

A North Korean Social Revolution in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

A North Korean Social Revolution in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, by MAJ James R. Mallicoat, U.S. Army, 38 pages.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) regime has increasingly become a global threat since the end of the Korean War. Their nuclear arms violations and human rights infringements have drawn the concern of the international community. The closed economy, tightly-controlled international borders, and indoctrinated population make it extremely difficult for the international community to influence or persuade the regime in Pyongyang to cease its problematic behavior. To change the government of the DPRK, North Koreans must remove the regime, and the most feasible way is to remove it from within. North Koreans are so heavily indoctrinated ideologically that it would be impractical to attempt to coerce them to reject it and oust their leader, whose reign rests on the direct lineage of the "father" of the DPRK. North Koreans lack the knowledge, skill, and reason to revolt against the DPRK regime, but a select group of North Korean defectors and the assistance of a special operations element could facilitate a social revolution through the means of unconventional warfare. In the event of a social revolution gaining popularity and becoming effective in the removal of the DPRK regime, several states with different political and economic goals would likely conduct unconventional warfare (UW) in support of that particular state's interest. This research explores ways special operations forces could remove the DPRK regime by way of unconventional warfare through an existing resistance element. This is not to imply that the US is planning or would conduct such operations; it is only meant as a way of offering a look at what such operations – conducted by any external actor – might look like.

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Acronyms

DPRK	Democratic People’s Republic of Korea
ROK	Republic of Korea
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SO	Special Operations
UW	Unconventional Warfare
OE	Operational Environment
IGO	Intergovernmental Organizations
NGO	Nongovernmental Organizations

Introduction

Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.¹

—John F. Kennedy

The Korean Peninsula has a volatile and arduous history that continues with an ever-growing divide between the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).² After the armistice of the Korean conflict, the ROK has outpaced the DPRK and grown militarily, economically, and politically. As a weakening state, the DPRK regime has acted out against the ROK in an attempt to display its strength as a nation. The ROK has solidified its position in the world economy as a stakeholder that, if disrupted, would cause detrimental economic ripples for many nations, not the least of which is the United States. The DPRK regime is clearly not only a threat to the ROK, but to the world.

The current dictator of the DPRK, Kim Jong-Un, leads a repressive regime and continuously teeters on provoking a war with the ROK. The most significant provocation occurred in March 2013, when Kim Jong-Un declared the Korean War armistice of 1953 null and void and threatened nuclear attacks on the US and ROK. More recently, the DPRK threatened to conduct its fourth nuclear test since 2013, in retaliation for a myriad of on-going UN sanctions, US and ROK military drills, and other acts that the DPRK views as aggressive or threatening. In response, the US and ROK refused talks with the DPRK regarding aid-for-disarmament until nuclear development ceases. China has distanced itself, for the sake of its own security, from the

¹ John F. Kennedy, "Address on the first Anniversary of the Alliance for Progress.," March 13, 1962, accessed August 23, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9100>.

² Republic of Korea (ROK), as it is officially recognized by the United Nations; also used as a title for South Korea. For the purposes of this study, 'South Korea' specifically describes the people as 'South Koreans,' while 'ROK' is reserved to describe the state. Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), as it is officially recognized by the United Nations, is also used as a title for North Korea. For the purposes of this study, 'North Korea' is reserved to describe the people as 'North Koreans,' and 'DPRK' is reserved to describe the state.

DPRK due to the regime's erratic and unpredictable behavior. The ROK and Japan have maintained a united front in an effort to dissuade the DPRK from further developing and testing missiles and weapons. Globally, the DPRK is isolated and in a persistent economic decline to the extent that the oppressed population suffers through constant hunger.

The current environment in the DPRK is ripe for a social revolution that could lead to a regime change. Constant oppression of North Koreans by a militaristic and paranoid regime has thus far prevented an overt social revolution. The DPRK regime brutally executed North Koreans accused of attempting or plotting to overthrow the regime, such as Kim Jong-Un's late uncle, Jang Song-thaek, in December 2013.³ The population lives in such fear that any image of Kim Jong-Un, on any type of medium, cannot be placed on the ground, thrown away, sat on, or manipulated in any other way that may imply disgrace to the dictator. Any such act would result in imprisonment at a labor camp, along with the current and future generations of that person's family. Historically, oppressed people rise up against ruthless dictators and regimes to better their lives. North Koreans are justified in starting a social revolution, which could be successful with assistance from special operations forces (SOF) that support such causes.⁴ In the event of a social revolution gaining popularity and becoming effective in the removal of the DPRK regime, several states with different political and economic goals would likely conduct unconventional warfare (UW) in support of that particular state's interests.⁵

³ "North Korea Newsletter No. 312," Yonhap News Agency, created May 7, 2014, accessed May 8, 2014, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/search1/2603000000.html?cid=AEN20140507005300325>.

⁴ Special operations forces (SOF): These are elite forces of a state's military that "have unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment, and training to orchestrate effects, often in concert with conventional forces." Joint Publication (JP) 3-05, *Special Operations*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), GL-12.

⁵ Unconventional Warfare (UW): These are activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area. JP 3-05, GL-13.

Recently, allegations of the use of SOF conducting UW have originated from conflicts in Ukraine. Due to the covert and clandestine nature of UW, obtaining evidence is often difficult; therefore, claims of Russian SOF conducting UW in Ukraine remains accusations, though the Ukrainian and Estonian governments have presented some very credible evidence in support of such claims. Although the situation in Ukraine differs from the social and political climate in the DPRK, the application of SOF in an unconventional warfare role to influence activities for that state's interests still apply. In Ukraine, Russian forces exploited the weakened condition of the Ukrainian government to raise local militia forces and influence the population to achieve political goals, such as the current debate on the secession of Crimea. As in typical UW, SOF conducts clandestine and covert actions to protect the identity and objective of the state exerting the influence. Developments in pro-Russian social activity and events that favor Russian control of Ukraine are typical benchmarks of UW.

Significance of Study

This study is significant because it presents one approach to remove a dangerous and erratic regime, eliminate a significant threat to Western allies in the East Asia region, reduce the chance of nuclear weapons proliferation, and create a more stable environment for the global community. The ousting of the DPRK regime, in its current state, would require a large-scale social revolution of North Koreans across the DPRK. A North Korean social revolution's chances of success would exponentially increase with the assistance of SOF – from whatever country chose to get involved. This study will explore the feasibility and suitability of SOF conducting UW in support of a social revolution to overthrow the oppressive regime. In the absence of SOF, any social revolution conducted by an untrained cadre and population would most likely be rapidly quelled by the most extreme and harsh means, as is typically done to those accused of treason and opposing the regime.

It would be imperative that, should a North Korean social revolution develop, a SOF element would be required to immediately support such a cause, as speed and timing are critical in the revolution's success. The methods of employment of UW in the DPRK must be methodical and calculated in a nation that is socially and economically isolated from the world. Unlike the Arab Spring that used social media and other forms of communications technology to mobilize a population, North Koreans lack all of these potential tools to foment social action. Therefore, SOF must understand how to conduct UW in support of a population that lives in an antiquated state of technology and under a government that closely monitors its activities. Through globalization, every nation would benefit, economically and in security, from a DPRK built upon democracy and free from the DPRK regime.

Research Questions

The primary research question of this monograph is to identify how North Koreans could remove the DPRK regime. Particularly, the study investigates ways SOF could support a North Korean social revolution in the DPRK that would lead to a regime change. To answer the primary research question, this monograph will investigate social revolution theory; the history, people, and current state of the DPRK; and SOF's application of UW. The hypothesis of this study asserts that if SOF supported an existing North Korean resistance element, then a social revolution would increase its chances of success of removing the current DPRK regime.

Current and accurate data pertaining to the DPRK is extremely limited due to the DPRK's closed borders and political and economic systems. The DPRK usually distorts economic, military, and social data in an effort to mask the true conditions of the degrading state. Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that have access, however limited, to certain areas of the DPRK provide a majority of the information collected. Those who have escaped the borders into China or the ROK provide other sources of information about the DPRK.

Guidepost

This research document is divided into five sections: introduction, research methodology, literature review, analysis, and conclusion. Following this brief introduction, there is the research methodology section. This section explains how the research explored case studies of social revolutions to find common themes and what instruments of national power make the DPRK function. The literature review section is divided into three parts: social revolution theory, the DPRK, and unconventional warfare. The social revolution theory sub-section discusses four common themes in six major social revolutions throughout history. The DPRK sub-section provides a brief history; examines the past and current political structure; describes the course of the economy and where it stands today; examines the military's disposition and capabilities; and reveals the construct and ideology of North Koreans. The unconventional warfare section defines phases of unconventional warfare through the lens of US SOF, due to a lack of foreign UW doctrine availability. This is not to imply that the US is planning or would conduct such operations; it is only meant as a way of offering a look at what such operations – conducted by any external actor – might look like. The analysis section combines the data collected throughout the literature review and explores the possibility of a North Korean social revolution and the manner in which SOF could support such a revolution. A hypothetical scenario based on the conglomeration of data on the DPRK, with the social structure serving as the foundation, serves as the vehicle to depict this potential outcome.

Research Methodology

This study seeks to determine how SOF, of any state, could potentially support a social revolution in the DPRK with the goal of removing the existing regime. Several states have an interest in the DPRK regime and if a social revolution emerged, one or more states would likely become involved and act to further their own interests. In order to explore this scenario, this study examined the theoretical construct of social revolutions to identify common themes among several theorists. The understanding of social revolution theory provides a solid foundation for the study of several historical cases.

To establish a basis, this research used a comparative historical analysis of social revolutions throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Comparative historical analysis is useful as it “is a good way to negotiate/compromise between history and theory”⁶ and it “provides a valuable check, or anchor, for theoretical speculation.”⁷ Additionally, comparative historical analysis is appropriate for explaining things that have occurred rarely throughout history and it is well-suited to study concepts in which variables are abundant and actual cases are minimal.⁸

This study divides the themes of social revolution into several categories ranging from the cause of social dissatisfaction and ending with the outcome of regime change. It compares the causes of social dissatisfaction to the current environment in the DPRK to show the similarities and illustrate the potential for a social revolution. Each of the social revolutionary theorists examined here applied a case study analysis to several states that experienced social revolutions. Several of the sources studied the same states and common themes emerged from the case study

⁶ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 40.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

of each. Although unique in each state's own way, the concept of a social revolution shares numerous commonalities across the studies. This study then applied these commonalities to the DPRK to test the suitability and feasibility of the possible success of a social revolution.

Initially, this study included a review of partisan warfare. After reviewing several sources, the author determined that partisan warfare is typically concerned with fighting against an invading or occupying force, which is not the case of the DPRK. Additionally, according to Mao, a theorist and practitioner of guerilla war, "the fundamental difference between patriotic partisan resistance and revolutionary guerrilla movements is that the first usually lacks the ideological content that always distinguishes the second."⁹ Therefore, the study omits case studies that included partisan warfare during a revolution.

⁹ Mao, *On Guerrilla Warfare* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1961), 27.

Literature Review

Social Revolution Theory

Many states that exist today are the product of social revolutions. Social revolutions are “rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below.”¹⁰ Each social revolution is unique in its own way. To study the theory of social revolutions, one must explore the surrounding circumstances of significant revolutions across the globe over the last several hundred years. Simple explanations do not exist as to why revolutions occur or why they succeed or fail, but a common set of ingredients that have historically led to revolutions is evident. This study’s research of social revolutions showed these ingredients to be: (1) an exclusive government rule; (2) heavy government interference in the economy; (3) external influences; and (4) a mobilized population sharing common grievances.

Exclusive rule was the most prevalent theme in social revolutions. Autocratic regimes are the most vulnerable to uprising, and “centralized, dynastic regimes are especially vulnerable because they restrict elite access to the ruling party and remain exclusive for prolonged periods without providing any option for change.”¹¹ France in the late 18th century was under the rule of an absolute monarchy with an oppressive king who could arrest and imprison his own people without trial, which led to the French revolution.¹² The Iranian revolution erupted when the Shah, a tyrannical dictator, attempted to secure his position by eliminating opponents, creating an exclusive ruling party, while banning the formation of oppositional coalitions.¹³ The Philippines

¹⁰ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 4.

¹¹ Misagh Parsa, *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of Iran, Nicaragua, and the Philippines*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 11.

¹² Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 2; See also Almond, *Revolution*, 70.

¹³ Parsa, *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions*, 26.

had a similar government that restricted access to the ruling party. It began as a democratic government, then political conflicts erupted and the government imposed martial law and closed the regime off to anyone outside the regime.¹⁴

Governments that heavily interfere with capital accumulation become more susceptible to internal conflict and social unrest than those governments that operate a free market economy. The population will focus their frustrations on the government for any disturbance in the economy that influences them, which could mobilize the people to challenge the state. In the early 20th century, Russia's compounding factors of debts and war significantly eroded the fuel and food supplies, which led to Russia rationing food to the population.¹⁵ Eventually, the population opposed Tsar Nicholas II's meddling in the economy and protests erupted across Russia, which the Tsar attempted to quell by using military force.¹⁶ The French monarchy in the late 18th century hoarded money to sustain its lavish lifestyle, despite heavy indebtedness following the American Revolution.¹⁷ The French began to revolt when the price of bread and taxes drastically increased during a period of famine.

Influences from external states have often led to social revolutions, whether from an inspirational perspective for an oppressed people to initiate a collective effort, or from a belligerent perspective in which a population does not approve of the external state. China suffered through a period of external influence in the 18th century when Western states wanted access to China's trade and resources.¹⁸ The Manchu dynasty opposed pressure from the West,

¹⁴ Parsa, *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions*, 27.

¹⁵ Almond, *Revolution*, 123.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 71. See also Skocpol, *States and Social Revolution*, 63.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

which led to a conflict that China eventually lost, leading to French, British, German, and Russian influence in China.¹⁹ Though not a colony, China was carved up by the Western nations, and the Manchu dynasty began to erode away due to its inability to secure China from the external influence.²⁰ In 1900, the Boxer rebellion broke out against foreigners and the Manchu elite that generated significant Chinese debt. Russia's revolution was also related to external influence. At the turn of the 20th century, Japan defeated Russia, which was largely unpopular with the Russian people, and this defeat, combined with an already fragile economy, resulted in civil unrest.²¹ In 1915, war erupted with Germany, and Russia was not prepared to fight a major conflict. The fight against Germany took its toll on the Russian economy, as well as its male population.

Mobilization of an oppressed population that shares common grievances has led to social revolutions. Revolutionary ideologies, such as those that promise a better life, corral the masses and provide direction for a group of people who would otherwise dissolve in their search for the desire to live better. Mao Tse-tung led the Chinese revolution. He exploited the peasants' grievances, which made up 80% of the population, primarily the unfair parceling of land ownership to the wealthy.²² Four hundred million peasants lived at the subsistence level on a daily basis, and there were tens of millions of people who owned no land at all.²³ Mao mobilized the population by focusing his propaganda and recruiting in rural villages and by conducting mobile guerrilla warfare, which, after decades of fighting, eventually led to their victory in the

¹⁹ Mao, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 14.

²⁰ Almond, *Revolution*, 146.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

²² Skocpol, *States and Social Revolution*, 68.

²³ Mao, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 13.

Chinese civil war and the establishment of the People's Republic of China.²⁴ In Nicaragua from the 1930s to the 1970s, the Somoza family dictatorship created such a disparity in social classes that economic inequalities gave rise to opposition groups. These groups coalesced into the Sandanista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) who used armed tactics to remove the despotic Somoza regime.²⁵

Although each of the aforementioned ingredients varied in application, the concept and effectiveness behind each resulted in the same outcome: regime change. Some of the common grievances developed over decades, and some regime changes took numerous revolutions and uprisings, but the idea of revolution and a chance at a better life brought people together who pushed forward in synchronization and eventually achieved that desire. The next section will explore the DPRK's brief history, governing body, economy, military, and society to identify if any of the ingredients of a social revolution are present.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

History of the DPRK

After the defeat of Japan in World War II (WWII), the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union proposed a four-party trusteeship to jointly "settle all issues dealing with trade, transportation, and currency" further agreeing that the parties would "handle executive, legislative, and judicial functions until Korea was deemed ready for independence."²⁶ The intent was to temporarily partition Korea and place the responsibility for developing an interim government on the United States and Soviet Union until Korea could be united under a single

²⁴ Almond, *Revolution*, 149.

²⁵ Parsa, *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions*, 27.

²⁶ Martin Hart-Landsberg, *Korea: Division, Reunification, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), 82.

governing body.²⁷ The United States and Soviet Union disagreed on numerous aspects of a unified Korean government, which ultimately led to war between the two sides and the division that exists today. The Soviets initially allowed political freedom in Pyongyang, but when division seemed imminent, they “centralized political operations in the north and promoted Communists to leadership positions in all important political bodies.”²⁸ One of the Communists promoted to a political position was a popular guerilla fighter, Kim Il Sung, who was in the Soviet Far East. The Soviets empowered Kim Il Sung to rule the DPRK with his ideas of socialism, which initially functioned well. Kim Il Sung wanted to reunite both sides, which led to a North Korean invasion into the south that started the Korean War in 1950.²⁹ The warring powers signed an armistice agreement and drew a dividing line along the 38th parallel in 1953, placing the conflict on hiatus. After the Korean War, the DPRK was able to provide basic needs for North Koreans and at one point in the 1960s its economy even surpassed that of the ROK. Between the end of WWII and the 1960s, Koreans who were re-located to Japan during the colonization period immigrated to North Korea for the abundant job opportunities.

The DPRK relied heavily on the Soviet Union and China for economic and military assistance, so much that when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the DPRK suffered heavily. North Korea suffered a major famine due to the drop in economic assistance from the Soviet Union and several natural disasters. One-eighth of North Koreans died from the famine, yet the DPRK regime continued to divert resources to the Korean People’s Army (KPA) of the DPRK.³⁰ Kim Jong Il emphasized the importance of the KPA and disregarded the deteriorating

²⁷ Hart-Landsberg, *Korea*, 83.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁹ John Feffer, *North Korea, South Korea: US Policy at a Time of Crisis* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), location 305, Kindle.

³⁰ Glyn Ford and Soyoung Kwon, *North Korea on the Brink: Struggle for Survival* (Ann Arbor,

conditions of the North Koreans. Nuclear weapons research and development increased with slow progress, and the international community recognized the implications of a nuclear-armed DPRK regime. Since 1998, the DPRK has demonstrated its ability to launch “satellites” into orbit and test nuclear weapons.³¹ More recently, since the death of Kim Jong Il and the rise of his son and successor, Kim Jong Un, the DPRK has increased threats to its regional neighbors and Western countries. The DPRK regime persists with aggressive rhetoric and threats of annihilation when they feel the need to take a stand against an event they do not approve.

Today, the DPRK remains a socialist state with an autocratic regime. The military continues to be the strong-arm of the state that controls an oppressed population, as well as defends the DPRKs borders. The DPRK is in a financially weakened state due to the closed economy and it is not able to adequately feed the civilian population or its military. Economic sanctions become more stringent as the DPRK continues its acts of aggression, gross negligence of the population, and daily human rights violations. In April 2003, U.S. Senator (Dem.) Dianne Feinstein told the Senate,

North Korea, an isolated dictatorship, with a collapsed economy, controlled by its military, and in possession of nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them, represents a clear and present danger.³²

Politics

After being defeated in WWII, Japan was forced to dissolve its colony of Chosen on the Korean Peninsula, and Kim Il Sung was appointed by the Soviet Union to govern northern Korea. The DPRK regime began with Kim Il Sung and his North Korean Communist Party in the late

Michigan: Pluto Press, 2008), 48, 79.

³¹ Erich Weingartner, “Understanding North Korea: Perception vs. Reality,” *Behind the Headlines* 60, no.1 (Autumn 2002), 7.

³² Feffer, *North Korea, South Korea*, location 98.

1940s.³³ Receiving direct mentoring from Stalin, he secured political backing from the Soviet Union.³⁴ Kim Il Sung “improbably but successfully styled himself as a father to the country, drawing on the Confucian tradition of respect for paternal authority.”³⁵ As “father” of the DPRK, he purged and/or executed all those who opposed him. This form of rule established and secured the enduring autocratic rule of the DPRK regime that exists today.

Throughout Kim Il Sung’s reign, he established a cult of personality that North Koreans grew to worship. His desire to reunite northern and southern Korea was so intense that he launched an invasion into the south. After the conflict, Kim Il Sung sought to reunify the Koreas through subversion by guerilla warfare in the south, a strategy that continues today. In the 1960s and 1970s, Kim Il Sung’s socialist ideals were focused on improving the economic condition in the DPRK. This bolstered his reputation as the DPRK’s “father” until his ideology of *juche* began to affect the economy in the 1980s. Despite the economic hardships, Kim Il Sung’s power remained in place throughout the country. Kim Il Sung began to groom his son, Kim Jong Il, in the 1970s, and officially announced him as the successor in 1984.

Kim Jong Il assumed control of the DPRK when his father died in 1994.³⁶ Kim Jong Il continued to rule in a similar fashion as his father: with an oppressive fist against the people in order to retain control of them. Kim Jong Il’s tyrannical rule remained steadfast, even through a famine that claimed the lives of millions of North Koreans. Kim Jong Il surrounded himself with his top security officials who were only trusted relatives, and the security of the capital was in control of several brothers who were in-laws to Kim Jong Il’s sister, “with the eldest brother

³³ Hart-Landsberg, *Korea*, 142.

³⁴ Ford and Kwon, *North Korea on the Brink*, 50.

³⁵ Feffer, *North Korea, South Korea*, location 280.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, location 100.

responsible for the Army core that defends Pyongyang.”³⁷ The autocracy would remain a family business, even after Kim Jong Il’s death in 2011.

Through the closed rule of the DPRK regime, Kim Jong Un was the chosen successor among the three sons to lead the DPRK after Kim Jong Il’s death. Immediately afterwards, the Korean Workers’ Party (KWP) Central Committee Politburo recognized Kim Jong Un as the Supreme Commander of the military, a promotion from his previous position as four-star general and Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the KWP.³⁸ North Korean media also titled him as the Supreme Commander of the Party, the State, and the Military. Through media analysis, it appeared that the real power behind Kim Jong Un was his uncle, Jang Sung Thaek, who was his top policy advisor and Kim Jong Il’s brother-in-law.³⁹ In December 2013, Kim Jong Un accused Jang Sung Thaek of political opposition and had him executed, along with his immediate and extended family. Executions are common for those who oppose the DPRK regime. The regime arbitrarily imprisons accused oppositionists, and three generations of their family, for any political offense that would include stepping on a picture of any of the Kims; throwing away a newspaper with a picture of any of the Kims; or mentioning disapproval of any of the ruling family.

The exclusive rule of the DPRK regime remains solidified in its indoctrination of the North Koreans. Any opposition to the regime is met with fierce punishment, and “as long as the country remains divided and under threat from the United States, it is likely that the North Korean regime will seek to maintain, if not intensify, the cult of personality that surrounds its present

³⁷ Bruce Cumings, *North Korea* (New York: The New Press, 2004), 169.

³⁸ Charles Armstrong, *The Koreas* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 61.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

leader.”⁴⁰ This policy ensures the survival of the DPRK regime.⁴¹

Economy

After the Korean War, both North and South Korea were racing against each other to recover from the devastating effects the war left on their economies. Kim Il Sung wanted to create a state-reliant nation by developing a state-controlled, planned, and Stalinist-based economy that focused on heavy industry.⁴² The DPRK economy flourished through the 1950s and 1960s with the help of the Soviet Union.⁴³ During the Cold War, the USSR began to limit economic aid and oil subsidies to the DPRK and after its collapse in 1991, the DPRK economy began to dwindle.⁴⁴ Trade between the DPRK and Russia dropped from \$3 billion in 1989 to \$40 million in 1999.⁴⁵ The lack of economic aid and several natural disasters led to a famine that killed millions of North Koreans.⁴⁶ The DPRK granted entry access to non-governmental organizations (NGO) for delivery of humanitarian aid and to assist the DPRK economy to reach a level of effectiveness that could support the population, but many left due to the friction of the DPRK regime.⁴⁷

The DPRK slowly recovered from the famine but lacked the economic resources to provide North Koreans with basic needs. North Koreans were impoverished due to the regime’s

⁴⁰ Hart-Landsberg, *Korea*, 173.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴² Hart-Landsberg, *Korea*, 140.

⁴³ Ford and Kwon, *North Korea on the Brink*, 112.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴⁷ Cumings, *North Korea*, 182.

closed-economy policy and sanctions imposed upon them by the outside world in an attempt to stop the DPRK regime from pursuing nuclear weapons. The DPRK regime created the Public Distribution System (PDS) to regulate food to North Koreans, but the system continues to fail in feeding the population. In Pyongyang, wealthier people can buy food with hard currency, rather than the typical voucher they earn for outstanding hard work.⁴⁸ Hunger remains widespread throughout the DPRK as only 20% of the land can produce crops; other areas are void of nutrients and depend on large quantities of fertilizer and pesticides.⁴⁹ Foreign trade and assistance could compensate for the agricultural shortfalls, but the DPRK's closed economy and heavy interference by the DPRK regime significantly dampen foreign relations and trade.⁵⁰

North Koreans lack some basic needs due to the intolerance of the DPRK regime by the international community. The European Union, United States, Japan, and South Korea stopped sending large quantities of oil shipments to the DPRK in 2002 because of the failing diplomatic relations.⁵¹ North Koreans suffer through brutal winters without heat and vehicle use is only for the wealthy as oil imports degrade.⁵² The DPRK relies heavily on China and Russia for economic support.⁵³ Russia's support is very limited as it is "neither politically inclined nor economically able to prop up the North."⁵⁴ China has an interest in ensuring the DPRK's economy does not

⁴⁸ Ford and Kwon, *North Korea on the Brink*, 98.

⁴⁹ Weingartner, "Understanding North Korea: Perception vs. Reality," 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵³ Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," 6.

⁵⁴ Ford and Kwon, *North Korea on the Brink*, 170.

collapse so that millions of refugees do not flood into China, so they continue their economic support.⁵⁵

Military

The DPRK military plays a central role in the DPRK, making up a quarter of its gross national product.⁵⁶ The KPA consists of an estimated two million active duty soldiers and seven million reserve soldiers.⁵⁷ Additionally, there are approximately 100,000 KPA special forces soldiers who are the best-fed, most highly-equipped, and intensely-trained forces deployed throughout the DPRK.⁵⁸ Although large in numerical strength, their equipment is antiquated Russian and Chinese discards. The failing equipment, logistical shortages, and inadequate training significantly degrade the KPA's effectiveness.⁵⁹ Nearly 70% of the KPA and 50% of the naval and air force are within 100 kilometers of the demilitarized zone.⁶⁰ Command and control is around the National Defense Commission in Pyongyang, which maintains authority over the military and security services.⁶¹

Economic sanctions continue to impair the DPRK military in its day-to-day activities. KPA soldiers resort to growing their own food and stealing supplies to sustain them.⁶² The lack of

⁵⁵ Ibid., 171.

⁵⁶ Ford and Kwon, *North Korea on the Brink*, 146.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 146.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 146; See also Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," 19.

⁵⁹ Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," 18.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁶¹ Ibid., 20.

⁶² N.C. Heikin, *Kimjongilia: The Flower of Kim Jong Il* (Lorber Films, 2009).

nutrition and poor food quality serves as a catalyst for disease and ailments, which results in desertion and in some cases, death.⁶³ The lack of oil hinders the DPRK navy from chasing deserters and impedes effective training. The DPRK regime's persistent spending on nuclear weapons technology continues to deplete the already constrained military budget, despite the amount of GNP it consumes. Continuous spending on military equipment and weapons, such as the satellite-bearing rocket launched into orbit in December 2012, has weakened the currency by a tenth.⁶⁴

Other forms of military power exist within the DPRK regime. The DPRK conducted Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) cyber attacks "against ROK commercial, government, and military websites, rendering them inaccessible."⁶⁵ In April 2011, the DPRK accessed ROK's national agricultural cooperative federation bank reserves.⁶⁶ The DPRK's cyber capability amplifies their development of nuclear weapons. The DPRK conducted three nuclear tests from 2006-2013 after unilaterally withdrawing from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 2003.⁶⁷ The DPRK regime relies on foreign partners to advance their nuclear weapons technology, although the assessment is that the DPRK is several years from developing a nuclear warhead that could be mounted onto a ballistic missile.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ "Inside the Cult of Kim," *The Economist*, April 3, 2013.

⁶⁵ Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," 10.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁷ "Country Profile: North Korea," Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), last modified July 2014, accessed September 8, 2014, <http://www.nti.org/country-profiles/north-korea/>.

Society

Approximately 23 million North Koreans struggle to survive on a daily basis.⁶⁸ The rural population suffers through hunger so much that the lack of nutrition has stunted growth among many youths. Agricultural trade between towns and villages is extremely limited due to the difficulty of obtaining travel permits within the DPRK.⁶⁹ Those who have permits to travel to neighboring villages must walk or ride bicycles, as most vehicles are in major cities. The privileged few who have a vehicle and money to travel reside in Pyongyang, which has a population cap of two million. Living in Pyongyang is not determined by money, but by political pedigree.⁷⁰ The elite in Pyongyang live well, “while the rest are entirely dependent on position and place,” but even the elite are subject to the numerous checkpoints throughout the city.⁷¹ Economic and social disparity resounds throughout the DPRK, but the cohesion that prevents the people from warring against each other is the idea that Kim Il Sung is their deity, and *juche* is their religion.⁷² *Juche* is the ideology of all North Koreans and the principle basis emphasizes the need to become/maintain independence, or self-reliance, and refusing to become dependent on external entities. *Juche* underlines the requirement to prevent external influence and rely solely on one’s own strength. The DPRK regime forces its citizens to study the ideology in “study groups” and “re-education” assemblies.⁷³

The DPRK regime indoctrinated North Koreans in the *juche* ideology for over 60 years.

⁶⁸ Weingartner, “Understanding North Korea,” 2

⁶⁹ Ford and Kwon, *North Korea on the Brink*, 83.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 106.

⁷³ Weingartner, “Understanding North Korea,” 2.

Kim Il Sung developed an idea, *juche*, that North Korean's would rely on their hard work and they, alone, would be able to sustain their nation. It is the fundamental idea that emphasizes the need to become and maintain independence, or self-reliance, and reject the idea of depending on external entities. *Juche* education begins at nearly three months of age and continues throughout adulthood.⁷⁴ This ideology is what the DPRK regime uses to control the population, along with the internal security mechanisms that uphold *juche*. The ideology is so much the identity of North Koreans that, at the time of Kim Il Sung's death, North Koreans gathered at the giant statue of him and were crying hysterically; heart attack victims crowded the hospitals in Pyongyang.⁷⁵

Juche creates an environment of accepted isolation of the North Korean population from the rest of the world. Media is state controlled and access to any outside source of information is extremely restricted.⁷⁶ The state operates all three television stations and eleven radio stations to honor the DPRK regime, promote *juche*, and depict Western countries as aggressors.⁷⁷ Arts media depict the US as "violent and cunning warmongers.....and South Koreans as sneaky and greedy US puppets."⁷⁸ The Ministry of People's Security (MPS) and State Security Department (SSD) detain North Koreans who contest *juche*, dishonor the DPRK regime, or conspire against the state.⁷⁹ The SSD discreetly embeds its members within the North Korean workplaces, neighborhoods, and other organizations to conduct surveillance and collect intelligence on

⁷⁴ Weingartner, "Understanding North Korea," 85.

⁷⁵ Don Oberdorfer and Robert Carlin, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, 3rd edition (New York: Basic Books, 2014), location 6249, Kindle.

⁷⁶ Ford and Kwon, *North Korea on the Brink*, 89.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

potential oppositionists.⁸⁰ The oppositionists go through unfair trials as political prisoners, who are then sent to one of the twelve political labor camps in the DPRK.⁸¹ Prisoners at the labor camps suffer through starvation, torture, and hard labor that sometimes lead to their deaths.⁸² If the DPRK regime sentences a political prisoner to a labor camp, then the regime incarcerates three generations of the prisoner's immediate and extended family.

The oppressive DPRK regime forced an estimated 20,000 North Koreans to defect to the ROK, and there is an estimated 300,000 North Korean refugees living in China.⁸³ Many refugees and defectors reside primarily along the border of North Korea and China, but many are denied refugee status by China and are deported for prosecution. The defectors and refugees that successfully navigate through the Chinese system typically migrate to Yanji, China, then finally to Seoul, South Korea.

The DPRK displays all of the historical factors present in social revolutions. The DPRK regime practices exclusive rule today and has since Kim Il Sung's rise to power in 1945. The regime oppresses the population to ensure the survival of the Kim family as the ruling party, as did several states that fell to a social revolution throughout history. The regime's heavy interference and mismanagement of the DPRK's capital accumulation, or lack thereof, also trends with historical studies of successful social revolutions. The DPRK experiences negative external influence through sanctions by the international community. Economic sanctions place pressure on the regime, which ultimately leads to food shortages and other basic needs among the impoverished population. All of the common ingredients to a social revolution lead to shared

⁸⁰ Ibid., 108.

⁸¹ Hart-Landsberg, *Korea*, 172.

⁸² Hart-Landsberg, *Korea*, 172.

⁸³ Jacques Fuqua, Jr, *Korean Unification: Inevitable Challenges* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2011), 5; and Heikin, *Kimjongilia*.

grievances of the North Koreans. A majority of the population live in fear of reprisal from the regime and struggle to survive on a daily basis. The only lacking factor is a leader to mobilize the population, which most are reluctant to initiate because of the widespread indoctrination of *juche* and the strict control the DPRK regime has on the population. The evidence presented in the research reveals that the most probable way of mobilizing the population is through an existing resistance organization outside of the DPRK, supported by a SOF element of an outside nation conducting UW.

Unconventional Warfare

Due to a lack of availability of foreign SOF doctrine, this study explores unconventional warfare (UW) through the lens of US doctrine. The contributing manuals are Army Training Publication 3-05.1, Unconventional Warfare; and Training Circular 18-01, Special Forces Unconventional Warfare. Use of US doctrine does not imply that US SOF would support a social revolution in the DPRK. It is simply a tool to describe the dynamics of successful resistance movements and the phases of UW used to support a social revolution. If a social revolution were to begin, or an existing North Korean resistance organization requested assistance, various states with different interests would seek to shape the environment and help bring about an outcome of their interest.

US Army doctrine defines UW as “activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerilla force in a denied area.”⁸⁴ Provided an existing resistance element, a SOF element can assist an oppressed population in achieving a common objective against an established government. A common objective could include the

⁸⁴ Training Circular (TC) 18-01, *Special Forces Unconventional Warfare* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, January 2011), 1-1.

national interests of the SOF element and a desired end state of the resistance organization. Armed forces or states may conduct UW directly or indirectly. A direct engagement could involve SOF operating with resistance forces in the affected state, as a line of operation, in which the military is the dominant instrument of power.⁸⁵ An indirect engagement could involve SOF providing training and equipment to resistance fighters in the sanctuary of a neighboring state as the main line of operation, with the military serving a supporting role to other instruments.⁸⁶ Additionally, SOF can conduct UW with the intent of preparing the operational environment (OE) for conventional forces, or as a stand-alone effort between the SOF element and resistance organization. This could be further limited to developing “missing elements to ensure the survivability and success of the organization.”⁸⁷

Dynamics of Successful Resistance Movements

A resistance movement must identify certain aspects of an organization in order to conduct a successful social revolution. In the absence of querying key fundamentals of an organization, a group of people would perform tasks that are disjointed and inane. Providing direction and structure is vital for an organization to achieve an objective, and the dynamics of successful resistance movements identify these components: leadership recognizes the “who”; ideology identifies the “why”; objectives clarify the “what”; environment and geography locates “where”; external support identifies the “how”; phasing and timing dictate the “when”; and organizational and operational patterns provide the structure.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Army Training Publication (ATP) 3-05.1, *Unconventional Warfare* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, September 2013), 1-3.

⁸⁶ ATP 3-05.1, 1-3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-3.

⁸⁸ Command and General Staff College (CGSC), “Advanced Unconventional Warfare course” (Command and General Staff College, class 13-02, Fall Term 1, A576, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, September

The leadership of a resistance movement creates the divide between the people and the government through the establishment of credibility and legitimacy. Leaders organize the resistance and provide “vision, direction, guidance, coordination, and organizational coherence” in order to achieve unity of effort.⁸⁹ Additionally, leaders establish clear objectives and leverage ideologies to mobilize the people. Leaders categorize objectives into tactical, operational, and strategic levels to identify what resources and level of effort are applied.⁹⁰ The strategic objective is the resistance’s end state, and the operational objectives could be gaining support of the population. Ideology is the driving factor of the people and provides motivation towards achieving the objectives. Through common beliefs, ideology serves as the cohesion and provides purpose to a resistance.⁹¹

The environment and geography influence how the resistance movement will operate. The two typical areas are urban and rural, both of which have advantages and disadvantages for the resistance. Rural areas typically provide a better safe haven for larger groups of resistance members, but can limit logistics due to the remote location.⁹² Urban areas can provide the resistance with the ability to influence more of the population, but limits the group’s ability to “train and organize for large-scale operations.”⁹³

Most resistance organizations require external support from foreign entities that share common interests in the strategic objectives. Support can come in the form of political

26, 2013)

⁸⁹ ATP 3-05.1, 12-4.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 2-4.

⁹¹ Ibid., 2-4.

⁹² TC 18-01, 2-5.

⁹³ ATP 3-05.1, 2-5.

acknowledgment to increase legitimacy within the international community; moral support to ensure the resistance movement survives; resources such as money, weapons, sustenance, and/or advisors; or safe havens from which a resistance organization can conduct operations or provide logistics.⁹⁴ A resistance will sometimes garner external support during the first phase of a resistance movement.

Phasing and timing consists of three phases, which varies according to the resistance movement. Phase I is the latent, or insipient, phase which focuses on subversion by way of recruiting, infiltrating government offices, establishing support networks, and/or acquiring support from external sources.⁹⁵ Completion of these tasks sets conditions for phase II, guerilla warfare, which is the active degradation of the government's security forces. Phase II creates a wider separation of the population from the government through propaganda and successful operations. When the resistance movement achieves a position of relative advantage, they transition to phase III, war of movement, to achieve the strategic objective of installing a new government.⁹⁶ The resistance movement combines direct and subversive actions to defeat the government. The leadership of the resistance element installs the shadow government and establishes a form of control over the territory and people. Each of the phases is not required in a resistance movement, and some may revert to a previous phase if there is a need to reconsolidate. Organization and operational patterns describe the structure of the resistance organization. It is the construct that allows resistance leaders to influence and guide the organization, which they design according to the resistance's goals.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ CGSC, "Advanced Unconventional Warfare course," September 26, 2013.

⁹⁵ ATP 3-05.1, 2-6.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 2-7.

⁹⁷ ATP 3-05.1, 2-7.

Phases of Unconventional Warfare

The seven phases of UW are not a checklist. They serve as general models to plan UW operations and can occur out of order or not at all. UW begins with preparation (Phase I) which identifies the resistance movement's ability to conduct a social revolution.⁹⁸ Intense intelligence preparation of the environment allows for the development of an internal and external network support structure. The state providing SOF may use other forms of power to shape the environment to increase the chances of success. The SOF element preparing for UW will typically make initial contact (Phase II) to assess the feasibility of conducting UW in the operational area.⁹⁹ The SOF element can establish initial contact by deploying select personnel to the operational area or by exfiltrating a member of the resistance organization to a location outside of the hostile area. Infiltration (Phase III) involves the actual linkup between the SOF element and the members of the resistance organization. The SOF element may clandestinely infiltrate the denied area to linkup with the resistance organization, or, in a limited-war, the linkup occurs outside of the denied area where forces are trained/equipped, and then inserted back into the target area.

SOF elements assist the resistance forces with their structure in the organization phase (Phase IV). This phase includes identifying cadre, establishing support networks, and determining mutual objectives. The ambiguity of UW and the unstructured environment requires "centralized direction and decentralized execution" to be effective.¹⁰⁰ During the build-up phase (Phase V), the SOF element and resistance organization expands its capabilities and resources. The resistance organization enhances the clandestine support network as the force grows with recruits and

⁹⁸ ATP 3-05.1, 2-8.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 2-9.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 2-11.

operations. Limited offensive operations procure equipment and weapons through battlefield recovery, and experience develops confidence in the resistance forces.¹⁰¹ Resistance forces increase offensive operations and expand their efforts in the employment phase (Phase VI). The resistance organization maximizes its potential efforts and resources to achieve the strategic objective. The offensive operations can range from expanded subversion operations to overt interdiction of the enemy, while increasing the operational tempo.¹⁰²

The final phase is transition (Phase VII) in which the resistance protects the newly installed government, as the ousted government will attempt to regain its position of authority.¹⁰³ In some cases, the resistance forces demobilize and return to their pre-conflict livelihoods. Depending on the resistance organization and new government, the resistance forces may transition to become the security forces, allowing the SOF element to transition to foreign internal defense (FID). The key to Phase VII is supporting the new government and its ability to govern while preventing additional uprisings.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 2-12.

¹⁰² CGSC, “Advanced Unconventional Warfare.”

¹⁰³ ATP 3-05.1, 2-15.

Analysis

North Korean Preparedness for a Social Revolution

Social revolutions are unique in each occurrence, but several factors influence the way social revolutions begin and end. The context of the time, grievances of the population, and the power of the governing body are some examples of factors that vary from one revolution to another. Although the social revolutions in Iran, France, Nicaragua, Russia, the Philippines, and China varied by time and context, they all shared some common themes that led to the social revolutions. As discussed earlier, the four themes are:

1. Exclusive ruling party and/or an oppressive autocracy
2. Heavy government interference and control of the economy
3. External influences and reliance on external support
4. Common grievances among the population and leadership

The situation in the DPRK shares these ingredients of a social revolution, and the potential for a resistance element to act against the DPRK regime may exist, however small it may be.

Exclusive rule through an oppressive autocracy is the current form of government in the DPRK. The DPRK regime has ruled the DPRK since the end of the Korean War with few political challengers. Similar to the Somoza family's 42-year reign in Nicaragua, the DPRK regime's tyrannical rule remains in effect after 60 years.¹⁰⁴ Both governments operated through tyranny by suppressing and oppressing the population for one reason or another.¹⁰⁵ The DPRK regime executes or imprisons opposition members in labor camps, along with three generations of

¹⁰⁴ Parsa, *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions*, 27.

¹⁰⁵ Almond, *Revolution*, 15.

the violator's family.¹⁰⁶ The Shah of Iran eliminated political opponents, as did Kim Jong Un when he executed his uncle for suspected opposition against the regime in December 2013.¹⁰⁷ Acts against the regime include "taking plate glass from a hanging photo of Kim Jong-Il," or placing a newspaper with an image of one of the Kims face down or in the trash.¹⁰⁸ The DPRK regime's arbitrary imprisonment of political officials mirrors that of King Louis XVI's indiscriminate incarceration of Frenchman in the Bastille, which became the focal point of French opposition during the start of the revolution. Much like the countries in the case studies, the DPRK regime rules through exclusive authority, and research suggests that "states that form exclusive polities.....tend to become very vulnerable to challenge and attack."¹⁰⁹

The DPRK regime tightly controls the closed economy, which is negatively affecting North Koreans throughout the country. According to Parsa's categorization of states involved in capital accumulation, the DPRK is a hyperactive state.¹¹⁰ A hyperactive state limits the market by controlling and/or owning economic resources, which makes the DPRK regime the primary economic actor.¹¹¹ The DPRK regime is the focal point of blame and responsibility for the economic crisis that has lasted for decades, thus becoming the target of social conflict.¹¹² The famines in the DPRK and 18th century France were the result of bad weather, increased taxes,

¹⁰⁶ This includes parents, grandparents, children, and grandchildren, if applicable.

¹⁰⁷ "North Korea Newsletter No. 312," Yonhap News Agency, created May 7, 2014, accessed May 8, 2014, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/search1/2603000000.html?cid=AEN20140507005300325>.

¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2013" (United States: Human Rights Watch, 2013), 342.

¹⁰⁹ Parsa, *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions*, 10.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 18.

expensive food prices, and depleted food stocks.¹¹³ The French population's intolerance of the famine due to King Louis' mismanagement of state capital and food stocks attributed to the social revolution. The DPRK regime's mismanagement of state capital is evident as it hosts the Arirang festival from April to August, honoring the Kim family, while a majority of the population suffers from hunger and only has access to a few hours of electricity per day.¹¹⁴ The Marcos regime in the Philippines also mismanaged/misallocated state capital of \$100 million to fund his reelection, which created a significant drop in the currency. The economic decline intensified, unemployment became rampant, and Filipinos began to mobilize against the Marcos regime. As the DPRK regime continues to control state capital and redirect funds to unnecessary festivals and nuclear warhead technology, the starving North Koreans who suffer through cold winters without gas and electricity for heat have compelling reasons to oppose the regime.

External influence significantly affects the DPRK economically, politically, and militarily. Western influence on the DPRK is typically in the form of sanctions, which inherently pushes the economy into a deeper crisis. The international community shuns the regime's rhetoric and nuclear weapons testing, which creates a reduction in food aid and oil imports from other states.¹¹⁵ External factors heavily influence the military as the DPRK regime attempts to maintain the pace of technology with its enemies, primarily in nuclear weapons technology. As demonstrated in the Chinese, French, and Russian social revolutions, the breakdown in these imperial systems occurred because they were trying to keep pace with military advancements.¹¹⁶ Additionally, these states crumbled under a social revolution because they focused on protecting

¹¹³ Almond, *Revolution*, 71.

¹¹⁴ Ford and Kwon, *North Korea on the Brink*, 93.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹¹⁶ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolution*, 285.

the borders of their nation from external threats.¹¹⁷ The DPRK is so consumed with the threat of a US and ROK invasion that a large portion of the financial resources is dedicated to protecting the southern and coastal boundaries. The lack of concern with border encroachment is at the DPRK and Chinese border. The DPRK relies on support from China to sustain its survival, much like it did with the Soviet Union before the end of the Cold War. The DPRK relied so much on Soviet economic aid that when the Cold War ended, combined with natural disasters, it fell into a famine that claimed the lives of millions of North Koreans. Yet, the DPRK regime did not learn from the crisis and currently relies on China for economic aid. China has an interest in maintaining the status of the DPRK because it serves as a buffer between Chinese and US/ROK militaries.

Common grievances exist within the North Korean population, but fear of reprisal from the DPRK regime suppresses any mobilization against the government. The oppression of North Koreans includes strict adherence and submission to the DPRK regime, controlled media, practice of the *juche* ideology and no other religions, and other government controls to prevent opposition.¹¹⁸ Challenges to the regime are met with mock trials, torture, incarceration in labor camps (that typically lead to death by starvation or execution), and the elimination of the violator's family lineage. The countries studied had characteristics of these human rights violations.

In the states that endured social revolutions, oppositional elements knew they were living comparatively in substandard conditions to those in other parts of the world. A majority of North Koreans do not have a standard to compare themselves to because contact outside of the DPRK is restricted and controlled. While in exile, Ayatollah Khomeini extended his power base and

¹¹⁷ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolution*, 285.

¹¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2013," 344.

influenced Iranians, which encouraged resistance elements to mobilize through mosques.¹¹⁹ North Koreans do not have a common area to share grievances because the DPRK regime secretly infiltrates the notorious SSD in workplaces, neighborhoods, and organizations to imprison or execute opposition members.¹²⁰ Additionally, a possible North Korean resistance leader on the outside could not be effective because of the closed borders and restricted communication. Revolutions begin because oppressed populations have little to lose, and much to gain, as occurred in the Chinese revolution when peasants toiled on farms that belonged to the wealthy. The peasants were abused by landlords, bullied by tax collectors, robbed by soldiers and bandits, and suffered through epidemics and famine.¹²¹ Similar to the peasants, North Koreans have little to lose, from a material perspective, but ideologically, they are bound to the system.

The key element that differentiates North Koreans from the French, Iranians, Russians, Nicaraguans, Filipinos, and Chinese is the North Korean ideology of *juche*. *Juche* is their way of life, and Kim Il Sung is the deity of the land and people, which is the only life they know. The millions of oppressed North Koreans share common grievances that, if mobilized, could likely remove the autocracy, but they are indoctrinated in the “cult nature of the regime itself with millions locked inside their own minds, in prisons of their own construction. They do not need to be controlled because they are true believers.”¹²² To state that, without external support, common grievances among the millions of oppressed North Koreans are enough to mobilize them would not be accurate. Changing the minds of an entire nation against an ideology that has been indoctrinated into the culture for over 60 years would be extremely arduous.

¹¹⁹ Parsa, *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions*, 27.

¹²⁰ Ford and Kwon, *North Korea on the Brink*, 108.

¹²¹ Mao, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 14.

¹²² Ford and Kwon, *North Korea on the Brink*, 107.

Special Operations' Unconventional Warfare in Support of a North Korean Social Revolution

UW conducted by SOF of any nation would likely use a similar construct of the seven phases of the US doctrine on UW. The premise of a UW operation in support of a North Korean social revolution is based on the assumption that the parent nation of the SOF element seeks to establish a democratic government in the DPRK; though, it is certainly plausible that other international actors (Russia or China, for example) could attempt to use SOF to install some other form of government, as long as it was seen as furthering their own political and geostrategic interests. The period and length of time to conduct UW towards the strategic objective of establishing a democratic government is irrelevant, as an operation of this magnitude could take years or decades. The following is a way a SOF element could support an existing North Korean social revolution.

The preparation phase (Phase I) requires a SOF element, or other agencies of the parent nation, to shape the environment for possible UW operations. Prior to SOF engagement with resistance members, agencies select North Korean defectors and refugees, and train them in information operations and covert communication to identify existing resistance bands and potential leaders.¹²³ A SOF element continues the area study that includes an assessment of the civil infrastructure to identify points of vulnerability and locations of nuclear weapons facilities. The preparation phase is continuous in terms of developing the support networks, but transitions when SOF identifies a potential shadow government and observes possible bands of resistance in the DPRK.

A SOF element conducts initial contact (Phase II) with members of a potential shadow

¹²³ Clandestine communication is selected over covert communication in order to hide the activity of messaging. During the preparation phase, select individuals are sampled discreetly, versus covert communication, which involves openly broadcasting a message while concealing the originator/origin.

government.¹²⁴ During initial contact with the shadow government, the SOF element determines the feasibility of conducting UW to confirm a mutual end state and conditions exists.¹²⁵ A SOF element continues to develop the shadow government, while the defectors/refugees continue to develop the support network, identify bands of resistance, and provide intelligence to the shadow government. The initial contact phase transitions when the SOF element's feasibility assessment is satisfied and they have contacted members of the shadow government.

The infiltration phase (Phase III) requires a SOF element to remain outside of the DPRK to continue selecting, training, and equipping resistance members, through the shadow government. The purpose of the limited-war scenario is to mitigate the risk of unintended consequences and the escalation of the already-intense political and military tensions. It would be more practical to infiltrate SOF trained North Korean defectors/refugees into the DPRK. The infiltration phase is continuous throughout the UW operation to maintain persistent engagement with all population centers in the DPRK.

In the organization phase (Phase IV), a SOF element continues to select and train defectors/refugees as area commanders and cadre. The main activity during this phase is the development of the resistance structure and the network that supports it. The organization phase transitions when the area commanders establish a resistance structure that is approved by the shadow government and a SOF element. During the buildup phase (Phase V), a SOF element continuously trains defectors/refugees as cadre in guerrilla warfare. Resistance elements do not conduct offensive operations during this phase. A SOF element assesses the operational reach of the supply network and smuggles items to the cache sites through a clandestine support structure.

¹²⁴ Ford and Kwon, *North Korea on the Brink*, 135.

¹²⁵ ATP 3-05.1, 1-8.

The SOF element's priority is assessing and expanding the support network and generating forces for the following phase.

The employment phase (Phase VI) begins with the resistance elements conducting subversive offensive actions in a protracted manner to erode the military's strength and morale.¹²⁶ The SOF element continues to train and equip defectors/refugees to infiltrate them into the DPRK to expand the operational reach. Guerrilla operations do not transition to overt operations due to the nature of the limited-war UW operation. The employment phase transitions when the resistance removes the Kim regime from the seat of government and no longer has the ability to control security forces. The transition phase (Phase VII) begins when the shadow government assumes legitimate governing authority of the DPRK. The SOF element and its parent nation agencies redirect training efforts from UW to foreign internal defense to protect the new government. They continue to train defectors/refugees (former military officials) to assume control of the DPRK military forces.

Introducing a new regime to a population that has several generations indoctrinated in worshipping a ruthless regime and embracing *juche* would possibly take a decade or more. Information operations are critical to shaping the environment and should take various forms since print and electronic media are state controlled and heavily monitored. Reeducation of North Koreans in a democratic, free market state, liberated from constant intimidation should be gradual. The societal structure's cohesion and support rests upon the indoctrinated beliefs, and rapid change could cause social disorder and other unintended consequences not aligned with the strategic objective of the SOF-sponsored state and new DPRK government. Throughout the significant socio-political changes, nationalism would be the most cohesive element to create unity on the Korean peninsula and maintain social stability and cohesion.

¹²⁶ TC 18-01, 3-7.

Conclusion

A North Korean social revolution supported by SOF UW is possible, as the conditions for a revolution do exist. Historical case studies of France, Russia, China, Iran, Nicaragua, and the Philippines illustrate that, when certain conditions exist, an oppressed people will challenge the government and revolt. When an oppressive government exercises exclusive rule, heavy intervention in the economy, and is significantly influenced by foreign powers, then a population with shared grievances will mobilize against the government to improve their way of life. All of these conditions exist in the DPRK, but the DPRK regime's indoctrination and extreme intimidation of North Koreans has thus far suppressed ideas of a revolution.

Support from a SOF element, by ways of UW, could improve the chances of a successful North Korean social revolution. SOF's support to a North Korean social revolution would be most effective in a limited-war UW operation. The intense DPRK indoctrination prevents a foreign force from influencing the North Korean population, thus limiting the ability for a SOF element to directly support a social revolution. Instead, a SOF element's most realistic approach would be to conduct UW through an indigenous population that has defected or fled as refugees. A SOF element's main effort would be IO through all phases and beyond, of the UW operation to identify potential resistance elements, influence them to organize, motivate them to act, and retain the new government.

The critical point of failure of a SOF element supporting a North Korean social revolution is time. If the phases are rushed and hastily developed, then the population may not be receptive to an IO message and any support network would be unreliable. If the process takes too long, then the resistance element may lose confidence and patience, risking the dissolving of the organization. Furthermore, the longer the operation lasts before the employment phase, the greater the risk of compromise of the organization.

Conditions in the DPRK are ripe for a social revolution, and with the assistance of a SOF

element through limited-war UW, they would have an excellent chance of successfully removing the DPRK regime. Due to the non-permissive environment of the DPRK and the infused indoctrination of the North Koreans, the UW operation would most likely require at least a decade to complete. This estimation of time considers the preparation of the environment beginning with identifying a resistance element, to the transition ending with the installation of the new government.

The removal of the DPRK regime would be beneficial not only to North Koreans, but to the international community. The DPRK holds “one of the world’s worst human rights records,” and the development of nuclear missiles in the hands of an erratic and unpredictable regime poses a threat to the surrounding regions within reach of DPRK ballistic missile technology.¹²⁷ Major states threatened by the DPRK, such as the ROK and Japan, play a major role in the global economy. If attacked, the effects would ripple across the globe. As long as the DPRK regime retains power, it remains a direct threat to Northeast Asia, and an indirect threat to the rest of the world.

¹²⁷ Ford and Kwon, *North Korea on the Brink*, 107.

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