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The Great North Korean Famine: Famine, Politics, and Foreign Policy

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Natsios, Andrew S. *The Great North Korean Famine: Famine, Politics, and Foreign Policy*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute for Peace, 2001. 295pp. \$19.95

Though not linked to the tragedy of 11 September 2001, North Korea rose once again to near the top of the list of likely U.S. adversaries with President George W. Bush's association of Pyongyang with a so-called axis of evil. This fine book by Andrew Natsios should be required reading for those contemplating the various policy dilemmas that confront the U.S. on the Korean Peninsula. Natsios provides an eloquent and informed narrative of evil as it exists today in North Korea—the slow and tortured death of millions of North Korean citizens by starvation as a direct result of the regime's totalitarian nature and its failure to reform disastrous economic policies. But the author also demonstrates that the North Korean quandary defies simple solution.

The book compellingly captures the human side of this international tragedy. Indeed, this aspect of the “rogue state” phenomenon is too often brushed aside in favor of high-politics approaches that degenerate into sterile discussions of containment, sanctions, and arms control possibilities. By contrast, Natsios's descriptions of the prevailing conditions in North Korea and the behavior of its leaders and national security apparatus are graphic enough to turn the reader's stomach. Thus he recounts the testimony of refugees who escaped to China: “In most cases the [group] suicides were committed by younger couples with smaller children; the couples had been denying themselves food for so long they feared they would die before their children did and that their children would be

left to fend for themselves.” Natsios describes observing, from the Chinese side of the Tyumen River, North Koreans on the opposite bank “dumping wrapped bodies into a large pit,” one of a number of suspected mass graves in the region.

Few are as qualified to tell this story as Natsios. Though not a specialist on Korea, he is an expert on disaster relief operations, with wide experience both in the U.S. government and civilian organizations. This breadth of experience allows him to put the Korean situation into a wider social and historical context. He offers many insightful comparisons to earlier famines in Ethiopia, China, and the Soviet Union. As vice president of World Vision from 1993 to 1998, Natsios made numerous trips to North Korea and the bordering areas of China during the mid-1990s. President Bush appointed him director of the U.S. Agency for International Development, which is certain to play a leading role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, among other missions integral to the war on terror. In addition, as a U.S. Army veteran of the Persian Gulf War, the author brings to the analysis a fluency on strategic issues that military readers are certain to appreciate. Thus his conclusions about the situation in contemporary North Korea go far beyond the speculation that is the norm for this closed state.

As a witness to the unfolding food emergency in North Korea, Natsios developed strong opinions about responsibility for the tragedy. He argues that culpability goes beyond the pathetic and cruel leadership in Pyongyang to the international community, and to the Clinton administration in particular—which took action only after the worst of the famine had passed, in the autumn of 1996. Natsios sharply criticizes Clinton for using food

aid as a diplomatic tool to coax concessions from Pyongyang. He maintains that such a position is ethically indefensible, since it punishes innocent populations, people who are unable to affect their government's policies.

The book does have a few weaknesses. First, its organization may prove frustrating. Different chapters focus on various perspectives of the famine, but this approach leads to some confusion about the overall chronology of events, which, given the complexity of the subject, is quite difficult to grasp. A second flaw is the lack of photographs. This in itself would not be a problem if no such photos existed, but Natsios makes a point of emphasizing the importance of photographs in conveying the reality of a famine. He also discusses the works of specific photographers but then fails to explain their absence. Finally, the overall analysis of the United States and North Korean interaction might have been stronger if greater attention had been paid to the nuclear proliferation issue. Certainly this was the most important concern in conditioning relations between the two countries, but Natsios hardly broaches the subject.

Overall, this study is an essential addition to recent scholarship on North Korea, which has not paid adequate attention to the human tragedy as it unfolded during the last decade. While Natsios makes a strong case for breaking the link between food aid and U.S. strategic interests, one wonders if relief efforts are aiding the North Korean regime and thus prolonging the catastrophe that Natsios has so eloquently described.

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Wirtz, James J., and Jeffrey A. Larsen, eds. *Rockets' Red Glare: Missile Defenses and the Future of World Politics*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 2001. 352pp. \$28.50

When President George W. Bush made his remark about the "axis of evil" in his 2002 State of the Union address, he publicly exposed the ballistic missile threat Iran, Iraq, and North Korea pose to the United States and its allies. So far, media concern has concentrated only on his name-calling. *Rockets' Red Glare* explores the missile defenses designed to counteract the threat from these countries.

James J. Wirtz, a national security affairs professor at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, and Jeffrey A. Larsen, a senior policy analyst of the Science Applications International Corporation, edited this book, which is an anthology of papers written to explore the implications of national missile defense (NMD). Contributors had a common assumption—that NMD will be deployed in a national security environment with either a modified antiballistic missile (ABM) treaty or no antiballistic missile treaty at all. This assumption allowed them to focus on the strategic level consequences of an NMD deployment; the editors then asked them to examine three levels of NMD deployment. These are "Limited Defense in a Cooperative Setting," "Enhanced Defenses and the Limits of Cooperation," and "Unlimited Defenses Unconstrained by Treaty."

Wirtz and Larsen organized their anthology in these three major parts. The "ABM Regime" provides historical background. Kerry Kartchner, the State Department's senior representative to the Standing Consultative Commission in Geneva, Switzerland, researched the