

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

History

Since it was initially settled around 6000 B.C., Korea has been under continuous influence from Japan and China. In 1894, a rapidly developing Japan tested its political and military strength by attempting to conquer China-held Korea. After a year of fighting, Japan was victorious; however, Russia later entered the situation, and its appearance resulted in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). Finally, in 1910, Korea was annexed to Japan. The Japanese held control until the end of WWII, when Korea became two independent countries, divided at the 38th parallel. Although this division between Soviet-controlled North and American-controlled South was intended to be temporary, a reunification never occurred. In 1948, the year the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was established, the communist leader Kim Il-Sung was elected Head of State, later taking the title of President. Before the Korean War exploded in 1950, Kim had moved North Korea into a Soviet-style communist government. In June of 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea in an attempt to unite the divided region under a communist government. However, by the end of the war in 1953, the boundary between North and South remained at the 38th parallel. Over the next four decades, North Korea's economy failed miserably compared to the growing economy of South Korea. With a failing economy, North Korea was forced to default on its loans in 1980.

Current Domestic Situation

Following the death of Kim Il-Sung in 1994, his son Kim Jong-Il became Chairman of the National Defense Commission and General-Secretary of the Korean Workers' Party, but the official title of "President" was evidently retired after Kim Il-Sung died. Nonetheless, the Chairman of the National Defense Commission is the "highest administrative authority." Although he praised the economic reforms made by China, Kim Jong-Il has made little progress to repair the economy, and he has retained the idea of "Juche," or self-reliance. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of the country had slipped into famine by 2000, although the extent of poverty in the nation is unknown as North Korea's government refuses to release any internal data. Kim Jong-Il is also regarded as one of the most eccentric heads of state; he is rumored to own a 20,000 film collection and to throw extravagant drunken parties that his advisors are required to attend.

Recently, speculation has developed concerning Kim's heir. Although his oldest son, Kim Jong-Nam, is the probable heir, a recent public relations disaster in Japan involving a false passport may have lost him the opportunity to rule the DPRK; now, the position could go to one of his other sons, Kim Jong-Chul and Kim Jong-Woong. Another close confidant, Kim Jong-Il's brother-in-law Chang Sung Taek, also plays a large role in determining North Korea's actions; however, it is highly unlikely that Kim will hand over the ruling line to Chang's descendants.

Foreign Relations

Throughout the administration of Kim Jong-Il, nuclear proliferation and the production of weapons-grade plutonium have remained pressing issues. Although the DPRK joined the United Nations in September of 1991, the country has yet to establish an overwhelmingly cooperative relationship with other body members. In 1993, North Korea declared its decision to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which states that only the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council may possess nuclear weapons. (The DPRK did not actually withdraw until 2003.) However, the DPRK entered into the Agreed Framework with U.S. one year later, in 1994, and on the conditions of this pact, agreed it would dismantle its weapons programs in order to receive economic support from the United States, South Korea, and Japan. North Korea completely disregarded the terms, however. Ten years later, President Bush has moved away from the bilateral talks pursued by Former President Clinton and has involved China, Russia, Japan, and South Korea. These dialogues serve as the chief mediation between the reclusive DPRK and the world. However, the DPRK has, evidently, continued its weapons program, and has refused to cooperate with any countries. Following failed talks in June 2004, North Korea threatened to test a nuclear weapon. Since that time, dialogue with North Korea has stopped, and growing intelligence suggests that the DPRK now has multiple nuclear weapons.

The above primer was written by CPU Deputy Publisher Jonathan Mason

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