31</sup> While most come from the peasant class, high ranking individuals are also vulnerable to suspicion, arrest, and disappearance for a time, possibly returning at a later date for those who are successfully reeducated.

A recent example in November 2015 was Choe Ryong-hae, one of Kim Jong-un's top aides, who ROK intelligence officials informed U.S. lawmakers had been sent to a rural collective farm for reeducation.<sup>32</sup> In December 2016, Kim Jong-un also received significant international media attention for allegedly ordering more than 340 executions, of which 140 were known to be senior leadership in either the ruling party, the government, or the military.<sup>33</sup> The highest profile party leader denounced was Kim Jong-un's powerful uncle, Jang Song Thaek, who was publicly dragged out of the chamber of the Workers' Party of Korea and humiliated on state television before his execution.<sup>34</sup> Similarly notable was the execution of Ri Yong Jin by anti-aircraft gun for falling asleep during a leadership meeting with Kim Jong-un in August 2016.<sup>35</sup> As with Orwell's inner party, everyone is at risk of falling out of favor with the DPRK's ruling party regardless of social class or previous safe status.

### Social Control

While Oceania had something akin to a middle class in its outer party, carefully arranged by the inner party to keep individuals in line, it is notable that the DPRK does not have a middle class in the traditional sense. In the late 1950's, Kim Il-sung and the ruling party instituted a social classification system known as *songbun*. In Korean, the word means "ingredients" or the material with which something is made.<sup>36</sup> Every citizen in the DPRK has been assessed with a *songbun* rating composed of two parts: *chulsin-songbun*, based on the socio-economic origins of one's family, and *sahoe-songbun*, which refers to a person's performance relating to socio-political and economic behavior.<sup>37</sup>

In total, there are fifty-four distinct *songbun* classifications, but they are divided into three overall castes which stratify the population: the core class, the wavering class,

and the hostile class.<sup>38</sup> At the time of the party's formation, this system served to flip the social order to give privileges to the peasant class who had taken up arms to establish the DPRK and fought in the Korean War. By design, it came at the expense of those who did not embrace the revolution — property owners, landlords, businessmen, and religious leaders.<sup>39</sup> In the 1950's, the change was welcomed because 80% of the population was in the peasant class. Over time it established a new order that determines one's lot in society based on the family one is born into.<sup>40</sup>

Today, those in the core class are privileged, those in the hostile class are disadvantaged, and those in the wavering class find themselves somewhere in between. The government keeps detailed files on individuals, methodically conducts *songbun* investigations from age seventeen forward, and routinely updates *songbun* records and classification. Individuals are not explicitly told what their current *songbun* status is.<sup>41</sup> According to the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, the DPRK's ruling party still uses *songbun* to make key decisions on all matters affecting North Korean citizens in just about every facet of life. Whether a person will be granted party membership, access to education, housing, employment options and career paths, military service, how their case will be weighted in the criminal justice system, and even access to food and healthcare are directly impacted by their *songbun*.<sup>42</sup> Within families, parents are constantly concerned with trying to guide their children through life in the *songbun* system with its inequities and unknowns. Predictably, individuals with higher *songbun* are discouraged or even prevented from marrying someone with lower *songbun* by their family and friends because of the negative impact it will have on their existing relations and future children.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, the most depraved aspect of *songbun* is the DPRK's infamous "three generations of punishment" rule, for which political crimes under the *songbun* system can have incredibly severe consequences. These offenses can send the convicted, their children, and their children's children into lifelong incarceration in the DPRK's political gulags. According to the U.S. Department of State, those sent to these camps can include "officials perceived to have performed poorly in their job, people who have criticized the regime, and anyone suspected of engaging in anti-government activities" to punish them through "unending hard labor."<sup>44</sup> According to a United Nation's Commission of Inquiry in 2014, the camps were established by Kim Il-sung himself to eliminate three generations of class enemies while purging from society individuals who pose a threat to the ruling party.<sup>45</sup> As a consequence of *songbun*, inmates sent to the camps are disproportionately populated with persons from the wavering and suspect classes. In practicing its three generations of punishment rule, the DPRK has instituted a barbaric system of control that far exceeds the way families are treated in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

### The Ruling Elites

Oceania and the DPRK share the obvious similarity that the ruling elites play the most important role in society in keeping the existing power arrangements in place. Like the inner party, in addition to higher prestige and considerably better living standards the DPRK's elites are the only ones who have access to high-end items and luxury goods. While many countries in the world have a lower, middle, and upper economic class, the DPRK has tended to only have a distinct and small economic class in its elite upper class. The DPRK is more resistant to the pressure when facing international sanctions on imported goods, because to squeeze a nation one usually needs to be

able to force discomfort on a sizable segment of society that needs the goods and services that are sanctioned. In the DPRK, the segment of the population that consumes such imported goods and services is very small. This demographic reality gives the DPRK the ability to better resist sanctions and maintain political stability. While exported items like coal and textiles have been sanctioned to reduce the DPRK's overall incoming revenues, it is unlikely export sanctions will be effective if they do not decrease the livelihoods of the ruling elites who hold political power. Getting the rest of the world to collectively enforce sanctions has also proven difficult, as the DPRK has repeatedly demonstrated its resourcefulness in getting around sanctions.<sup>46</sup>

### A Strategy of Extreme Isolation

As the ruling elites are the only segment of the North Korean population that carry relevant political weight, the continued acquisition of luxury goods for their consumption is a critically important concern for the Kim Family regime. While the concept of *Juche* originally started out as a political philosophy to galvanize the DPRK's will to be self-reliant and resist outside efforts to force the DPRK's leadership into making concessions, it has become deeply entrenched in the DPRK's economic system.<sup>47</sup> It has also evolved a dual purpose, first to condition the North Korean people to accept the deprivations that come with the national economic problems of self-imposed isolation for many decades, and secondly to facilitate a permanent quarantine of the population from contact with the outside world. This section explores the DPRK's strategies of extreme isolationism as a self-reinforcing system, its extreme form of state corruption, and how it has become a state that makes crime pay.

## A Self-Reinforcing System

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the government of Oceania designed society such that the common people had zero communication or contact with the citizens and culture of other states, other than to watch mass execution spectacles for captured prisoners of war. Everything the proletariat knew came from the propaganda newspapers, books, and films they were authorized to consume. The DPRK has similarly used *Juche* to shape a highly contained "hermit" society in which the common people accept the state's explanation that isolation is a necessary byproduct for national self-reliance and survival.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, letting *Juche* lapse now would lead to the regime being forced to open up the DPRK to the outside world.<sup>49</sup> While the ensuing commerce and trade would encourage economic reforms and put the country on the path to increased prosperity for the rest of the DPRK's people, the ruling elite see the other side of the coin.<sup>50</sup> They want the good life to continue for themselves and their families, including extended access to the luxury goods and consumables they know are available outside the DPRK. The Kim family delivers the luxury goods sought by the ruling elite, so the ruling elite continues to go along with them staying in power. It can be inferred that this self-reinforcing system keeps the status quo locked in place with little incentive for change because of "motivated reasoning," a phenomenon whereby satisfying ones needs overrides rational thought.<sup>51</sup>

The challenge for the Kim family has always been how to ensure that these luxury commodities keep flowing to the ruling elite in spite of international sanction efforts led by the United States. The U.S. Code of Federal Regulations covers a wide range of banned luxury goods including luxury automobiles, yachts, gems, jewelry, luxury fashion accessories, cosmetics, perfumes, furs, designer clothing, luxury

watches, rugs and tapestries, electronic entertainment software and equipment, recreational sports equipment, tobacco, wine and other alcoholic beverages, musical instruments, art, and antiques and collectible items including rare coins and stamps.<sup>52</sup> In addition to sanctions, the DPRK also has a negative reputation to contend with as a pariah state that commits numerous human rights abuses. In February 2014, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry report concluded that the "that DPRK authorities have committed and are committing crimes against humanity in the political prison camps, including extermination, murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape and other grave sexual violence and persecution on political, religious and gender grounds."<sup>53</sup> Most countries and potential trading partners correctly perceive that having open commerce with the DPRK would damage their own international reputations and create more problems than benefits.<sup>54</sup>

#### An Extreme Form of State Corruption

Due to these challenges, the DPRK's leadership probably concluded long ago that it must conduct illicit business to generate revenue by whatever means possible to maintain the status quo and offset their trade imbalance, as the DPRK's legal exports are far less than its imports.<sup>55</sup> Carried out with the government's support under a shroud of state secrecy, the DPRK has been very successful in getting around international sanctions and adapting their tactics when their schemes are uncovered. Over the years, much has come to light regarding how the DPRK's illicit drug production, trafficking, currency counterfeiting, smuggling, and the proliferation of weapons and weapons technologies have provided the DPRK with hard currency. While the full extent of the DPRK's criminal activities are unknown, the debriefings of North Korean defectors and

the congressional testimony of aid workers who have worked within the DPRK reveal much about the regime's complicity.<sup>56</sup>

The key organization within the Korean Workers' Party that runs the DPRK's criminal enterprise was designated Central Committee Bureau 39, or Office 39, when it was formed in 1974.<sup>57</sup> While Kim Il-sung was in power, his son Kim Jong-il took the lead in establishing Office 39 as a repository for a secret slush fund for the Kim family's use.<sup>58</sup> It may have started as a way of "fulfilling [Kim Jong-il's] penchant for luxury items," as his longtime personal chef Fujimoto Kenji revealed that Kim Jong-il had exotic tastes and was a prolific consumer.<sup>59</sup> Kim was also reported to have not one but six personal luxury trains which he had outfitted with the best amenities including flat-screen televisions and satellite phones.<sup>60</sup> Office 39 became the state sponsored organ for maintaining the loyalty of the ruling elites as well as funding idolatized monuments of the Kim family dynasty throughout the DPRK.<sup>61</sup>

According to estimates from East Asian intelligence officials, it was believed in 2003 that Office 39 was holding as much as \$5 billion U.S. dollars' worth of hard currency.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, according to the Korea Economic Institute of America, the ROK government analyzed the DPRK's rising importation of luxury items in 2010, 2011, and 2012. It found the DPRK imported \$446, \$584, and \$645 million U.S. dollars' worth of luxury goods respectively each year.<sup>63</sup> Some of the most sought after items included electronic devices, alcohol including scotch and fine wines, fur coats, cosmetic items including perfumes, and more than half a million dollars' worth of caviar.<sup>64</sup>

### A State That Makes Crime Pay

This arrangement and governmental structure is unique among the states of the modern age in that there are no other sovereign nations that provide an analogous

comparison. While many nations experience corruption and the problems of crime penetrating the organelles of the state, the DPRK clandestinely pursues illegal activities, illicit trade, and sanctions evasion as official state practices authorized at the very top of the government.<sup>65</sup> Designed to enable it to commit crimes beyond its borders as opposed to committing crimes within them, the DPRK's policies have been called "a form of criminal sovereignty that is unique in the contemporary international security arena."<sup>66</sup> In this context, it uses sovereignty to "[carry] out illicit international activities in defiance of international law and the domestic laws of numerous other nations."<sup>67</sup>

This leads to the fascinating observation that when it comes to the use of the national instruments of power, including diplomacy, the military, and law enforcement, the DPRK is like no other nation in that it actually uses them to commit crimes as opposed to fighting them.<sup>68</sup> In the process, the small percentage of the DPRK's citizens that make up the ruling elites end up being the beneficiaries of a unique governmental system that makes crime pay for their benefit. If it existed, a larger North Korean middle class might give international sanctions the capability to be more effective.

However, sanctions are only powerful instruments against nations which depend on external markets.<sup>69</sup> As one scholar from the Institute of Korean Studies explained in February 2018, economic sanctions against the DPRK typically lead only to reducing the number of people in the lower *songbun* classes that the DPRK will be able to feed.<sup>70</sup> These hardships are not shared by the elites, and past experience with the famines the DPRK experienced in the 1990's showed that the regime was prepared to weather it and survive. As long as the elites are taken care of, the DPRK's senior leadership sees

little reason to change the status quo and the Kim family dynasty continues to perpetuate the policies that have kept it in power.

### Conclusion

Like the fictional totalitarian regime in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the DPRK may have advanced to a state where its leadership enjoys a near-perfect form of totalitarian government after emerging from the stalemate of the Korean War. More so than any other nation in existence today, the DPRK's choices have many parallels to the fictional Oceania: its grand strategy of avoiding peace, quarantining itself from the rest of the world, maintaining ruthless control over its population, and perpetuating the privileged lifestyles of its ruling elites. The continued import of luxury items plays a critical role for the Kim family regime in maintaining stability and order, and the DPRK's adoption of criminal sovereignty as a state-sponsored enterprise has empowered it to resist external pressure and international sanctions that could change that calculus.

Whereas sanctions tend to be the tool of choice for the U.S. when dealing with rogue nations, they seem to only have inhumane impacts on the DPRK's disadvantaged *songbun* classes as opposed to a nascent middle class that might have the power to push for societal and political change. While none of the foregoing sheds light on ways to induce the DPRK to denuclearize, viewing the DPRK's leadership through an Orwellian lens can give national security practitioners possible insights into why they think the way they do, and whether or not the DPRK's ruling elites really think disarmament and peace on the Korean peninsula are in their best interests. Intelligence assessments of changes in the status of the ruling elites and their psychological disposition are probably the best way to judge their motivated reasoning and help determine whether strategies to influence the regime are working.

At present, the heads of state of the U.S. and the DPRK are scheduled to sit down together in May 2018 for historic talks on a possible peace agreement.<sup>71</sup> From an Orwellian perspective, it is plausible that the DPRK's senior leadership genuinely does not want peace and that initiatives from the regime to negotiate at the bargaining table serve an entirely different purpose than what it purports it to be. In that case, attaining full confidence in their nuclear capabilities and maintaining the status quo for the ruling elites are their top priorities. Consequently, the DPRK's diplomatic overtures are more likely a continuance of Kautilyan-style warfare using dueling diplomacy and subterfuge to turn negotiations to their advantage and buy more time to keep perfecting their nuclear arsenal.

If this theory is correct, the DPRK's senior leadership will again be seeking to propose "deals" which dangle peace and appear to offer real substance for change, but are designed so that they can shift their position again later to avoid an end to the war. Assuming the ruling elites ascribe to the Orwellian concept of *war is peace*, it follows that they see it as the only reliable way to continue to hold on to what they have. A fundamental shift in their thinking would need to take place, something that would change the personal well-being calculus in their motivated reasoning.<sup>72</sup> A carefully nuanced information campaign designed to send the right messages to the DPRK's ruling elites would be needed in any strategy the U.S. and the ROK adopts, which may require making concessions to the DPRK's ruling elites which are distasteful to the ROK but would set the conditions for honest and genuine negotiation coming from the DPRK's side.<sup>73</sup> Accomplishing such an information campaign while structuring the summit in such a way as to offer a path forward for peace while preventing the DPRK

from simply taking advantage of the negotiations again is the real conundrum. It will likely require small incremental steps in a *quid pro quo* arrangement designed to make it increasingly difficult for the DPRK to back out of the peace process. Such are the challenges of dealing with an Orwellian state that puts the personal needs of its leadership above the needs of its people.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Sun Tzu, *Sun Tzu on the Art of War*, trans. Lionel Giles (London: Luzac and Company, 1910), III:18.

<sup>2</sup> *Juche* became the official state ideology of North Korea in 1972. Often described as a philosophy of "self-reliance," it was defined by Kim Il-sung as "holding fast to an independent position, rejecting dependence on others, using one's own brains, believing in one's own strength, displaying the revolutionary spirit of self-reliance, and thus solving one's own problems for oneself on one's own responsibility under all circumstances." It is commonly seen as justification for national self-reliance and self-denial in the face of North Korea's economic stagnation. See Grace Lee, "The Political Philosophy of Juche," *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs*, 2003, 105, <http://www.asia-studies.com/sjeaa2003.html> (accessed March 11, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> At the time of this writing, the DPRK and the U.S. have agreed to hold a historic summit in May 2018; for the first time ever, a U.S. president would be sitting down to hold talks directly with the head of the North Korean state. See Tessa Berenson, "Why Trump's Predecessors Did Not Meet With North Korea," *Time*, March 9, 2018, 1, <http://time.com/5192579/trump-meets-kim-jong-un-north-korea/> (accessed March 11, 2018).

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Elleman, "The Secret To North Korea'S ICBM Success," *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, blog entry posted August 14, 2017, <https://www.iiss.org/en/iiss%20voices/blogsections/iiss-voices-2017-adeb/august-2b48/north-korea-icbm-success-3abb> (accessed March 11, 2018); Luis Martinez, Elizabeth McLaughlin, and Meghan Keneally, "North Korea Says It Tested New, Nuclear-Capable ICBM That Can

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<sup>8</sup> Hans Nichols and Alex Johnson, "U.S. Missile Defense Test Fails Off Hawaii, Officials Say," *NBC News*, January 31, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/u-s-missile-defense-test-fails-hawaii-officials-say-n843486> (accessed March 11, 2018); "US Missile Defense Test Failed In Hawaii," *The Guardian*, February 1, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/01/us-missile-defense-test-failed-in-hawaii-officials-say> (accessed March 11, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Restuccia, "Trump on North Korea: 'The Era of Strategic Patience Is Over,'" November 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-north-korea-the-era-of-strategic-patience-is-over/> (accessed March 11, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Within the novel, Orwell employs *mise en abyme* in the form of a book within the book by the traitor Emmanuel Goldstein; it states that the population of Oceania is 85% proletariat and 2% inner party, leaving approximately 13% for the outer party. See George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1950), 172.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>12</sup> The party's slogan is "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past." See *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Flock, "George Orwell's '1984' Is A Best-Seller Again. Here's Why It Resonates Now," *PBS Newshour*, January 25, 2017, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/george-orwells-1984-best-seller-heres-resonates-now> (accessed March 11 2018).

<sup>14</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 158.

<sup>15</sup> Giovanni Gavetti and Jan W. Rivkin, "How Strategists Really Think: Tapping the Power of Analogy," *Harvard Business Review*, 83 (April 2005): 54-63.

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<sup>22</sup> United Nations, *Report of the Detailed Findings*, 34.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, III.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-84; See also United Nations, *Report of the Detailed Findings*, 30.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Collins, *Marked for Life: Songbun*, 84.

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<sup>45</sup> United Nations, *Report of the Detailed Findings*, 329.

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<sup>48</sup> United Nations, *Report of the Detailed Findings*, 33-34.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 1

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

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