

What You Need To Know About The History Of Korea And The Players

Nigh on to 50 years I've had family ties to the Republic of Korea (South Korea). I try to keep up with current events so that when Suzie-Q says "that guy is a communist" I understand what she means. She's a child of the Korean War era and grew up in farm country where indoor plumbing, electricity and even drivable roads were practically non-existent. Her worldview differs significantly from the newer generations of South Koreans who instead of experiencing war and the hard times that followed, they've only known the miraculous growth, economic boom, and western influenced popular culture that is South Korea today.

I've been reading a bit to bring my thinking current, because the Korea I first saw in the spring of 1972 no longer exists. Views have shifted from staunch anti-communist to dreams of unification with a belligerent and communist north. They've shifted from conservatism toward liberalism. Their politics look a lot like American politics with the parties at each other's throats and presidential impeachment seems always on the menu. Popular culture displays a strong American/Western influence. Christianity has surpassed Buddhism to become the Country's largest religion. High rise apartment buildings long ago replaced the single home compounds that made up the residential areas. They've maintained and modernized the traditional market areas, but they also have some spectacular modern shopping malls.

I am sharing some bits of information that may provide insight and understanding. For a little more understanding, you may want to read [Fire and Fury](#). Additionally, I have supplied links to much of what I reviewed while writing this.

Understanding the political landscape is important to grasping the possibilities, pitfalls and dangers of the upcoming summit.

A Brief History:

The Japanese colonized Korea from 1910 to 1945. Before that, it was ruled by the Koryo Dynasty, the origin of the western name Korea, followed by the Choson Dynasty. Colonization is a polite descriptor of what the Japanese did. Brutal occupation with attempted eradication of history, language, and culture is a more adequate description. The Japanese took over agriculture, industry, schools and government. Koreans were relegated to an underclass the Japanese intended to assimilate into their society. The Japanese intended to erase a distinct culture that existed since 400 BC. Animosity toward Japan still exists in the older generations.

There were Korean resistance fighters in the south and north. Those in the south were mostly destroyed by the Japanese. In the north, they were able to retreat to and resupply in Manchuria and Russia. One of the northern resistance fighters was Moscow schooled Kim Il Sung, future first premier of North Korea and Grandfather of the current premier Kim Jong-Un.

The Japanese colonial rule ended with their WWII surrender. Much like post war Germany, Korea was divided into a US backed South and a Soviet backed North. On June 25, 1950, Kim Il Sung led a Soviet backed North Korean invasion of South Korea to unify the peninsula under communist rule. In July 1953, a cease fire line was established leaving Korea divided along the 38th parallel where a Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was established and still exists. The war never ended.

Over the years, the Republic of Korea (R.O.K, South Korea) has seen extensive economic growth and democratization. On the other hand, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (D.P.R.K, North Korea) has become one of the world's most

isolated and controlled communist states.

Since 1948, it has not been a smooth road to democratic government and relative freedom for the South Korean people. During the country's relatively short modern post war history, there have been at least five iterations of government. Arguably, the period most responsible for Korea's rapid economic expansion was the 18-year rule of Park Chung Hee. On May 16, 1961, General Park led a military coup. For the following two years he was the country's unelected leader. Afterwards he was elected to three terms until he was assassinated October 26, 1979 by the head of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency. Park's reign included a period of martial law, restrictions on civil liberties, suppression of the press and opposition political parties and control over the judicial system and universities.

Fast forward to current history:

In 2013, Park Geun-hye, the daughter of Park Chung Hee, became Korea's first female president. At age 22, after her mother was killed during a 1974 North Korean assassination attempt of her father, Park began fulfilling the role of Korea's first lady. Later, she would become vice chairperson of the conservative Grand National Party (renamed the Saenuri Party and currently named the Liberty Korea Party) serving five consecutive terms. In a December 2012 election, she defeated liberal former human rights lawyer Moon Jae-in to become Korea's first female president. As president, reminiscent of her father, she was criticized for using power to silence opposition.

Impeachment Scandal:

Choi Soon-sil is the daughter of Choi Tae-min founder of a religious cult, the Church of Eternal Life. In 1974 following the death of her mother, Mr. Choi befriended Park, Geun-hye. He continued to mentor her and maintain their

relationship following her father's 1979 assassination. Korean media reports rumors of an improper relationship between Mr. Choi and Park. Others believe she was under strong influence of the cult. After Mr. Choi's death, the relationship continued through friendship with his daughter, Choi Soon-sil. It is believed that Mr. Choi built substantial wealth through his relationship with President Park Chung-hee. Choi Soon-sil apparently continued to profit from the relationship while remaining President Park's close confidante. It was discovered that she influenced policy, reviewed the President's speeches, and had access to classified documents without a security clearance. She made millions of dollars selling influence to Korean corporations including Samsung and Lotte. President Park was impeached behind the scandal. Both women are currently serving prison sentences.

Election of Moon Jae-in:

Following impeachment of Park Guen-hye, Korea elected Moon Jae-in president ending nearly a decade of conservative rule. Moon is described as a left-leaning liberal. He is a former student activist and civil rights lawyer. Moon was also the Chief of Staff for liberal President Roh Moo-hyun known for meetings with North Korea during his presidency. In 2007, the Roh administration abstained from a United Nations vote on North Korea's human rights record reportedly based on Moon's coordination with North Korea. Roh favored the Sunshine Policy of former liberal President Kim Dae-jung on whose cabinet he served. Roh's presidency was also embroiled in scandal resulting in his impeachment, which was later overturned by Korea's Constitutional Court. In 2009, during investigations over alleged bribery, Roh committed suicide. Moon vowed to continue the Sunshine Policy emphasizing dialogue with North Korea. During North Korea's ballistic missile threats, he opposed deployment of the American missile defense system citing environmental concerns. He agreed to

have the North and South Korean Olympians march under a unified Korea flag. For many South Koreans, it was not a popular decision. There is no evidence indicating policies of Moon will differ from the liberal and communist friendly presidencies of Kim and Roh.

The Kim Clan:

The DPRK's first leader was Kim Il-sung. He was born near current day Pyongyang, the DPRK capital. His family migrated to Manchuria during the Japanese occupation. During the 1930's he was a Korean resistance fighter. He changed his name from Kim Song-ju to Kim Il-sung to honor a guerilla fighter. He relocated to the Soviet Union and joined the Communist party. During WWII he commanded the 1st Battalion of the Soviet 88th Brigade made up of Chinese and Korean exiles fighting the Japanese. He returned to Korea in 1945 and led the 1950 invasion of the South hoping to unify the peninsula under communist rule. He began the country's work toward developing nuclear weapons. He died July 8, 1994.

Following the death of his father, Kim Jong-il took full control of the DPRK. In a communist regime, it was the first occurrence of a transfer of power between a father and son. He continued the oppressive dictatorship, maintained a military first approach during difficult economic times, and continued work toward development of nuclear weapons. Kim Jong-il died December 17, 2011.

As his father did, Kim Jong-un followed his father into power. As he assumed power, Kim reportedly executed or removed senior officials left over from his father's regime. He also reportedly executed his uncle and allegedly members of his uncle's family and ordered the assassination of his brother who was living in Malaysia. He has been the most aggressive and boisterous of the Kim clan in the development of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons.

Since 1948, the Kim family has ruled the DPRK and by most accounts brutally. Amnesty International and others have documented the existence of prison camps holding political prisoners, some of them held for offenses committed by family members. Reports show that as many as 200,000 people are held in these camps and up to 400,000 have died in them.

America's players:

The North Korea problem spanned the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations and continues into the Trump administration. Clinton's legacy was the 1994 Agreed Framework, for Bush it was the Six-Party talks and removing North Korea from the list of State Sponsors of Terror after labeling it a member of the Axis of Evil, and for Obama it was the policy of Strategic Patience. None of these moved an inch toward denuclearization of the Korean peninsula or a lasting peace. During each of these administrations it is safe to repeat the well-used axiom kicked the can down the road. The Trump administration appears to be making some headway amid ratcheting up sanctions and intensifying pressure on China who is North Korea's lifeline. Trump may succeed but remember that North Korea has continually lied and broken every agreement made.

Where to from here:

For decades, the Kim clan has brutalized the North Korean people. They have been winners in every failed negotiation receiving food stores, nuclear reactors, and fuel oil only to break every agreement reached. To entertain that the present Kim is going to swing open the borders and let the light shine on the atrocities committed there is naivete on steroids. To do so would be the end of the regime and North Korea. Kim has either had an epiphany or he is running the greatest con of our time. When the President shakes Kim's right hand, he better ensure he knows what the left hand is doing. We cannot afford to get starry eyed over the prospect of peace and denuclearization and lose sight of the danger this regime

poses to the world. Let's pray the Trump administration can finally get it done, but let's not have a peace in our time moment.

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Website: [JD. Pendry's American Journal.](#)

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