

Close Encounters of the Nonnuclear Kind: The North Korean Public Relations Campaign in U.S. Media of the 1970s

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Seeking to add a missing, nonviolent page to the history of U.S.–North Korea relations, this study examines Pyongyang’s initiatives in the area of public relations. It systematically organizes North Korea–related material from five major U.S. newspapers to reconstruct a complex public relations campaign that North Korea implemented during the 1970s through the U.S. media. The campaign was similar to those of other developing countries in its objective of gaining U.S. attention and influencing its policy making through mass media, but it differed from them in the intentional projection of a belligerent image. An analysis of frequency and contents of the coverage of North Korea as well as related policy debates demonstrates that the campaign enjoyed a qualified success. Although it did not lead to U.S. adoption of specific policies desired by North Korea, it helped a peripheral North Korea break through the hierarchies of information flows.

Keywords: U.S.–North Korea relations, 1970s, public relations, U.S. media, international information order

The history of North Korea’s relations with the United States is always viewed through the prism of military confrontations and security crises. With the Korean War (1950–1953), the interaction got off on the wrong foot—or, to borrow an old Korean expression, missing the very first button, the entire dress was fastened wrong. The result is a narrative of the bilateral relationship focused exclusively on conflict (see, e.g., Beal, 2005; Lee, 2006; Oh & Hassig, 2000). It goes from the Korean War to North Korea’s abduction of USS *Pueblo* in the 1960s and murders of two U.S. officers in the Korean joint security area in the 1970s, followed by series of nuclear and missile tests since the 1990s—most of which triggered emergency meetings of top U.S. officials to confirm war plans and weigh options for retaliation or preemptive strikes on North Korea. If there were any negotiations between the United States and Pyongyang,² they were ad hoc attempts by the two sides to deescalate a crisis. In this light, even the recent summitry between the two parties is hardly an exception.

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Date submitted: 2018-11-12

¹ This project was completed during the author’s fellowship at the Institute for Korean Studies of Indiana University, which was supported by the Core University Program for Korean Studies (AKS-2016-OLU-22500004).

² In using the name of a capital city as an alternative name of the government that is seated there, I follow the common practice in news media, diplomatic history, and international relations.

Missing in the narrative is any mention of efforts by either government to approach the other in a nonthreatening way and at a time other than one of an imminent armed conflict. The blame for the grim story of this interaction is naturally put on the North Korean leaders and their penchant for brinksmanship. This article, however, demonstrates that such efforts at nonthreatening interaction did take place. They were initiated by Pyongyang and materialized in a public relations campaign carried out through U.S. media in the 1970s. Although several studies (e.g., Hong, 2012;³ Yu, 1987) make references to North Korea's advertisements in the U.S. press and visits by American journalists to North Korea in the 1970s, none of these systematically examine the appearance of North Korea in U.S. media during this time. I demonstrate that Pyongyang implemented an elaborate campaign that proceeded through several stages throughout the 1970s and encompassed various tactics aimed to influence the public opinion and ultimately the policy making in the United States.

This article reconstructs Pyongyang's campaign and reveals its objectives through cross-analysis of North Korea-related material (news stories, opinion pieces, letters to the editor, advertisements, etc.) that appeared in five major U.S. newspapers (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune*) from 1965 to 1980 against the description of developments concerned with North Korea and its relations with the United States as recorded in scholarly works⁴ as well as archival documents. I then assess the effects of the campaign by analyzing trends in these newspaper publications and reviewing changes in U.S. policy makers' approaches to North Korea. The conclusion compares the North Korean campaign with those of other developing countries and discusses the implications for the investigation of public relations efforts of foreign governments in general.

By examining the North Korean campaign as one of multiple examples of public relations initiatives by developing countries, I do not seek to justify the methods of the regime in Pyongyang; nor am I attempting to portray it as a victim of misunderstanding. Rather, this analysis is intended to underpin a hope for a breakthrough toward more peaceful socialization of the regime, especially given its current—however ill-conceived—undertakings as it tries to reach an international audience once again through journalists and mass media.

The term *public relations* (PR) refers to management of communication between an entity and its target publics. Seeking to affect the way the publics perceive it, this entity may launch a PR campaign that highlights, withholds, or modifies relevant information and conveys it to the targeted publics. When the entity is a government, the PR campaign may be an attempt to communicate with politicians or government agencies of another country in pursuit of political objectives. Achieving positive publicity in the target country's mass media usually constitutes a significant part of such a campaign. During the 1970s, Rhodesia, Chile, Egypt, Taiwan, South Korea, and other developing countries hired PR professionals, tasking them with improving their governments' portrayal in the West, out of concern that the unflattering stereotypes

³ This article uses the Revised Romanization system for South Korean names and the North Korean Romanization system for North Korean names, except for names with commonly accepted alternative spellings.

⁴ Representative studies on U.S.–North Korea relations during the 1970s include Hong (2004, 2012), B. Kim (2015), Kwak and Patterson (1999), and Yu (1987). For works examining Pyongyang's foreign policy of the 1970s, see Buzo (1999), Gills (1996), Jeong (1997), Min (1987), and Zagoria and Kim (1976).

impressed on the so-called Third World by Western media were negatively impacting the advanced nations' policy making on issues of major importance to the developing world (Albritton & Manheim, 1985). The services rendered by these contracted PR firms included the preparation of press kits, counseling embassy personnel about the phrasing of issues in discussions with the press, organizing field trips for journalists, conducting meetings and programs highlighting resources of the client country, and establishing personal contact between client-government officials and influential officials or journalists in the target country (Albritton & Manheim, 1985). Research on these campaigns provides an important basis for comparison with concurrent North Korean efforts.

Theoretically, this study is informed by communications research pertaining to the international information order (IIO), the effect of foreign news and public relations counsel on agenda building and agenda setting, and the factors predicting the newsworthiness of subjects in the hierarchy of international news flows. Scholars examining the relationship between media and foreign policy in the United States have demonstrated that policy makers often depend on media for their understanding of external events (Albritton & Manheim, 1983; Baum & Potter, 2008; Kioussis & Wu, 2008), whereas media rely on information subsidies, which reduce the otherwise very high costs of obtaining information from overseas (Gandy, 1982). Taking advantage of this situation, foreign governments may attempt to manipulate their image abroad, shaping the informational settings through agenda-building efforts, such as the PR activities described above (Albritton & Manheim, 1985; Kioussis & Wu, 2008; Manheim & Albritton, 1984).

The mass media, for its part, operates as a discrete strategic actor that observes events and performs an agenda-setting role by selecting, assigning valence to, and amplifying the news about those events (Baum & Potter, 2008; Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004). The initial newsworthiness of an event is determined by its context and attributes as well as the position and location of the country where it occurred in the international communication network and world system (Chang, 1998; K. Kim & Barnett, 1996). On the selection of an event as news, previous studies have found particularly important such factors as the extent of violence and deviance the event involves; its timeliness and impact; geopolitics; and the foreign country's economic and political prowess, along with its relationship to advanced nations (Chang, 1998; Gans, 2004; Jones, Van Aelst, & Vliegenthart, 2011; Shoemaker, Chang, & Brendlinger, 1986). Therefore, by engaging in PR campaigns, foreign governments both utilize and challenge the existing IIO, with the goal of affecting the media in the target country, which in turn influences that country's public opinion and its policy making.

In practice, the agenda-building efforts of a foreign government have been found to influence its country's salience in news coverage and the valence of relevant articles (Albritton & Manheim, 1983, 1985; Kioussis & Wu, 2008; Manheim & Albritton, 1984). The agenda-setting effect of news about a foreign country has been observed in changes in the favorability of the country among the general public (Kioussis & Wu, 2008; Perry, 1989; Wanta et al., 2004). Assessing the success of a media campaign in setting the agenda for policy making—that is, evaluating whether a publicity effort facilitated the adoption of certain policies desired by the foreign government that initiated the campaign—is a highly contentious and complex issue (see, e.g., Foyle, 1997). This study evinces a potential agenda-setting effect in the association between the timing of North Korea's PR campaign and the prominence of North Korea in political debates in Washington, DC.

A Prelude to the Public Relations Campaign

Until the late 1960s, North Korea pursued neither formal nor informal contacts with the United States. Its diplomatic ties were limited to the communist bloc and newly independent countries of the Third World, and the regime's position on issues of concern to it was represented in the international arena by its patron, the Soviet Union. Neither did Pyongyang demonstrate interest in public diplomacy toward Americans. This indifference was mutual. Following the Korean War cease-fire agreement of 1953, Washington preferred to deal with Korea-related questions through multinational organizations such as the United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea. To the United States, North Korea was a Soviet satellite not worth talking to. Besides, negotiating directly with Pyongyang would diminish the legitimacy of the South Korean regime supported by the United States. The presence of North Korea in major U.S. media also remained minimal. The only spike of attention toward the regime is observed in 1968, when the Korean People's Army abducted the U.S. navy intelligence ship *Pueblo* and held its crew hostage, and in early 1969 after a North Korean MiG jet shot down a U.S. military aircraft, EC-121, on a reconnaissance mission (see Figure 1). The coverage of these two events in U.S. media focused on reporting the newest developments and discussing ways to retaliate or resolve the situations.

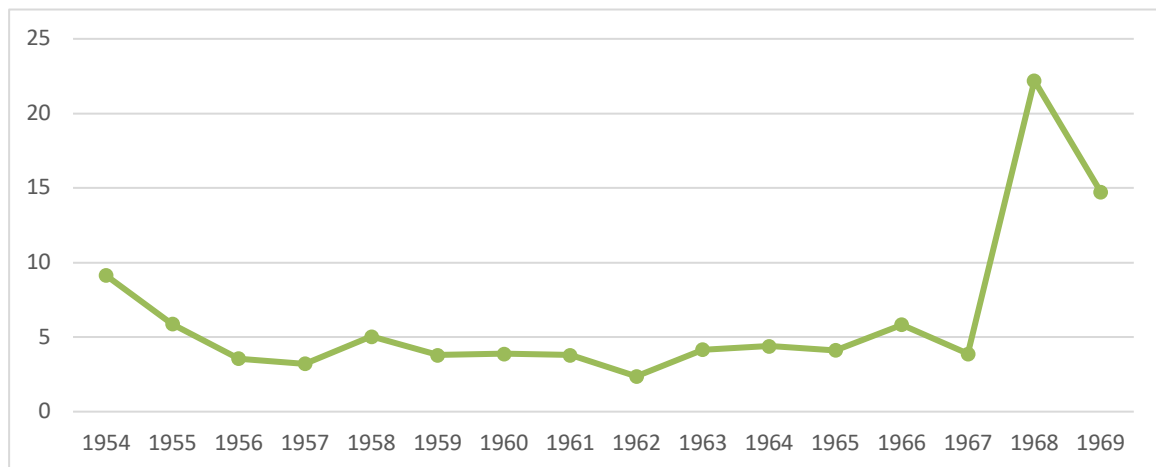


Figure 1. Frequency of articles mentioning North Korea in five major U.S. newspapers during 1954–1969. Source: author's calculations using the ProQuest Historical Newspapers database. (Due to differences in newspaper sample sizes, the values for all newspapers were rescaled for the purpose of comparison so that the total number of articles for each newspaper during 1954–1969 corresponded to 100. However, no significant difference was observed between the graphs prior to and after the rescaling.)

One exception to this crisis-triggered publicity was a full-page advertisement printed in *The New York Times* in October 1969, which promoted the forthcoming English translation of Kim Il Sung's biography as "a most important book for those who are interested in the history of modern Korea" (Miraisha, 1969, p. 41; see Figure 2). Pyongyang's first experiment placing an advertisement in a U.S. newspaper was likely inspired by the fascination with the country among American radical leftist organizations, some of which

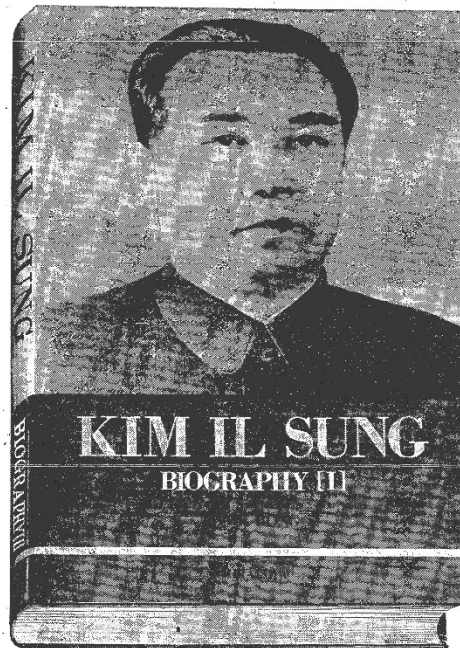
sent delegations to North Korea in the late 1960s.⁵ By introducing Americans to the figure of Kim and his "revolutionary struggles" and *juche* ideology, the regime probably intended to reach an even wider spectrum of political forces. The advertisement was utilized for propaganda purposes both at home and abroad as evidenced in the fact that the news of the advertisement's publication was reported in North Korean newspapers and by the country's official press agency broadcasting in foreign languages. In the reports, the advertisement was referred to as an "article" ("North Korea says," 1969, p. 5), implying that the world's press had acclaimed Kim's biography.

*Korea Has Produced
the Hero of 20th Century*
KIM IL SUNG BIOGRAPHY (I)

**At last!
The long-awaited
Biography of
Kim Il Sung-Vol. I**

To the people who want to understand the great *Juche* Ideas of General Kim Il Sung, the Hero of the 20th century that Korea has produced, together with his brilliant history of revolutionary struggles and exploits, his outstanding leadership and lofty virtues, this biography is an essential book. This is a most important book for those who are interested in the history of modern Korea. This biography is a history of General Kim Il Sung's ardent love for the people over 40 years; it is a great moving epic about Hero General Kim Il Sung who led to victory the national liberation struggle, unexampled in the history of the world; it is a record of victories and glories in the modern revolutionary movement of Korea.

Vol. I of Biography of Kim Il Sung, on the basis of ample materials, vividly reproduces General Kim Il Sung's great history of glorious revolutionary struggles from 1917



This is a complete English translation of the original Korean edition of "General Kim Il Sung, the Sun of the Nation", Vol. I, published in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. General Kim Il Sung has consistently led the Korean revolution to victory, taking upon himself the destiny of the fatherland and nation, for more than 40 years since he, born into a revolutionary family, took the road of revolutionary struggle in his early years. The history of revolutionary struggles of General Kim Il Sung itself is the history of the struggle of the Korean people for freedom and independence.

Figure 2. North Korea's first advertisement in the U.S. press appeared in The New York Times in October 1969.

⁵ It is worth noting that the Kim Il Sung biography advertisement was placed in *The New York Times* shortly after a visit to North Korea by the leader of the Black Panther Party, Eldridge Cleaver. For an analysis of North Korea's ties with the Black Panther Party, see Young (2015).

This period of North Korea's early emergence in U.S. media can be called a prelude because it preceded a deliberate effort by the regime to increase its publicity. Nevertheless, it was of crucial importance to the country's leadership as a learning experience and thereby laid the foundation for its subsequent PR campaign. The larger coverage during the security crises as well as the visits of delegations from the rising American radical left movement demonstrated a potential for a thus far little-known country to attract more attention in the United States. Pyongyang now also had experience in self-promotion in a U.S. newspaper.

Stage 1: Courting the Journalists

The campaign proper commenced in the early 1970s with the addition of a critical factor—the beginning of détente in East Asia, which included the Sino-American rapprochement, efforts to end the war in Vietnam, a partial withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea, and the inception of an inter-Korean dialogue. After an exchange of public announcements signaling changes in the unification policies of the two Korean regimes, and following (then National Security Advisor) Henry Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing, the two Koreas began their very first talks since the Korean War, which resulted in the simultaneous announcement by Seoul and Pyongyang of the July 4, 1972, Joint Declaration containing three principles for reunification. At about the same time, North Korea embarked on a massive diplomatic effort toward a wide range of countries from Northern Europe to Latin America and Southeast Asia (Chae, 2014).

The indicators of the onset of a PR campaign targeting the United States are discernible from September 1971, when Kim Il Sung in an interview with the *Asahi Simbun* noted that North Korea "intend[ed] to see what attitude the United States takes toward us" ("North Korea pledges," 1971, p. A26) in the light of President Richard Nixon's projected visit to China. The first in a series of interactions the North Korean leader would have with the foreign press in the early 1970s, the interview took place just a few months after Pyongyang attempted to contact Washington for the first time through diplomatic channels—a message delivered by the Romanian vice president (Hong, 2012, pp. 308–311). Then came a vaguely disguised invitation. Kim Pyong Sik, a vice chairman of the Association of Korean Residents in Japan who was regarded as an unofficial spokesman for North Korea, gave an interview to *Washington Post* correspondent Selig S. Harrison (1972), in which he expressed the hope that political leaders, businessmen, scholars, and journalists from the United States would "gradually be able to visit our country [North Korea] as the atmosphere [of the détente in East Asia] improves" (p. A14). Kim made no secret that the regime hoped to take advantage of the forthcoming 1972 presidential election in the United States, stating:

If Mr. Nixon wants to enjoy the full support of the American people in the election, he should formulate his Korean policy on the basis of the five principles of peaceful coexistence . . . he must support a "no war" agreement between North and South [Korea] and discontinue the U.S. war policy against the DPRK. (Harrison, 1972, p. A14)

Over the next few months, the North Korean Press Association sent out formal invitations to American journalists. In May 1972, *The New York Times'* Harrison E. Salisbury and John M. Lee became the first journalists from the United States to visit Pyongyang since the Korean War; *The Washington Post's* Harrison and Mark Gayn (a Canadian columnist who wrote for *The New York Times*) traveled to the country in June. Their reports from North Korea were serialized in American newspapers while their trips were in

progress (see Figure 3). Several American scholars, such as Harvard Law School professor Jerome A. Cohen, who had been known for their criticism of U.S. policies toward the communist world and the South Korean government, were also invited. On their return to the United States, some of them contributed opinion pieces or gave interviews to newspapers. Overall, between 1972 and 1976, North Korea welcomed about 30 Americans, most of whom came in the first year (James, 1976).



Figure 3. The May 31, 1972, issue of The New York Times with an article about North Korea on the front page.

The American visitors were shown around the country; they traveled to industrial cities, visited war museums, and watched revolutionary operas. The image North Korea tried to project was that of a small, industrially developed, sophisticated, and relatively well-off country that had been attacked by the United States in the past and was now threatened by the continuous presence of U.S. troops in South Korea but ready to defend itself, and thereby a worthy negotiating counterpart to the United States. In the interviews Kim Il Sung granted to the journalists, he demanded the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from the Korean Peninsula. Playing on the ongoing inter-Korean dialogue and escalation of demonstrations in the United States for the pullout from Vietnam, Kim emphasized that in Korea, too, the stationing of American troops was an obstacle to peace, hindering national reunification ("Excerpts from interview," 1972). He also hinted at his desire to have bilateral, formal negotiations with the U.S. government. In an interview with Salisbury and Lee, Kim noted that he believed the U.S. government needed to improve relations not only with the big powers but also with the smaller ones. However, in reply to the reporters' question about whether an increase in understanding between the two countries could start with people exchanges, he said:

I don't think we can find anything interesting if we go there. . . . You feel unpleasant here [due to the strong anti-American sentiment]. Is it any good if we cause more people to have bad feeling here? Only when the United States Government changes its policies toward us may we discuss anti-American sentiments and only then will it be interesting for both of us to visit each other. ("Excerpts from interview," 1972, p. 14)

Yet Kim concluded the interview by raising a glass of wine to his American guests: "Let's drink a toast together. We recognize that the American Government is not the American people. We want to have more American friends" (Salisbury, 1972, p. 14). Thus, the North Korean leader aspired for amicable relations with the American journalists but disapproved of people exchanges. These seemingly paradoxical statements reveal the true intentions of the regime. It expected the visitors to act as messengers relaying the North Korean position to the United States and rallying the U.S. public behind it through media.

The consequent coverage of the country in the U.S. media, however, did not satisfy the regime. Although interviews with Kim took up entire pages in major newspapers and the journalists described some positive achievements of North Korea—such as the country's impressive industrial growth and well-developed welfare system—the reports focused on what had shocked them most in a negative way: extreme anti-Americanism and militarism, isolationism and suspicion of foreigners, the Kim personality cult, and indoctrination of the population. Already by late August 1972, Pyongyang was rejecting visa requests by U.S. journalists planning to observe the Red Cross talks between the two Koreas to be held in Pyongyang because of "displeasure with stories written by other American correspondents who recently visited North Korea" (American Embassy Seoul, 1972). In October 1974, Kim Yong Nam, a North Korean Workers' Party official, made it clear at a Tokyo press conference that Pyongyang was no longer willing to repeat the experiment of two years previous of allowing U.S. journalists into the country (Jameson, 1974).

Stage 2: The Advertisement Approach

At the time of Kim Yong Nam's statement in October 1974, North Korea had one more reason to be frustrated, in addition to disappointment with the results of the first stage of its PR campaign. By 1974,

Pyongyang had suspended the inter-Korean dialogue and started pursuing more aggressively direct contacts with Washington and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea. In March 1974, North Korea suggested bilateral talks with the United States on a peace accord to replace the Korean War armistice agreement. The proposal was made in the form of a letter addressed to Congress, but Washington refused even to accept the letter. Throughout 1974, North Korean diplomats tried to deliver the letter to Congress and the White House through various channels but without success (Hong, 2012). In 1973, North Korea gained observer status at the United Nations and with it the right to attend sessions of the General Assembly. At the debate on the Korean question that year, Pyongyang raised the issue of removing foreign—read “American”—troops from South Korea, but the Assembly decided to refrain from voting on Korea-related resolutions and instead adopted a consensus statement urging the two Koreas to continue their dialogue (United Nations, 1976a, p. 157). The regime managed to advance a similar position to the vote in the fall of 1974, but the draft resolution submitted on its behalf was rejected (United Nations, 1976b, p. 178). Shortly before the vote, President Gerald Ford announced on his trip to Seoul that the United States would maintain the 38,000 American troops in Korea without further reductions (Ford & Park, 1974). Pyongyang had therefore exhausted the traditional diplomatic options available to it and resorted to another publicity effort as an alternative way of exercising pressure on U.S. policy makers.⁶ The particular approach it selected—placing advertisements in major U.S. newspapers—can be explained as a desire to avoid the medium of journalists and reach the American public directly.

A streak of about 20 North Korean advertisements appeared in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* between December 1974 and April 1977 (see Figure 4), the largest portion of which appeared in 1975, during the campaigns for presidential nomination by Democratic candidates (most of whom advocated reduced U.S. military presence overseas) and the climax of debates on the Korean question at the United Nations. These were large-scale advertisements ranging from two columns to two full pages, signed by the Information Section of the Office of the Permanent Observer of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) to the UN, Korean Information Service, DPRK, or Korean Central News Agency, though sometimes not signed at all. Most of the advertisements reprinted excerpts from Kim Il Sung’s speeches or interviews he had given to foreign journalists. The contents were rather dated by the time they were published. An open letter to the U.S. Congress was dated April 1973, but it appeared in *The Washington Post* in June 1975; Kim’s thoughts on the construction of a socialist economy, which were published in March 1975, were dated 1968. The shortest gap is six weeks—Kim’s speech from April 1975 was published in May and June of that same year. The subjects range from the production targets of the agricultural industry to Kim’s views on the Third World to an episode from his past as a guerrilla fighting against the Japanese in 1933. About half of the articles convey Pyongyang’s position on reunification. The original, strong anti-American phrasing of the speeches, using such terms as “U.S. imperialist aggressors and their stooges” and “warmongers,” remained unchanged.

⁶ For an analysis of North Korea’s diplomatic and military efforts of the mid-1970s—which were carried out in parallel to this stage of the campaign in media—see Chae (2014).

THE FOLLOWING COMMENTARY IS A PAID ADVERTISEMENT

OPEN LETTER TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

The Second Session of the Fifth Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has discussed the question of terminating foreign intervention in our internal affairs with the aim of accelerating the independent, peaceful reunification of our country and sends this letter to both the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States.

As a result of the consistent efforts made by the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for the independent, peaceful national reunification, a dialogue started between north and south Korea in September 1971.

Later, both sides held high-level talks, announced a joint statement whose keynote is the three principles—*independence, peaceful reunification and great national unity*—and formed a North-South Co-ordination Commission as a joint setup to implement the agreed principles.

This was an epoch-making event that altered the state of freeze between the north and the south separated from each other for many years and opened up a new phase for peaceful reunification.

After the announcement of the north-south joint statement we proposed, as a concrete step toward the implementation of the agreements between both sides, to realize collaboration between the north and the south in all fields of politics, economy, culture, military and diplomatic affairs and, in particular, made a five-point proposal for eliminating the present state of military confrontation, that is, the stopping of armament reinforcement and arms race, the withdrawal of foreign troops, the reduction of army strength, the discontinuance of the introduction of weapons from foreign countries and the conclusion of a peace agreement—the most urgent problems in dispelling misunderstanding and distrust and creating an atmosphere of trust between both sides.

However, the south Korean authorities have not made a due response to our peaceable initiative which accords with the desire of all the Korean people, and the dialogue between the north and the south has made no further progress at the stage in which the agreements between both sides should be put into practice.

Facts show that this state of affairs is mainly due to the policies of the U.S. Government authorities who do not want to see Korea reunified peacefully by the Korean people themselves.

The U.S. Government authorities welcomed the north-south dialogue in words, but in deeds they have obstructed it from the outset, throwing cold water on it. They have instigated the south Korean authorities to take the "position of strength" in negotiation with us, declaring that, although the north-south dialogue is in progress, they would keep their troops in south Korea and "push ahead the modernization programme" for the south Korean army.

Last year, for instance, the United States gave the greatest amount of military "aid" to south Korea, supplied it with large quantities of modern weapons and military equipment, expanded military bases, made incessant military provocations and staged ceaseless military exercises. In this way it stepped up war preparations and further encouraged the south Korean authorities to military confrontation with us.

This position and attitude of the U.S. Government toward Korea go against the desire of all the Korean people to reunify their country peacefully and run counter to the current trend to the relaxation of tension and peace.

At a time when north and south Korea hold dialogue and the Koreans endeavour to solve their problems peacefully for themselves, why are the U.S. Government authorities intervening in and obstructing?

If the United States should truly hope for the peaceful solution of the Korean question and desire peace in the Far East and the Pacific region, it would have no need to keep its troops in south Korea any longer and deliberately maintain military confrontation with us who advocate peaceful reunification.

We consider that it is high time for the United States to change its policy in the light of the present changed situation, withdraw its troops from south Korea and take a measure to dissolve the "United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea," thereby removing the obstacles to the peaceful reunification of Korea.

The United States should discontinue military "aid" and the supply of weapons and military equipment to south Korea, stop armaments expansion and war exercises in south Korea and desist from encouraging the south Korean authorities with military support for the purpose of making Koreans fight Koreans.

If the U.S. Government authorities take such steps, war danger will be removed in Korea and the Korean people will certainly achieve the peaceful reunification of the country by themselves.

Considering that this will conform with the interests of the peoples of both Korea and the United States and fully accord with the interests of peace, the Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea expresses the hope that the U.S. Congress will pay serious attention to our letter and adopt relevant positive measures.

Supreme People's Assembly
Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Pyongyang
April 6, 1973.

Figure 4. Examples of North Korean advertisements: a two-page advertisement that appeared in The New York Times on May 11, 1975, and a half-page advertisement printed in The Washington Post on June 29, 1975.

A reader would need to possess a profound knowledge of developments on the Korean Peninsula and beyond to connect, for example, the advertisement containing Kim's thoughts on the Non-Aligned Movement, published in early 1976, to inter-Korean rivalry at the United Nations. The majority of the advertisements appeared at odds with the time and place and were not favorable to North Korea. That is, unless the contents are to be read in alternation, as threats and assurances of the regime's peaceful intentions. The goals of this stage of the campaign are clearer in retrospect if the advertisements are divided into two categories: those seeking to promote Kim as a world revolutionary leader and those preparing American public opinion for North Korea's diplomatic overtures, such as the debates on the Korean question in the UN General Assembly or the offer of a bilateral peace treaty with the United States.

Pyongyang believed that its advertisement blitz was successful. Ri Kye Baek, a member of the North Korean Supreme People's Assembly and vice chairman of the Association of Korean Residents in Japan who performed the role of spokesperson for Pyongyang in the second half of the 1970s, asserted it was likely that President Jimmy Carter made his campaign pledge to remove U.S. troops from South Korea due to public pressure in the United States ("N. Korea ties," 1977). Yet the advertisements largely stopped in early 1977. Most likely, this was due to the problem of financing the campaign. Capitalizing on the atmosphere of the *détente*, North Korea expanded its trade ties and took large loans from Western Europe and Japan in the early 1970s, but its economic system was incapable of utilizing the opportunities efficiently; on top of that, the country was hit hard by the oil shock of 1973, so it could not help but start defaulting on its debts in the mid-1970s, which led to a shortage of foreign currency (Buzo, 1999). An additional reason could have been the image-making fiasco Pyongyang suffered as a result of the Panmunjom axe murders of August 1976. Given the negative publicity North Korea received in the aftermath of the incident, the regime may have decided to wind down the advertisement campaign in U.S. media, similarly to its approach toward UN diplomacy when it retracted the pro-North Korea resolution from deliberation by the General Assembly in September 1976.

Stage 3: A North Korean Version of "Ping-Pong Diplomacy"

The end of the second stage of the PR campaign coincided with a change in North Korea's policy toward the United States. On March 17, 1977, Ri Kye Baek hosted a press conference for American correspondents at a Tokyo hotel, where he announced the timing was good for the normalization of the U.S.–North Korea relations. He emphasized that Pyongyang was not attaching any conditions, such as troop withdrawal, to talks with Washington and suggested that the two countries meet to discuss a peace agreement, troop withdrawal, and the improvement of person-to-person exchanges (Malcolm, 1977). Kim Il Sung himself said in an interview in July 1977 that, "if the U.S. authorities want it, there can be dialogue [between the United States and North Korea] at any time. . . . We will continue to knock at the door of dialogue" (I. Kim, 1988, p. 258). Clearly, Pyongyang was trying to take advantage of the early policies of the Carter administration striving to renew the *détente* in East Asia by lifting the travel ban on communist countries, sending a formal delegation to Vietnam, and resuming the normalization talks with China. In contrast to these efforts and despite North Korea's pleas, however, Washington maintained that no dialogue could be initiated with Pyongyang without the participation of Seoul and suggested instead a multiparty conference on the Korean peace that would include the two Koreas, China, the United States, and the Soviet Union (Kempster, 1977).

The new stage of the PR campaign targeting U.S. media started in earnest two years later, when an opportunity for North Korea to show its goodwill presented itself with the 35th World Table Tennis Championships held in Pyongyang in April 1979. Athletes from around the world participated in the tournament, a 35-member U.S. team among them. Accompanied by several spectators and three U.S. journalists invited by Pyongyang, they were the first sizable group of Americans in North Korea since the 1953 cease-fire. The country again received much coverage in U.S. newspapers as table tennis players contributed their own articles along with the journalists. ABC television even showcased Pyongyang in a segment of the *Wide World of Sports* ("Morning briefing," 1979). In addition, UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim visited North Korea during the competition, as part of what he described as his "personal quest"

("North Korea asks," 1979, p. B9) to help achieve stability and peace in the region. Waldheim's entourage included Malcolm W. Browne of *The New York Times* and Don Shannon of the *Los Angeles Times* as well as six other correspondents.

In 1980, the North Koreans also invited congressman Stephen Solarz (D-NY), who had actively advocated the reduction of U.S. involvement in South Korea during the presidential campaign period of 1976. Solarz was the first U.S. politician to visit Pyongyang. Kim Il Sung restated to Solarz his interest in cultural exchanges and diplomatic ties with the United States, which Solarz relayed in interviews with *The New York Times* (Stokes, 1980) and *The Wall Street Journal* ("The Kim gambit," 1980) on his return home.

In many aspects, the third stage of North Korea's PR campaign resembled the first. Both proceeded through Pyongyang's invitation of Americans to come and see the country for themselves. On the other hand, a significant difference between the two stages can be observed in North Korea's strategy; unlike the earlier part of the decade, in the latter 1970s Pyongyang was eager for people exchanges. Kim Kwan Sop, chairman of the North Korean Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, explained to a visiting American journalist that North Korea wanted to normalize relations with the United States gradually, beginning with the exchange of journalists, sports teams, and tourists ("News in brief," 1979). This change in Pyongyang's position was reflected in the revised format where North Korea welcomed a broader range of people—not only journalists and scholars but also politicians and common citizens, such as athletes and spectators. Yet the objectives of the campaign remained the same. The regime sought to use the American media to achieve diplomatic ties with the United States and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea. The former goal was openly announced many times since Ri's statement of early 1977; the latter became apparent in the infuriated comments of North Koreans when Carter's plan for a troop pullout was postponed (see, e.g., "Nodong Sinmun commentator," 1979).

Qualified Success of the Campaign

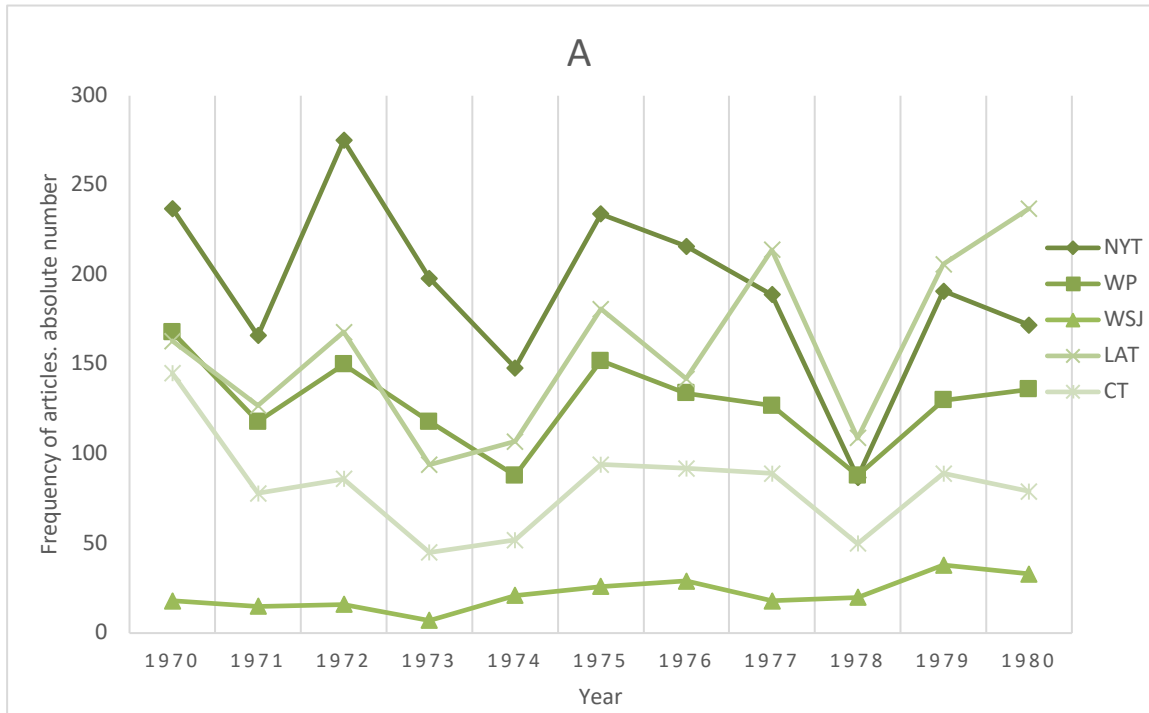
A picture of a complex, deliberate PR effort by Pyongyang emerges when publications in U.S. media pertaining to North Korea are grouped by date and type and examined against concurrent developments in the Korean Peninsula and the United States, East Asia, and the world. The regime launched its PR campaign in the context of the increasing power of Third World countries in international institutions on one hand, and in the context of the perceived domination of advanced countries in the IIO on the other. Pyongyang utilized the atmosphere of détente among the great powers in East Asia and the antiwar, radical left, and other movements in the United States. The PR campaign proceeded through several stages as its strategy varied and tactics adjusted in accordance with trends in the United States, Korea, and adjacent regions; initiatives in the diplomatic domain; and Pyongyang's interpretation of the effect of the previous stage. The undertaking transformed from a one-sided request relayed through foreign visitors to attempts to explain North Korea's position through advertisements, and finally to indications of a readiness to open any kind of bilateral contact with the United States. Yet the overarching goal of having all U.S. troops withdrawn from the Korean Peninsula and gaining official recognition from Washington remained the same. All stages of the campaign were timed to precede a U.S. presidential election or coincide with the beginning of a new administration—when the American media and public were most prone to the discussion of new policies.

Every step in the publicity realm was coordinated with Pyongyang's moves in the area of traditional, government-level diplomacy as well as with its military maneuvers.

Despite such intense efforts, North Korea did not attain its goals. Nixon's plan for U.S. troop reductions was repeatedly postponed into the Ford presidency, and Carter publicly rescinded his promise to pull out U.S. forces from Korea in 1979. Nor did Washington agree to establish diplomatic relations with Pyongyang. Several reasons can be suggested to explain this failure. The U.S. media, public, and policy makers looked at North Korea with preconceived notions of communist countries in the Cold War context, through the prism of memories of the Korean War and recent clashes, and as the stereotyped hermit kingdom dating back to premodern times. The United States' close ties with South Korea also prevented Americans from giving much consideration to North Korea's approaches. Assisting South Korean development and nurturing existing business interests, the benefits of the military alliance with Seoul, and concerns about alienating an ally were seen as more important than the potential merits of establishing bilateral relations with Pyongyang—especially at a time when South Korea actively lobbied the United States against the withdrawal of U.S. troops or the initiation of U.S. contacts with the North. In sum, Americans found no merit in the notion of dealing with North Korea one-on-one. The Department of State insisted, "We see nothing to be gained by the separate discussion with the U.S. which North Korea indicates it would prefer" ("North Korea rejects," 1979, p. 15).

The long list of obstacles does not mean, however, that North Korea was destined to fail in attaining its objectives. While its rival to the south employed the expertise of PR firms, Pyongyang obstinately lumbered forward without much competence in the art of public relations in the capitalist world. Its campaign lacked internal coherence between its stages and was fraught with contradictions. The regime showed off anti-Americanism as a basic principle of the North Korean state while trying to improve relations with the United States. It professed peaceful intentions while enhancing its military might, digging infiltration tunnels into South Korea, and provoking clashes on the inter-Korean border. Its aggressive rhetoric alternated with self-victimization only exacerbated suspicions of its intentions. In the absence of trust, Washington naturally preferred to have China and the Soviet Union guarantee the maintenance of peace via a multiparty agreement, or at least to ensure that South Korea had an adequate defense and was treated as an equal through tripartite negotiations.

On the other hand, any assessment yields different results if the campaign is weighed not against the specific goals of the North Korean regime but its agenda-building and agenda-setting capacities. Figure 5 displays the variations in frequency of articles mentioning North Korea in five major U.S. newspapers during the 1970s along with stages of Pyongyang's PR campaign. It illustrates a correlation between the timing of the stages and the salience of the country in U.S. media. The three highest values in the frequency of articles about North Korea since the beginning of the campaign—1972, 1975, and 1979—fall squarely on the most intensive periods of the three campaign stages.



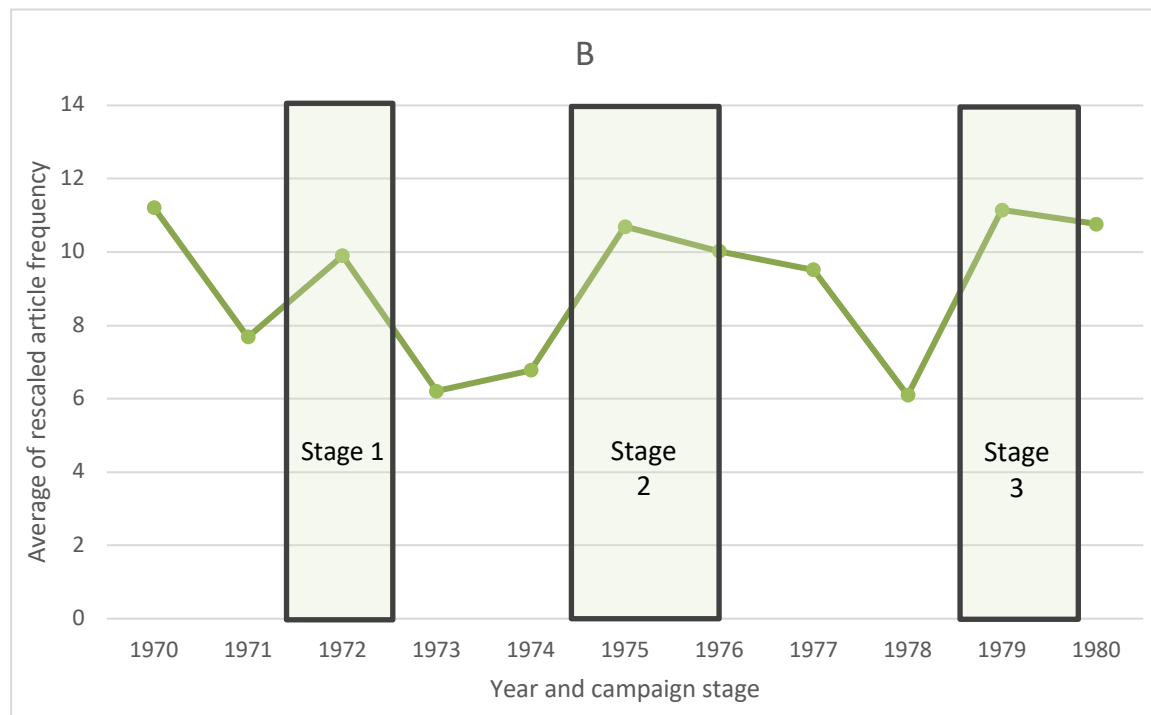


Figure 5. Salience of North Korea in The New York Times (NYT), The Washington Post (WP), The Wall Street Journal (WSJ), Los Angeles Times (LAT), and Chicago Tribune (CT). (A) Frequency of North Korea-related articles by the newspaper shown in absolute numbers. (B) Stages of Pyongyang's PR campaign and the average frequency of North Korea-related articles in the five newspapers, calculated based on rescaled values.

Two points are worth noting here: the relatively high value for 1970 and the correspondence of important developments with stages in the North's PR campaign. From the perspective of North Korean diplomatic history, the year 1970 belongs to the period of security crises of the late 1960s, whereas the regime's peace offensive commenced in 1971. If the charts' time axes were extended to include the late 1960s, the values of 1968 would triple and those of 1969 would double those of the highest values of the 1970s. In other words, in the 1970s, the salience of North Korea in U.S. media never surpassed the levels of the security crises period of the late 1960s, which testifies to the primacy of violent events and conflict with great powers in the visibility of a country in international communication flows. Second, given the contemporaneity of the campaign stages and major developments related to Korea, one may argue that the country would have appeared in U.S. media more often during the highlighted periods anyway—with or without the PR effort of Pyongyang—because of the unprecedented nature of the inter-Korean dialogue in 1972, fears of North Korea's offensive against the South in the wake of communist victories in Indochina in 1975, the 1976 Panmunjom axe murders, and the World Table Tennis Championships of 1979. However, such a criticism overlooks the high probability of the events themselves being part or consequences of Pyongyang's foreign grand strategy of the time, which involved a combination of publicity, military, and conventional diplomatic measures. Yet it also reveals that the relationship between the salience and the PR

campaign cannot be established clearly based on frequency alone; an assessment of the campaign's efficiency necessitates an application of several analytical methods in concert.

One such method is to investigate qualitative changes in the coverage of North Korea in the U.S. press. During the 1970s, articles about North Korea began appearing on the front pages and in news briefs of the most important events at home and abroad—even when news from North Korea had nothing to do with military confrontation, which had been the exclusive case before. Interviews with Kim Il Sung and descriptions of life inside the country stretched through several pages—and not only in the paid advertisement section. Many more articles now reviewed domestic economic, political, and social developments in North Korea and attempted to explain the country's inner workings and foreign policies. A new, more elaborate image of North Korea emerged through these reports. The country's prominence in U.S. media was elevated; breaking through the hierarchies of IIO, it became a newsworthy subject.

There were also active discussions of approaches the United States might take toward the country. Journalists, scholars, and members of the public contributed opinion pieces, some of them suggesting establishing bilateral ties with North Korea and withdrawing U.S. troops from the South out of fear the United States could be embroiled in another war, some because they thought Pyongyang appeared to be seeking reconciliation or no longer posed a threat (see, e.g., Jameson, 1977; Terhorst, 1975).⁷ Paradoxically, both lines of thought were in accordance with the contradictory messages relayed by the North Korean campaign.

Even though neither policy—withdrawal of troops or official recognition—was adopted by Washington, the conversations in media spilled into deliberations on Capitol Hill. Senator George McGovern (a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee), for example, urged a phased withdrawal of U.S. forces and “direct discussions” with North Korean officials because U.S. troops in Korea “could trip this generation into another wrong war in another wrong place at another wrong time” (“McGovern urges,” 1976, p. A2). Running for nomination to the Senate, Tom Hayden included the extension of diplomatic recognition to North Korea in his political manifesto (Goff, 1976). The discourse likely played a role in the transformation of U.S. policies toward Pyongyang. If in the early 1970s the State Department did not consider any contact with North Korea, by the mid-1970s it had made proposals for multiparty talks to include Pyongyang (Secretary Kissinger offered four-party talks in 1975 and Secretary Cyrus Vance, five-party talks in 1977), and by the end of the decade, President Carter announced that the United States was “willing to open talks with North Korea” (“Carter says Brezhnev,” 1979, p. A4; emphasis added) under the condition that South Korea also participated.

In sum, Pyongyang's PR endeavor can be evaluated as a qualified success since it is plausible that, taken in combination with the regime's concurrent diplomatic and military maneuvers, it increased awareness of the country among the American public, setting the agenda and thereby affecting the policy making in Washington.

⁷ Another popular type of argument for the pullout of U.S. troops from South Korea stemmed from the criticism of the South Korean regime in the light of its abuses of power, systematic violations of human rights, and the bribery scheme that was exposed in the aftermath of Nixon's resignation and came to be known as Koreagate (see, e.g., “House panel asks,” 1976).

The Precedent of North Korea's PR Campaign in Theory and Practice

Adding to the research of government-led, international PR efforts, this study analyzes an example of a campaign that a foreign country was able to carry out in U.S. media due to the information subsidies (via tours for journalists, press conferences, etc.) and advertisement revenues it offered. The North Korean PR campaign was similar to those of other developing countries in its objective of gaining the attention of the American public and influencing U.S. policy making through mass media, but it differed from them in its emphasis on the nation's hostile relations with the United States. The choice to highlight anti-Americanism and belligerence stemmed from North Korea's experience fighting the United States in the Korean War as well as Kim Il Sung's ambition for fame as a revolutionary on par with Mao Zedong and Josip Tito—which had appeal to the domestic and Third World audiences of Pyongyang's propaganda. However, such a strategy contradicts the findings of previous studies about PR campaigns by developing nations, which discuss how a nation can improve its image by appearing cooperative. These studies suggest that countries receiving heavy media attention with negative valence—such as North Korea in the wake of security crises of the late 1960s—would benefit from a decrease in the frequency of coverage given that lower salience masks apparent conflict between two countries (Albritton & Manheim, 1985; Kiousis & Wu, 2008; Manheim & Albritton, 1984).

The North Korean case is unusual but hardly unique. This study, then, reveals potential avenues for expanding the research of PR campaigns—which is currently focused on countries seeking amicable portrayal overseas—to the investigation of international publicity endeavors of states that intentionally project a hostile image. In particular, this study offers insights into the assessment of such endeavors. The North Korean effort achieved an agenda-building result, as reflected in the increase in frequency and quality of coverage of the country during its campaign. The fact that a peripheral in the information networks North Korea sparked policy discussions points to an agenda-setting effect. These results can be explained in terms of substituting positive coverage with hostility, which corroborates existing works on the primacy of violence, conflict with the United States, and other types of deviance for a country's position in IIO (Chang, 1998; Jones et al., 2011; Shoemaker et al., 1986). But such a mechanism of gaining prominence makes it difficult to separate the effect of media tendency from the workings of a PR campaign, calling into question the significance of government efforts.

Furthermore, evaluating the success or failure of a campaign based on its immediate agenda-building and agenda-setting outcomes does not take into consideration its long-term consequences. In North Korea's case, the choice and maintenance of a feisty, belligerent image has likely contributed to the country's continuing isolation from the international community. It may have helped the regime survive, but it is also responsible for the political and economic impoverishment of the country.

The (re)opening of North Korea to Western media in recent years suggests that Kim Jong Un may be trying to not only imitate the look of his grandfather but also learn from his experience. From his first public appearance as the heir of Kim Jong Il (Kim Il Sung's son) in 2010, the incumbent North Korean leader has been keen on inviting foreign journalists to major events showcasing the country, such as a satellite launch or a congress of the Korean Workers' Party. In terms of the rhetoric, he initially continued the tradition of harsh language that became a hallmark of Pyongyang's voice in international news during the

rule of his father. In September 2017, Kim Jong Un took this one step further, promising to “surely and definitely tame the mentally deranged U.S. dotard [President Donald Trump] with fire” (J. Kim, 2017, para. 18). Considered the strongest statement ever made by North Korea (Won, 2017), this personally delivered address—in addition to teaching English speakers an archaic insult—demonstrated perhaps the maximum level of media attention that can be garnered by appearing aggressive and noncomplying with international norms, short of inviting military action. The following year, however, marked a sudden change in the regime’s public approach to the United States. Pyongyang expressed its willingness to commence negotiations with Washington on ending the North Korean nuclear weapons program, invited television crews from the United States and other countries to observe the dismantlement of a nuclear test site, and continued issuing official statements devoid of colorful propaganda even after the failure of the Trump-Kim summit meeting in Hanoi. Through this series of publicity moves, Kim clearly strives to project the image of a professional politician heading a normal state. Neither the welcoming attitude toward Western media nor the softened language of public remarks is irreversible, and the regime can revert to its habitual, crisis mode at any time. Nevertheless, Pyongyang’s ongoing campaign may serve as an indicator that the regime is eager for another attempt to interact with the United States in a nonthreatening way.

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