

North Korea – Reclusive, Dynastic and Very Dangerous

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I've always been fascinated by this strange and sinister country where in many ways the clock seems to have stopped 50 or 60 years ago. There are a slew of adjectives you can use to describe North Korea --- isolated, repressive, rigid, militaristic, tyrannical, Stalinist, unpredictable, anachronistic and bizarre, and, as we've seen in last month, both dynastic and trigger-happy. What really defines the remoteness of the place are the satellite images we've seen of Southeast Asia taken at night. The lights of Japan, China and South Korea clearly reflect prosperous, advanced societies --- then you look at what should be NK, and it is virtually black. A picture certainly worth a thousand words.

North Korea is really the last remaining vestige of the Cold War. The concentration of active military troops facing off on the Korean peninsula, which totals over 1.7 million, is the highest of any place of similar size in the world. NKorea combines a rigid adherence to militant, Marxist Communism with its own brand of isolationist, hyper-nationalism. The result has been a tyrannical regime that spends billions on an absurdly bloated military, stands by while millions of its people to die of starvation while the ruling elite and party bureaucrats live high on the hog. By all rights the North should have been ripe decades ago for social upheaval and revolution, but somehow the Kim dynasty has managed to keep its population under the boot for over 60 years.

Just like the light and dark satellite photos I mentioned, the contrasts between everyday life in NK and its sister SK couldn't be more stark. Since the Korean peninsula split in two after WW2, the North has turned from a relatively prosperous country of about 16mm with an industrial base to a third-world nation of 23mm with a deteriorating industrial base and an antiquated agricultural sector.

In contrast we all know what's happened below the 38th parallel --- one of the greatest success stories of emerging SE Asia – a huge leap in prosperity for 48mm SKoreans and now the world's 9th largest economy in terms of GDP. Today SKoreans enjoy a per capita income 14 times that of NKoreans and have a life expectancy of 74 years, vs. a miserable 51 years in the North. The transformation is even more dramatic given that the SK of 1945 was a largely agrarian society which lacked the North's manufacturing base and natural resources.

In fact, I was surprised to learn that NK's economy actually outpaced SK's for all of the 1950's well in the 1960's before the two reached parity about 40 yrs ago. The latest GDP data shows the huge leap SK has made since then --- at close to \$860 bil., SKorea's GDP is now fully 22X bigger than the North's. Or, put in baseball terms, the score is Capitalism 22, Communism 1.

To get a better perspective on today's two totally different Koreas, you really need to look at some key historical developments over the last century.

The seeds of the split peninsula were really sown over a century ago by developments in East Asia very much influenced by the US. Just a few months back in the Chappaqua Library, some of us heard about an aspect of American history I admit I knew very little about. We heard a talk by James Bradford, who wrote "The Imperial Cruise", which focused on American foreign policy in East Asia between around 1898 and 1910. The chief protagonist was Teddy Roosevelt, who, whatever you may think of him, was an unbridled expansionist. Reminiscent of certain recent US Presidents, he was convinced that America had an obligation and God-given right to spread its culture and influence wherever feasible. Asia and the Pacific rim became a key area of focus, starting earlier with Hawaii, then followed by our virtual forced annexation of the Philippines, which was one of the ugliest episodes ever in our foreign relations.

The US became increasingly impressed with Japan's culture and economy at the time while we tended to dismiss China and Korea as backward societies. Washington moved pro-actively to encourage Japan to expand its presence in those two countries, thinking it could spread American influence in Asia and create big new markets for American business.

In what was one of the more devious sellouts of the 20th century, the US in 1905 effectively gave Japan carte blanche to expand into and eventually dominate Korea, while we agreed to look the other way. In 1910 Japan ousted Korea's legitimate government and set up a colonial regime that lasted until the end of WW2. The Japanese had always looked down on the Koreans, and ran the country with an iron fist, forcing the population to speak Japanese and adopt Japanese names, not to mention forcing over 2 million Koreans to move to Japan to do menial labor. No surprise, then, that the Korean's hatred of Japan became intense, and led to the bad vibes that still exist between the two countries today.

After VJ Day in 1945 a vacuum developed on the peninsula as the Japanese got out, and North and South Korea were "created", by drawing a line along the 38th parallel to separate the north, which had been occupied by Russian troops, and the south, which was held by a contingent of American troops. Interestingly, one of the US Army officers who decided on the 38th parallel as a demarcation line was an Army colonel by the name of Dean Rusk.

The Russians needed an indigenous puppet leader to run the North, and finally settled on Kim Il-Sung, a popular guerilla rebel who since 1932 had fought rear-guard actions against the Japanese in Manchuria. Once in power, Kim found that running a dictatorship financed by Moscow had its rewards, and thereafter ruled with an increasingly brutal hand for the next 46 years. One of the improbable quirks of Kim's background is that as a teenager he played the organ in a Protestant church in China where his father, a devout Christian, was the minister. Obviously Kim didn't inherit much of his father's sense of right and wrong.

He immediately started weighing his chances of taking over the whole peninsula, with the assumption that the Russians would back him up. Of course we all know what happened in June, 1950. In a stunning miscalculation, Kim launched a disastrous war that took a huge human toll --- close to 3 million military and civilian casualties, and virtually destroyed the peninsula's infrastructure. American and UN troop deaths totaled close to 40,000, almost 10 times the toll in the Iraq war. This was the only hot war that was fought within the Cold War, and not only was the war never declared, it was never ended with a peace treaty.

The full story of the invasion is fascinating, and clearly one for another day, but two key catalysts stand out: the first was America's failure to clearly define its protective strategy in Southeast Asia at the time. In the late 1940's Secretary of State Dean Acheson made ambiguous statements about our willingness to defend So.Korea in case of military aggression, and never really clarified what our policy was. As a result both Kim Il-Sung and Stalin, whom Kim had consulted about possibly attacking the South, figured that if push came to shove, the US wouldn't want to get involved in another shooting war far from home so soon after the end of WWII. Second, while Stalin had initially nixed an invasion by the North, Mao's takeover of China in 1949 along with Russia's new nuclear capability gave Stalin more confidence, and in early 1950 he gave Kim the green light.

But Kim Il-Sung wasn't the only miscalculator. Harry Truman, who was egged on by General MacArthur, himself rolled the dice in late 1950 and ordered our troops to cross the 38th parallel as we pushed the NKoreans out of the South. Relying on faulty intelligence, he gambled that China wouldn't intervene, and if it did, Chinese troops would be poorly armed and no match for the US. The rest is history, and the Korean peninsula would never be the same. Today, 57 years after the armistice, the US still is SKorea's full-time protector, with close to 28,000 troops stationed throughout the country.

As we know, an armistice, brokered by the UN, was finally signed in early 1953. The new North-South dividing line, now called the DMZ, was drawn close to where it had been before -- roughly along the 38th parallel. The war basically eliminated any chance the two Koreas could be re-united in the foreseeable future, much less talk to each other in the same room. The intensity of the hatred and invective between the two was now so great they became isolated armed camps, hurling insults and threats on a daily basis. As well, historians claim that the war not only severely delayed any potential improvement in relations between China and the US but also helped draw China and Russia together in tighter opposition to the US.

In the North, Kim Il-Sung managed to emerge from the war still in charge, though a lot less trigger-happy. Over time Kim's grip tightened, and his rule evolved into a full-fledged cult of the "Great Leader". To force NKoreans to toe the line and to snuff out independent thought, Kim used every trick in the brain-washing book. He and his propaganda machine created a God-like persona, making similar efforts by Saddam Hussein, Papa Doc Duvalier and Mussolini look amateurish at best.

And to make sure his new persona went unquestioned, he built a tyrannical police state that made Stalin's KGB look like a bunch of softies. He started by having thousands of statues of himself built around the country, flooded the streets and the media with adoring accounts of his achievements and required every household to have a framed portrait of him hung on the wall. He set up dozens of gulag prisons and concentration camps to punish any kind of political or economic misbehavior, down to a random word of criticism heard on the street. Teams of "hall monitors" were established in every apartment building, whose job it was to snoop on residents and report any punishable activity. All dwellings were equipped with mandatory closed circuit speakers that spouted martial music and propaganda. Any communication with the outside world was forbidden and no outside media was allowed in, creating an information vacuum ripe for exploitation. For internal consumption he orchestrated massive public displays of pomp and ceremony, with tens of thousands of perfectly synchronized performers marching and dancing in packed stadiums. For the few folks who could afford a TV set, which cost close to 4 month's wages, that was the only show in town that day. With only one State-run channel to watch, nobody had any idea what they were missing.

Kim's message to the people was unadulterated propaganda --- NKoreans were a special, self-reliant breed blessed to live in a Communist worker's paradise. The country was destined for greatness and would soon reunify, on its terms, with the poor but belligerent South, which had become a virtual colony of the U.S. The threat of invasion by the South was said to be constant, and made more menacing by the backing of the imperialist US and its nuclear weapons. All the while the average worker in the North lived a gritty, hardscrabble life, probably working long hours in a grubby, poorly equipped State-run factory. Who knows if he possibly believed the regime's promises that hard work and discipline would bring better times for all. Meanwhile, Kim, the ruling elite and the state-run business bosses lived in high style -- Kim's excesses were over the top -- he reportedly has a dozen or so mansions and retreats secreted around the country, with their own spas, gaggles of young ladies at his beck and call and private food gardens to make sure the Great Leader remained well fed throughout.

One claim that Kim made to North Koreans was more accurate than most of us probably remember. While the South had no intention of invading the North, it was in fact backed by American nuclear weapons, several hundred of which we placed in SK starting in the 1960's. The US made no secret the nukes were there as a deterrent and on several occasions US spokesmen said openly they would be used if the North attacked. Shades of General MacArthur all over again. Though there was much debate in Washington about how far we should push the nuclear threat, there's no question the North could easily convince itself it was threatened by SKorean nukes.

Let's fast-forward through the '60s and '70's, a period that saw relations between North and South range from ice-cold and on the verge of war to, occasionally, luke-warm and half-way civil. During the ice-cold periods, South and NKorea, along with the Pentagon, periodically went on full alert, with the North frequently ordering full mobilization. Nerves were constantly on edge for good reason -- several brazen attacks by the NKoreans over the years

came close to provoking military action by the South. There was the NK assassination squad that got within a block of gunning down the SK President in 1968, the capture of the USS Pueblo that same year, the unprovoked killing of US soldiers at the DMZ in 1976, the planted bomb in Burma that killed 7 visiting SKorean political figures in 1983, and later the bomb that destroyed a Korean Air Lines flight in 1987, killing 115. Along with its constant threats to turn Seoul into a “sea of flames”, the North tried every provocative trick in the book, including digging elaborate tunnels under the DMZ, launching secret submarine landings and even infiltrating SKorea to assassinate defectors.

Throughout that period and in the 40 years following the war, Kim Il-Sung outlasted dozens of world leaders, including Stalin, Mao and six US Presidents. His longevity surely broke the Guinness Book of Records for dictators -- when he died in 1994 he had hung in for 46 years, without any visible sign of having to dodge assassination attempts or military coups. Just think, if Gerald Ford has lasted that long in office he’d still be President! There may be a good reason he could sleep soundly at night -- according to reports I read, the police and troops assigned to Pyongyang aren’t issued live ammunition, which conveniently minimizes opportunities for a military coup. Since for obvious reasons there is little crime in NKorea, we have to guess they rarely needed to use ammunition anyway. When Kim died, there were amazing scenes of mass, hysterical mourning that really stretch credibility, given the unmitigated tyrant he was. Those scenes attest to the fact he had truly achieved God-like status.

What was surprising was the smooth transfer of power after Kim’s death to one of his virtually unknown sons, Kim Jong-Il. The younger Kim was an inscrutable, stone-faced figure who was barely 5 feet tall, and sported a bouffant hair-do that made him look at least 5’ 2”. Back then he was virtually unknown to the NK people, and it stretches the imagination today to hear that as far as anyone knows, Kim Jong-Il has only spoken once in public in his 16 years in power. Yet by skillfully exploiting his father’s Godly image, he managed over time to create his own cult of personality, that is, assuming he actually had one. Charming personality or not, Kim Jong-Il has proven over the years to be a very shrewd, sharp operator who is apparently well schooled in Machiavellian theory and as tuned in to world events as anyone.

The first few years of Kim’s rule brought two dramatic changes for the North. The first was the military’s newfound ability to reprocess plutonium to make nuclear warheads. The second was the spread of domestic food shortages that played havoc with the economy and eventually caused widespread famine. Looking at the food shortages first, estimates are that over the last 15 years, periodic famines have taken a huge toll, killing as many as 2 million North Koreans. The accounts of the famines I read made very grim reading. Daily rations, already minimal to begin with, were cut to a bowl of watered-down corn meal, with maybe a bit of rice. Many people lived on roots and grass; and children scavenged for kernels of corn on the ground. To make matters worse, the poorly fed military was forced to live off the land, and you can imagine who ended up with the little food that remained. Bottom line, during this

period the population was weakened by hunger and so focused on just surviving that it didn't have the time or energy to revolt.

The other side of the coin was Kim Jong-II's determination to make NKorea a legitimate nuclear player, famine be damned. Starting in the early 1980's, US spy satellites began picking up evidence that NK was building some kind of nuclear complex at Yongbyon, north of Pyongyang. After several years of sifting the images, the US military finally concluded it had a problem on its hands. Our observers were initially puzzled by the fact NK made little effort to disguise the facility, which led to a long delayed response on our part. From that time on NK's development of nuclear capability and our subsequent efforts to derail it has made for a very long, complicated and frustrating story. For roughly a quarter century, the US, the UN and our allies tried but failed to get the North to limit its nuclear efforts to civilian use.

Over that period Kim Jong-II skillfully played his nuclear card to threaten, blackmail and extort the West to his advantage time and time again. Though he signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1985, he hasn't hesitated to renege on his promises again and again while squeezing more concessions and aid from the West. Looking back on the US's policy responses to Kim's maneuvers, one can't help but wonder how our strategy could have been so erratic and ineffective. Throughout the Reagan, Clinton and both Bush administrations, our strategy seemed to constantly shift gears, reflecting if nothing else the frequent turnover at the State Dept., CIA, Military and the White House.

The Bush 43 administration was a prime example. Despite the fact Kim had made real overtures to the US in early 2000, the Rumsfeld/Cheney contingent in the newly elected administration refused to even talk to NK until it had gotten rid of its nukes, an event clearly not about to happen any time soon. After an encouraging visit by Madeleine Albright to Pyongyang late in 2000, any hope of a rapprochement was out the window soon after a lame-duck Clinton canceled a planned visit to NKorea and Bush followed with his "Axis of Evil" speech in 2002. That guaranteed there wouldn't be meaningful negotiations with the North for the foreseeable future. There's a fascinating sidelight to the Axis of Evil speech -- David Sanger, in his book "The Inheritance", claims a source in the White House told him that Bush picked NKorea as the third pariah to include in the Axis for a simple reason -- he didn't want all the countries on the list to be Muslim.

Then in 2003 the invasion of Iraq refocused the US, leading the Bush administration to largely ignore what was going on in NK. Kim took full advantage of our distraction, getting away with missile launches that brought only a slap on the wrist from Washington. So a perverse combination of our inconsistent strategies and Kim's shrewd machinations that have frustrated the US and the West almost from the start. Don Gregg, former US Ambassador to SKorea, called our inability to prevent Kim Jong-II from going nuclear "One of the greatest failures of American foreign policy ever". Today the prevailing assumption is that only a complete collapse of the Kim regime will reverse its nuclear ambitions.

In recent years NK has managed to launch several nuclear missiles and set off what was probably a small underground nuclear explosion. While in most cases the results were underwhelming from a technical standpoint, reliable sources now say the North has enough plutonium reprocessing capability to build from 6 to 8 nuclear warheads. Bottom line, despite endless acrobatics on both sides, NKorea has become the 9th member of the global nuclear club. Even more effective for Kim has been his success in selling nuclear technology to some of the world's bad actors, which is a whole other aspect of his quest for nukes. We've all read about the clandestine air or sea cargos occasionally detected by satellite, air surveillance or port inspectors -- what we don't know is how much his arms trafficking has gone undetected over the years.

The trafficking he's gotten away with has steered a major flow of hard currency back to NKorea's Treasury. That cash has been instrumental in shoring up his regime and kept the economy from totally collapsing. You may remember back in 2007 when Israeli jets took out a Syrian nuclear complex in the desert that turned out to have been built by the NKoreans. Construction of that complex had reportedly been going on for over five years before satellite images clearly revealed its intent. During that whole period the NKoreans had been shipping components into Syria with impunity. And of course now we have a clearer picture that the North has been shipping nuclear technology and components to Iran and Libya, to mention a few, with equal impunity. Another story entirely are the massive gains the regime has reaped over the decades from trafficking in drugs and counterfeiting US currency.

Earlier this year we were reminded that the Kim regime is no less dangerous than it ever was. In March, as we all know, a NKorean torpedo sank a 1,200-ton SKorean patrol boat, with the loss of 46 SKorean sailors. The motive for this virtual act of war is still unclear, though most North Korea experts think it had a lot to do with the upcoming shift of power from Kim Jong-Il to one of his sons, Kim Jong-Eun. Many feel the sinking was set up as a command performance by the younger Kim to give him credibility with the military establishment. There are some, however, who think the North may not have been the culprit. I happened to see Peter Ehrlich at lunch yesterday, and he mentioned that Don Gregg, for one, has a very different take on what may have happened.

As most of us are aware, Kim Jong-Il had a stroke two years ago, and is thought to be in failing health. That's obviously the reasoning behind the big Worker's Party confab held in Pyongyang two months ago that in a few magic moments lifted Kim's son, Kim Jong-Un, from total obscurity virtually on to the throne. Overnight he was made a 4-Star General and is virtually assured of being his father's anointed successor. As well, Kim's sister and a few cronies got big promotions, probably to create a kind of regency around the younger Kim when he takes power.

The perpetuation of the Kim dynasty is pretty ironic, since Communist doctrine views nepotism as counter to its basic precepts. In fact it's widely felt that the bureaucracy and the military weren't happy when Kim Il-Sung handed power to Kim Jong-Il back in 1994, and today they

may have a pretty dim view of Kim Jong-Eun. It certainly speaks to the totally rigid, repressive state of life in NKorea that the Kims have been able to extend their line for 62 years while flouting fundamental Communist doctrine. Only time will tell if the younger Kim, who is 27 or 28, will be able to carry the ball after his father is gone. Some feel the ruling elite will be happy to have a twenty-something “Great Leader” who can, at least for a while, be manipulated from behind the scenes.

Does Kim Junior bring anything to the table? The assumption is probably not, but very few people have any idea, and, as I mentioned, the average NKorean hardly knows who he is. He apparently went to boarding school under an assumed name in Switzerland, where sketchy reports say he bossed fellow students around on the soccer field and pretended to be the son of a chauffeur. An amusing sidelight is that Kim Junior’s older brother, who would have been the obvious heir-apparent, was caught several years ago in Japan trying to get to Tokyo Disneyland using a fake Japanese passport. He quickly faded from view but has recently emerged as an investor in gambling casinos in Macau. The middle son, about whom even less is heard, was dismissed by a No. Korean source as being “unmanly”, whatever that implies in North Korea – speak, though I guess we get the general idea.

While N.Korea operates in a virtual vacuum, its not 100% isolated. Virtually its sole connection abroad is, not surprisingly, with China, which is the only country that can exert any real influence on the North. But, as we’ve all heard, for a host of reasons China is highly unlikely to do anything constructive in getting Kim Jong-Il to shape up. Ever since the US and SKorea began sporadic talks with the North in the 1980’s, China has been a mostly uncooperative observer in the process. It did join in the 6-Party talks in the late ‘1990’s, which were a joint effort to get NKorea to back off its nuclear program. But after years of unproductive dialogue, those talks have been put on the back burner and may or may not be resumed. Most telling about China’s lack of cooperation was its refusal last summer to go along with the UN’s condemnation of the North for the sinking of the SKorean patrol boat. That in spite of the conclusion of an international study that a NKorean torpedo had done the dirty work.

Why should anyone be surprised that China has played the role of spoiler? China has every reason to play off both sides, while paying lip service to the idea that NKorea’s nuclear ambitions should be contained.

We can’t forget that the Chinese bailed out Kim Il-Sung in the Korean war, taking about half a million casualties in the process. Without Chinese intervention Kim Il-Sung would have been toast, and a reconstructed, Western-leaning Korea would have backed right up on China’s doorstep. In the intervening years China has pumped major aid into NKorea when needed and has remained by far its biggest trading partner. Equally as important, its top military brass has kept close ties with NKorea’s military and has kept its army well supplied. China’s top military leaders are prone to be more hawkish and anti-American than are its government leaders, so they’re happy to play adversarial roles versus the US and SKorea.

So the status quo is just fine with the Chinese. The last thing they want is a full-fledged political and economic collapse in NKorea, which could spark a massive flow of refugees across the border. Equally unappealing for China would be a peaceful reunification of North and South, which would likely see, over time, a US – friendly democratic Korea sitting right in Beijing's back yard. Is China perfectly happy to let Kim keep developing his nukes? Not really, but there's little it feels it could do that the US couldn't do to make him stop, and they're certainly not threatened by a nuclear NKorea.

China in fact is the only foreign country Kim Jong-Il has ever set foot in. His occasional trips across the border, always by train, are shrouded in secrecy and few Chinese and fewer NKoreans even know he is there. Apparently Kim is deathly afraid of flying, so he's become a train buff by necessity. The real question is whether he is impressed, or not, by China's huge economic leap forward. Hardly anyone has the vaguest idea, because his psyche remains a total mystery to all but his closest confidants. Needless to say his trips to China haven't made an iota of difference so far.

So without China in a supportive role, the US, the UN and the West will probably continue to play the same diplomatic games that have gone nowhere over the years. The fact is Kim is focused on self-preservation, and he knows that any step on his part to open up to the West and accept development aid as the price of closing down his nukes would let the genie out of the bottle. By keeping the status quo just where it is, he minimizes the possibility of upheaval and revolt, at least for now.

Many continue to feel that Kim's regime is increasingly vulnerable to total economic meltdown, but that's been the case off and on ever since the mid-1990's, when conditions were ripe for revolution. Others point to recent feelers put out by Kim to restart the 6-Party talks, but chances are that little will be accomplished unless he feels really intense pressure to change his stripes.

Assuming Kim Junior can avoid a palace coup and eventually take over, the key question will be whether he feels he has to assert his untested authority by doing something brazen, and possibly very stupid. Given the events of the last few weeks, it looks like he may already have done something pretty stupid.

One thing we all have to hope is that he's not crazy enough to fool around with nuclear warheads. A reasonable hope is that the newly elevated leaders around him will moderate whatever he has up his sleeve. Of course we could be sitting here in 10 years and still not have an answer if Kim Jong-Il takes after his father and lives in to his 80's. It's just possible that by then younger Kim will shed his genetic baggage and will teach his father the joys of Facebook, Twitter and Fox News and convert the old man in to a Great and Beneficent Leader. As for me, I'm not going to lose any sleep thinking its going to happen.

As a kind of postscript there are a few interesting sidelights I didn't mention.

The first are three excellent books about NKorea you could pick up on a really rainy afternoon. The best is probably "Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader", a 700-pg. tome by Bradley Martin, a correspondent with decades of experience in North and SKorea and China. His interviews with NKorean officials and defectors along with his nose for detail makes fascinating reading. "The Two Koreas", by Don Oberdorfer, also a correspondent, is a comprehensive, blow-by-blow account of events on the peninsula from 1945 through 2000. Finally, Barbara Demick's book, "Nothing to Envy" is a fascinating and depressing account of the trials of daily life in NKorea told by half a dozen defectors who lived to tell their stories. I highly recommend all three, as well as an independent film, "Kimjongilia" which played at the Burns a few weeks ago. What sounds like a nasty tropical disease is actually a chrysanthemum that was genetically altered to celebrate the first 10 years of Kim Jong-Il's rule. The movie has fascinating stories by defectors and some rarely seen footage of NKorea.

Second is the story of Jimmy Carter's multiple visits to NKorea acting as an independent arbiter to avert potential crises and, more recently, to win the release of an American minister who won't get this year's Nobel Prize for intelligent diplomacy. Carter's visits were often made without consulting the State Dept., and caused a lot of teeth-gnashing in the White House on several occasions. They were, however, effective in keeping both sides out of mischief on more than one occasion. And of course Bill Clinton made a recent cameo appearance in the North to bail out the two American journalists who got a little too curious.

Finally, there is increasing evidence that slowly but surely, ordinary NKoreans are getting wind of life outside the country. We hear reports about smuggled cell phones, clandestine use of the Web and other communications from the West, in spite of constant censorship and certain prison terms for people caught looking or listening. We can only hope that modern media can help speed the eventual end of the Kim dynasty.

Questions:

1. Do you agree that NKorea remains a volatile, trigger-happy regime that could endanger the West, or is the concern overdone?

2. So far the regime has made a mockery of the West's erratic carrot and stick approach to dealing with its nuclear weapons – what approaches would you recommend to make concrete progress?
3. What would the regional and global implications be of a military strike on NKorea's nuclear complex?
4. What should the West do to try to get more cooperation from the Chinese?
5. NKorea will probably continue to test-fire nuclear missiles. Should the West draw the line at some point? If so, when, and how? Or is a nuclear NKorea probably just as inevitable as a nuclear Iran?