

Time Magazine on US Diplomacy — and History

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Global Research, June 21, 2018

[New Eastern Outlook](#) 20 June 2018

Region: [Asia](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Time magazine, founded almost a hundred years ago (in 1923), runs like a well-oiled machine: there are departments and sub-departments for everything; nothing is left to chance. So when, in its latest issue, it publishes a two-page spread of the US's recent history with Korea, readers should be able to take it to the bank.

What jumps out from the timeline — and the US press in general — is that when it comes to US diplomacy, and hence US history, there is never but one actor, America's 'enemy' of the moment. Whether stealthy Indians, Kamikaze pilots or ISIS terrorists belted into explosives, the US has consistently peered down from its impregnable city upon a hill, upon one 'enemy' after another, invariably concluding it must go to war.

According to Time's latest illustration of this lopsided worldview, from 1953, when the Korean Armistice was signed, (failing, as its name states, to end the state of war between north and south), to the meeting between its current leader and the US president, the North appears to have been the only actor in the Korean drama, making one threatening gesture after another. The US is nowhere to be found.

According to this 'document', having tested nuclear missiles in 1984, in 1986 North Korea joined the Non-Nuclear Proliferation Treaty.

"In 1992, North and South signed a joint declaration of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. In 1994, the US and North Korea sign the Agreed Framework Deal to replace North Korea's nuclear power plants in exchange for better trade relations. In 1996 floods triggered a massive famine in which hundreds of thousands died."

What was the US doing as these things were happening? What actions did it or did it not take vis a vis North Korea, according to the framework? Specifically, what about the promise of 'improved trade relations'? The time-line shows that the richest (at the time) and most powerful nation in the world did NOTHING to fulfill its obligations toward one of the poorest countries in the world, all through the nineties and into the new century, causing the 'North Korean dictator' to double down on nuclear methods of persuasion.

During that entire period, whenever the press turned its attention to North Korea it reported that the people were starving, thousands were in concentration camps. And yet, according to Time's unchallengeable records, the US did nothing. ("Let them eat cake...") Nor, as I recall, did pundits offer an explanation for Washington's failure to 'live up to its signature'. That explanation is laid out [here](#), justifying in turn why Kim failed to uphold his end of the bargain. (The help given by China was not part of the bi-lateral agreement between Korea and the US...)

Let's repeat what the time-line published by the US weekly of record says: In 1994, the US and North Korea signed the Agreed Framework Deal to replace the North's nuclear power plants in exchange for better trade relations. In 1996, floods trigger a two-year long famine in which hundreds of thousands die. These are Time magazine's own words, not a handout from Pyongyang.

And as if these facts were meaningless, in two color graphs, Time headlines: "The US Aims to Prevent any Attack", followed by the 2017 progression of Kim's nuclear weapons' reach. Below the fold, under the headline: "North Korea Aims to Improve its Economy", Time admits that

"The US and other world powers cut off trade, with 90% of North Korean exports sanctioned since 2006, and alarming figures on disparities with the South, including [the fact that] 41% of the North's population is undernourished."

Kim, remember, is accused of 'starving his people'. What we know for certain is that he remembered the ancients. It was the Koreans who in the thirteenth century, invented movable type, not the Chinese— Kim Jong Un was educated in Switzerland before becoming the undisputed head of his country, empowered to follow the advice of early Greeks, Romans and Chinese: "If you would have peace, prepare for war."

The media appears unable to recognize that what may ultimately bring an end to a 73 year standoff was not diplomacy, but deadly preparations for war — the ultimate statecraft. While attention is focused on when and how far Kim's denuclearization will go, Trump's breakthrough came only when North Korea achieved the ability to nuke the US. Unlike the Soviet Union — or China — Kim appeared capable of acting if the US failed to unfreeze the Korean situation: a country divided 73 years ago by Mao's China and the US.

Why then, since the signing of a historic first agreement between Trump and Kim, have we heard nothing but doubts and caveats from the press? Most astonishingly, the fourth estate questions the wisdom of the US removing what Trump rightly referred to as a provocation: twice yearly military maneuvers in South Korea, to which were recently added the US Air Force. These exercises do not claim to affect the North's ability to strike the US with a nuclear missile, so what is their point, other than to intimidate? To claim that they 'protect our allies', when what brought the US to the table was a nuclear threat to the home country is pure bunkum. But never mind, the press has to feel that it's doing its job....

The sole reason for Kim's nuclear program was to bring the US to the table to begin to resolve the deadlock that has endured on the Korean Peninsula since 1953. So once he has achieved that aim, it is perfectly logical for him to proceed apace with denuclearization. People don't deliberately do what doesn't make sense for them to do, even though the US press's job — with respect to all other players except its own government — is to systematically express doubt about all foreign players.

What Trump's encounter with Kim actually makes clear is that the US President is determined to put diplomacy on a new footing, emulating the outreach practiced by Putin and Xi. The media unanimously taunts Trump's approval of 'authoritarian leaders', but this is not some attraction to 'strong men', such as might be experienced by an adolescent. It's a conviction that the world needs to be run differently from what has been the case during

the American century. As proof, an overlooked remark the US president made during the G7 Summit in defense of re-admitting Russia:

“I don’t know whether anyone has noticed, but we have a world to run.”

That one sentence says it all: the US President agrees that we need, in Vladimir Putin’s words ‘a multi-polar world’.

President Trump hasn’t read the history books, but he is changing America’s approach to international relations. It may be the only thing a ‘deal-maker’ has to offer, but it is the silver lining in the overall disaster of the Trump presidency: Historically, America has seen all ‘others’ as potential enemies. Twenty-first century international governance will be built on cooperative interpersonal relations, with or without the United States.

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