

Chapter 2

Famine or food scarcity in North Korea?

La pluralité des voix n'est pas une preuve qui vaille.

[The fact that we hear the same thing from many sides does not mean that it is true.]

René Descartes, Discourse on method (1637, second part, p. 139-140)

Situations marked by acute food scarcity are not uncommon. For instance in 1946-1948 the food consumption standard of the UNRRA (United Nations Rehabilitation and Relief Administration) was 1,500 calorie per day and per person in Germany and 1,200 in Austria (New York Times 21 October 1946, p. 14)¹. In some months the consumption fell even to lower levels. For instance, according to the New York Times (22 January 1948, p. 16), in January 1948 it fell to 1,070 per day in North Rhine – Westphalia (which includes the Ruhr). The food situation was also very difficult in the years after the war in occupied Japan. Although these levels of calorie intake are only one half of “normal” levels, the newspaper articles that we mentioned do not say that anybody died due to food scarcity.

Statistically, it is not easy to measure the calorie intake of people because in such situations many parallel circuits of distribution come to life. A more reliable criterion of difficult food situations is the price increase of food. For instance, in 1818 in the German province of Bavaria the price of wheat tripled. In 1847 in most of France the price of wheat doubled. According to an official US source cited in Kim² (2007, p. 216), between September 1945 and September 1946 rice prices in the US occupation zone of Korea were multiplied by 300³. Yet, in none of these cases is there any mention of a famine leading to thousands of deaths.

In other words, it is important to make a clear distinction between situations of food scarcity which are fairly common and cases of large-scale famine leading to massive deaths through starvation. Such cases are very rare. Yet, according to western media, it is such a large-scale famine that North Korea experienced in 1996-1998. This point is documented in more detail in the next section.

Why should one ask the question raised in the title?

In the articles of the New York Times about North Korea it is stated as a fact that in the mid-1990s there was a severe famine in North Korea which cost at least two millions lives. Some illustrative excerpts read as follow:

- “The exodus of North Koreans to Jilin and Liaoning provinces [in Northern China] began in earnest in the waves of the famine that struck North Korea in the mid-1990s killing as many as two

¹As a matter of comparison, at that time the level of food consumption in the United States was 3,000 calorie daily.

²This source is: “United States Armed Forces in Korea” (vol. 3, chapter 6, 5).

³A part of this increase was probably due to a general inflationary process. The official exchange rate did not change much: from 15 won on one US dollar in October 1945 it increased to 50 in July 1947. However, it may well be that the black market rate increased much more than the official rate (that was also the case in Japan).

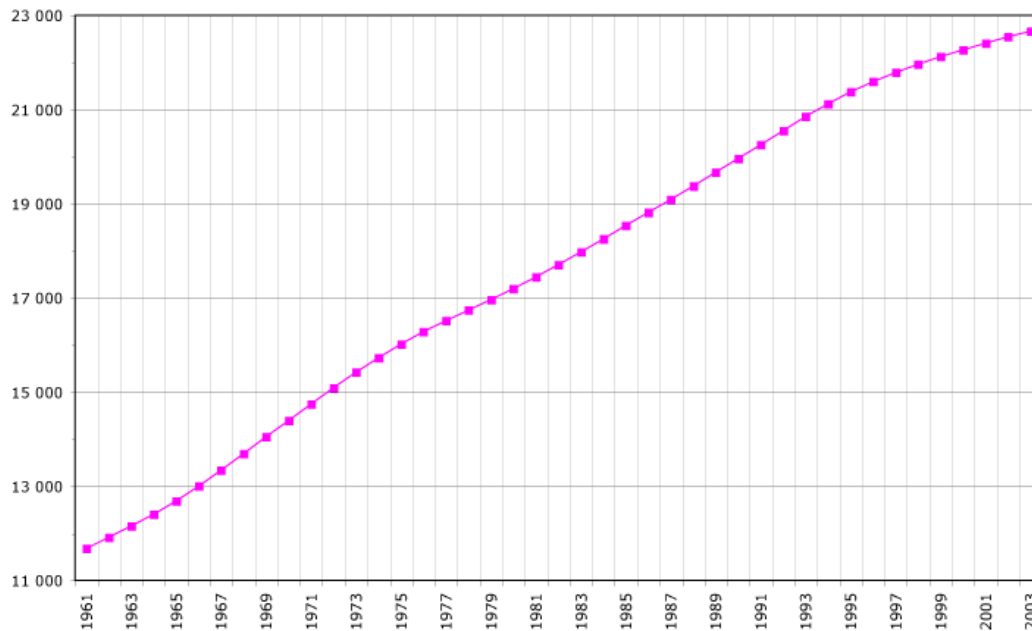


Fig. 1a: Population of North Korea, 1961-2003, (in thousands). The graph shows no annual decrease. If there had been a famine in 1996-1998 with a death toll of 600,000 (which is the lowest estimate suggested in relation to a possible famine) these 3 years would have been marked by a decrease because during the 1990s the annual natural increase was about 160,000; thus, in each of the years 1996 to 1998 the population would have decreased by 40,000. *Source: Wikipedia, article about Korea in French; it is entitled: “Démographie de la Corée du Nord”.*

million people.” (NYT 24 March 2005)

- “After all, this [President Kim Jung Il] is a man who imported Mercedes-Benzes in the late 1990s while two millions of his compatriots were dying in a famine.” (NYT 10 October 2006)
- “The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a famine that is estimated to have killed as many as two million people.” (NYT 16 August 2007)

Why should such statements not be accepted at face value? There are many reasons but the main problem is the following. These articles rely on surveys, on the testimonies of refugees, on statements made by personnel of aid organizations and they all complain that North Korea is a very secretive country about which very little is known. For instance one article says that we know less about North Korea than about the planet Pluto⁴. The problem is that this is simply not true.

North Korea is a member of the United Nations since September 1991. The government of North Korea transmits statistical demographic data to the Statistical Division of the United Nations. These data give the total population (see Fig. 1) as well as the population by sex and age. These data are easily available on the Internet⁵.

It turns out that these data are in contradiction with the claim that two million people died of famine between 1996 and 1998. They are even in contradiction with a lower estimate which is sometimes offered that 600,000 persons died. So, an honest journalist should say: “Yes, we know that the figure of 2 million deaths is in contradiction with official population data but we think that the official data are not reliable” and he (or she) should then give reasons why official data cannot be trusted and at the same time say on which records the estimate of 2 millions relies.

In fact, the articles never ever mention that there are official data and while some (like the third one cited above) say that the figure of 2 millions is an estimate, others simply present it as a fact (as do

⁴The article is entitled “Invisible Korea” (NYT 12 October 1997).

⁵See for instance the Wikipedia article in French about the Demography of North Korea. More detailed data are available on the following statistical website of the United Nations: World Population Prospects, the 2008 revision of the population database.

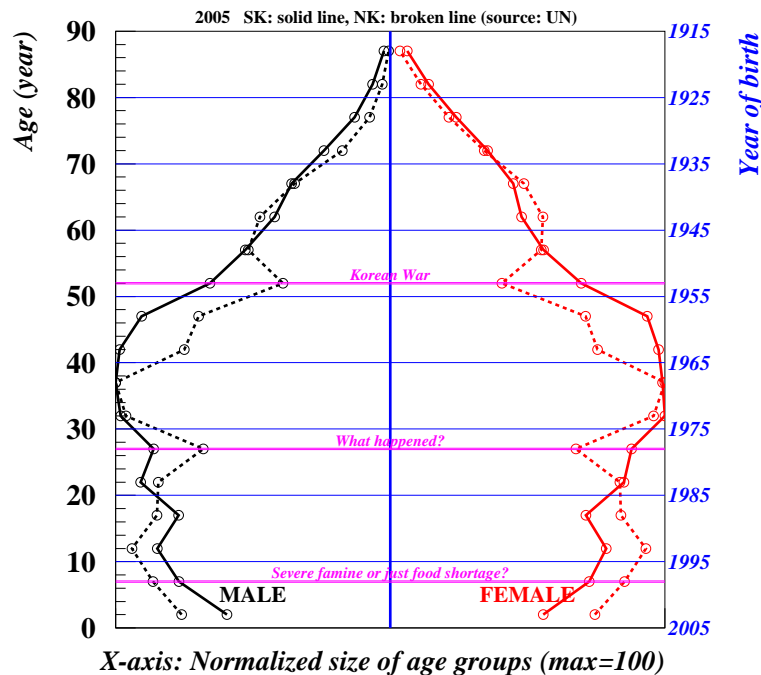


Fig. 1b: Comparison of the population pyramids of South and North Korea. The fact that around 1996-1998 there is no dip in the North Korean birth rate gives little credence to a possible famine in those years. Indeed, one has some reasons to think that food shortages result in reduced birth rates (Roehner 1990). The comparison also raises the question of what caused the dip of 1978 in North Korea? Two factors seem to have played a role: (i) The fact that the reduced age groups of the Korean War reached marriage age (ii) The birth-control program launched by the North Korean government possibly on the example of the one-child policy which was introduced in China around this year. *Source: United Nations: World Population Prospects, 2008 revision.*

the first two articles cited above). Moreover, I have not seen a single article which says on which records the estimate of 2 millions is based. The standard sentence is: “Experts think that the famine cost the lives of 2 million people.” Most often these experts are not named; yet sometimes their names and positions are given and we will see in a short moment who they are. Actually, some (but very few) articles mention that there is a broad range of opinions among experts with estimates going from 600,000 to 4 million (see Cumings 2005).

Foreign trade of North Korea

Another feature of the previous articles should raise our suspicion. They talk abundantly about food aid to North Korea but never about food imports⁶.

It is a fact that like Switzerland or Norway, North Korea has many mountains (see Fig. 2) and is therefore not self-sufficient for food. Countries which are in this situation import the wheat, rice and other food products that they cannot produce themselves. But the articles of the New York Times about North Korea make us believe that North Korea is so closed that it has no foreign trade partners.

⁶The aids which are mentioned are coming from the United Nations through the World Food Program, from the United States and South Korea (at least when the relations of these two countries with North Korea are not too bad) and also from Japan. See for instance the article entitled “US details food aid plan for North Korea” (NYT 23 March 1999).

Again, this is simply not true.

As a matter of fact, North Korea has many trading partners among which its closest neighbors China, Japan and Russia are the most important⁷. To prove this point we are on firm ground because trade between two countries is recorded by both of them. As a result, if we do not trust the North Korean statistics we can rely on the Chinese, Japanese or Russian statistics. According to the “UN COM-TRADE” website of the United Nations, in 1998 the exports of North Korea to China, Japan and Russia were (in millions of US dollars): 57, 220 and 8.4. Altogether, in 1997 North Korean exports totalled \$950 million⁸.

Regarding our investigation, the important question is the following: are North Korean exports sufficient to cover the imports of cereals whenever they are needed. According to a figure given on the website of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) the annual domestic consumption of cereals is of the order of 5 million tons. In most years a part of this amount needs to be imported. Thus, in 2004 despite a harvest which was the best in 10 years some 25% of this amount had to be imported (FAO website). To take an extreme case let us assume that the harvest failed completely and that the total amount needs to be imported. What would be the cost? Even though the imports may consist in different cereals (wheat, rice, barley) for the sake of simplicity let us assume that it consists only of wheat. What was the price of wheat in the 1990s? It fluctuated between \$100/ton and \$170/ton. We will take \$135/ton as an average price. The cost of importing 5 million tons would be $5 \times 135 = 675$ million dollars. Thus, even in this extreme case, the exports would cover the required imports and leave a surplus for importing other goods (such as oil) which are almost as essential as cereals.

Before we leave this topic it should be mentioned that between 1995 and 2010 there has been a rapid change in the foreign trade of North Korea in the sense that China replaced Japan as the principal trading partner. In 1996, North Korea exports to Japan represented \$290 million against only \$68 million for the exports to China. In the following years the exports to China increased whereas the exports to Japan stagnated or decreased. By 2006 the situation was completely reversed with exports of \$1,230 million to China and only \$77 million to Japan. In 2007-2009 the exports to China continued to grow but unfortunately the data for Japan are not available on the UN COMTRADE website.

How did the famine thesis emerge?

In the previous section we emphasized the role of the media and in particular of the New York Times in spreading the notion of a severe famine in North Korea. We also pointed out the role of the “experts” who backed this thesis and provided estimates. In this section we will consider these two aspects more closely.

The role of the New York Times

Why do we devote so much attention to the role of the New York Times? It is because as far as foreign relations are concerned, this journal can to a large extent be considered as a mouthpiece of the Department of State. This statement can be illustrated by many cases. For instance, as soon as a foreign leader falls out of favor with the State Department some unflattering qualifications begin to appear in the New York Times articles. If he is energetic he is called a strongman or a mercurial leader, if he is not he is termed weak and wavering.

⁷Although there are no diplomatic relations between the United States and North Korea this situation is rather exceptional. North Korea has diplomatic relations with a large number of countries. For instance, it has diplomatic relations with all the countries of the European Union with the exception of France and Estonia.

⁸According to the French website “Marché export, Corée du Nord” at the following address: <http://asiexp.free.fr/coree/cornord.html>

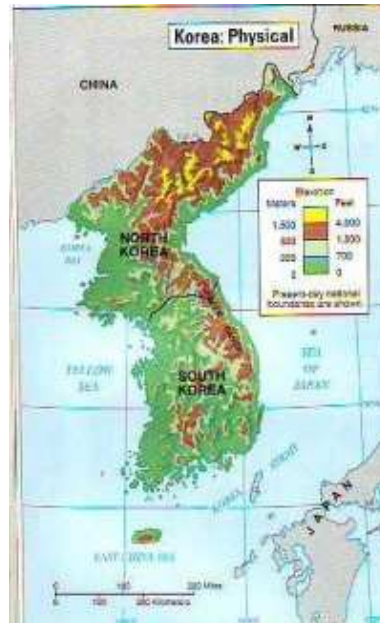


Fig. 2 Physical map of Korea. There is a marked contrast between North and South Korea in terms of farmland surfaces. The North has several mountain ranges and only few plains. *Source:* http://wiki.theplaz.com/World_Cultures_Portfolio/Korea

As an illustration the reader can (thanks to the Internet) have a look at the articles written immediately before and after the military coup against Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez on 11 April 2002. As shown by the following excerpts the comments of the New York Times and of the State Department after the overthrow of a democratically elected president were remarkably parallel (NYT 13 April 2002) “With yesterday’s resignation of President Hugo Chávez [in fact he did *not* resign] Venezuelan democracy is no longer threatened by a would-be dictator. American officials praised the Venezuelan military and the police for defying Mr. Chávez, as well as television stations and other media outlets that continued to function despite government orders to shut down. ‘We wish to express our solidarity with the Venezuelan people and look forward to working with all democratic forces in Venezuela to ensure the full exercise of democratic rights,’ said Philip T. Reeker, a State Department spokesman”. Thus, if one follows the argument of the New York Times, the best way to preserve democracy is to let the military remove an elected president.

So, by tracking changes in the tone and content of the New York Times articles, one may be able to follow the shifts and turns that take place in the State Department.

First of all, it may be of interest to look at the number of articles which contain the expressions “North Korea” and “famine”.

Table 1 Number of New York Times articles with the expressions “North Korea” + “famine”

1993	94	95	96	97	98	99	2000	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	2010
0	0	5	29	63	26	46	21	11	29	29	10	10	13	4	8	9	18

Source: New York Times (online index)

The first phase started in 1996

By the number of articles it may seem that it was 1997 which was the defining year. Yet, in 1997 the famine was considered a possibility but not as a complete certainty. The transition from one phase to the other came in 1999 with an article entitled: “Korean famine toll: more than 2 million” (NYT 20 August 1999) which will be analyzed more closely in a short moment.

Why did we say that in 1997 the matter was still in debate? It is because at that time there were still a few articles which suggested that there was in fact no famine at all. Here are some excerpts of such an article (NYT 12 October 1997).

- While the public perception of North Korea is still of starving children in orphanages that is not the impression that many visitors are coming away with. All the commotion about famine may have in fact helped avert one.
- “People are looking much better than we expected” said Namanga Ngongi, the deputy executive director of the World Food Program, after a visit to North Korea.
- At one extreme, there are reports that the famine is so severe that people are dying in huge numbers or turning to cannibalism⁹. One informal survey of refugees suggested that in some North Korean towns 15% of the people may already have died, and an aid agency extrapolated last month that 500,000 may have died of starvation and related illnesses.
- Ethnic Koreans are often the best able to talk to ordinary North Koreans and assess conditions among their relatives. Many say the situation is grim but still far better than the hunger they remember in both Koreas during the 1950’s.
- A recent survey of 4,000 North Korean children by the World Food Program, not a representative sample, found 17% suffering from serious malnutrition. By comparison, World Bank figures suggest that in India in the early 1990’s, 43% of children were malnourished; some visitors say countries like India are chronically in worse shape than North Korea is now.

The second phase began in mid-1999

At this point the “heavy-weight” experts had not yet delivered their final verdict. This came in mid-1999. One of these articles (NYT 20 August 1999) was already mentioned. The experts’ assessment took fairly staggering forms as shown by the following excerpts.

- “Two years ago we saw no food in the country *at all*, I remember distinctly not ever hearing a bird sing, or seeing a bird” said Catherine Bertini, executive director of the United Nations World Food Program.
- “We now know that more than 10% of the population starved to death” said Andrew Natsios, a former vice president of the relief agency World Vision.

The famine is no longer a possibility, it has become a certainty. Moreover, such articles are obviously written with a public relations objective. PR professionals know that in fact numbers are of little importance. Whether the death toll is 600,000 or 2 millions, who cares except a few scientists ¹⁰? What matters is to impress in the minds of the public a few suggestive images: a country without any food, without birds, where parents are selling their children and where families resort to cannibalism. Such images will serve this purpose even though they are absurd and unbelievable.

A last question should be asked: Who are these two experts, namely Ms. Bertini and Mr. Natsios? Both are American public servants who have been (or are still) working for the USAID (United States Agency for International Development). According to the Wikipedia entry for the USAID, this organization reports to the Secretary of State. Andrew Natsios, USAID’s former head, stated unequivocally in a widely distributed 2003 speech that even foreign USAID-funded contractors are

⁹The New York Times itself contributed to spread this story as shown by the following sentence (NYT 20 April 1997): “As famine spreads, a misery of almost unspeakable dimensions is becoming evident from the horror stories of starving babies reduced to skin and bone, of women selling their daughters, of families even resorting to cannibalism to survive.”

¹⁰The fact that at this point numbers did no longer matter is illustrated by the following excerpt of the same article: “In 1995, North Korea was driven to ask for international help. By then it was too late for many of its 24 million citizens”. Well, in 1995 North Korea had a population of only 18 millions according to both official figures and those given in the CIA World Factbook.

an arm of the US government. Moreover, through the publication of the so-called CIA Family Jewels document it was learnt that the USAID and the CIA have had joint training programs in the 1970s¹¹. Characteristically, the New York Times article does not give the affiliation of the two persons; it does not even say that they are American.

Definition and characteristics of the consolidation phase after 1999

We have seen two phases so far. A first phase (1997-1998) during which horrific stories were already circulated but with an interrogation point still remaining. “This country is so secretive, isn’t it¹²?” Then came a second phase (1999) marked by definitive statements in particular as to the number of deaths. In the third phase that we will call the consolidation phase this message was repeated over and over again. Basically, each and every paper about North Korea carried this message even when the topic of the article was completely different. For instance, an article entitled “North Korea is said to apologize for currency changes” (NYT 12 February 2010) mentions that “the collapse of the Soviet bloc led to a famine that killed many North Koreans in the mid-1990s”¹³. This is the standard version. The fact that it provides at the same time a plausible explanation makes it more convincing and easy to remember even though the famine is supposed to have begun only in 1996, that is to say 6 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Moreover, even if, as said above, numbers are in fact of little importance the message about the death toll needed to be repeated in similar form in order to be accepted as *the* truth.

In order to show how well this campaign worked a personal recollection may be useful.

How experts accepted trumped-up statements

Anecdote

I had been in contact with Prof. Bruce Cumings in 2008 in relation with my study the post-World War II occupation of Japan. These contacts convinced me that he was a researcher who was fairly honest in trying to find out the truth. Cumings is a recognized expert of post World War II Korea, somehow in the same way as John Dower for Japan. So, when in September 2010 I discovered that one of his papers was cited in the reference section of the Wikipedia article about the North Korean famine I read it with great interest.

This paper is in fact a book review that was published in December 2005 in the “London Review of Books”. The first pages of this 5-page review were indeed in line with the opinion I had formed. Opinions and judgments were supported by facts and evidence. However, as soon as Cumings turns to the question of the famine the tone and content changes dramatically. The tone becomes completely emotional and the content no longer mentions any evidence. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

“A friend of mine [i.e. Cumings] who worked for the Mercy Foundation used to patrol the border with \$100 bills, hoping to buy back young Korean women from the hundreds,

¹¹Illustration of the fact that this link still exists is provided by the following episode cited in the Wikipedia article about the USAID. In December 2009, Alan Gross, a contractor for USAID, was arrested in Cuba. He (as well as US government officials) claimed that he was helping to deliver Internet access to the Jewish community. However the head of the Jewish community in Cuba denied any knowledge of Gross. He was later charged with providing satellite communications equipment to Cuban dissidents.

¹²It is true that the wooden language and conventional phraseology used in their public declarations and official newspapers by the leaders of the DPRK much contribute to maintain the image of an opaque polity.

¹³Here is another example: “Mr. Kim has outlived previous predictions of the collapse of his government even after an estimated two million North Koreans died of famine in the mid-1990s.” (NYT 3 April 2010, the article is entitled: “North Korea is said to be seeking China aid”).

more likely thousands, of Chinese men who had done the same. Entire families swallowed poison. Becker [the author of one of the two books which is reviewed in the paper] believes that Kim Jong Il has the blood of 4 million people on his hands, but experts who have studied the famine closely believe that the figure is closer to 600,000. Becker's is the highest estimate I have encountered; perhaps history will prove him to be right."

Does the fact that girls turn to prostitution mean that there was a famine in the country? There have been many cases of this kind even in countries where there was no famine. In 1945-1947 many Japanese girls "sold themselves" to GIs who sustained them (along possibly with part of their families). There was indeed a shortage of food and jobs in Japan at that time but we have never heard that there was a famine which killed thousands.

After reading this review I wrote to Bruce Cumings to ask him on which evidence was based the estimate of 600,000 deaths that he seemed to favor. I got the following replies.

"This is my wife's estimate. She is working on a book on the NK famine, but it isn't going to be finished for a while. So I don't have better info for you." (email of 22 September 2010). "Meanwhile the media uses 2 million all the time, as if they know what they are talking about." (email of 23 September 2010)

In other words, here is a well-known expert who for over 12 years (from 1998 to now) has not been able to form a personal opinion as to the sources and evidence on which was based the figure of 2 millions that "the media use all the time", but who nevertheless supports the famine story both by repeating the estimate of "experts" and by adding his own personal testimony as a further proof.

What is the evidence for the 2 million estimate?

Can we try to fill the gap that Cumings' non-answer left open? The excerpts cited above provide some elements on which the 2 million deaths statement seems to rely.

- The main objective element was the immigration of North Korean people to China.
- Interviews of some of these emigrants provided survey estimates.
- Statement made by officials of relief organization confirmed the estimates made by the immigrants

It is not difficult to show the fragility of such arguments.

(i) In the 2000s, hundreds of thousands people from Poland and from the Baltic states left their country to work in Germany, the United Kingdom, Ireland or Iceland. Does this prove that there was a severe famine in Poland or the Baltic states? In fact, they were simply looking for better salaries.

(ii) Let us for a moment assume that the people who were interviewed were honestly reporting what they have seen. An emigrant may be able to provide an estimate for the village or town that he left but certainly not for the whole country. I have not seen any serious attempt to put together various local testimonies to cover a vast area.

(iii) The "experts" do not say on what evidence they base their claim. Moreover, we have seen that for at least two of them their affiliation with the USAID should make us take their claims with some caution.

Do well-informed sources mention a famine?

If, as suggested in the previous section, we cannot really trust the American media on this question, are there other sources that we can use. It would be useless to turn to European media because on such a matter they have little proper means of information and rely heavily on the news given by US news agencies. On the contrary, China has a long borderline with North Korea and after being its close ally during the Korean War has maintained solid ties with this country.

China Daily

So we turn to the online search engine of “China Daily” which is a semi-official daily newspaper published in Beijing. The search engine covers only the period 2000-2010 but this is enough for, as we have seen, over this time interval New York Times has 162 articles containing the words “North Korea” and “famine”.

If we use only “North Korea” as keyword we get 6,744 articles. If we add “famine” we get only 4 articles, and in fact none of them really refers to a famine in North Korea. For instance, one of these articles is entitled “Hot heads prevail as temperature plummets” (30 July 2007). In this article the two words occur together rather fortuitously.

Of course, it may be said that as the Chinese medias are mostly state controlled this test is not really convincing. As a second test we will look into the internal reports of the US State Department.

What do the internal files of the US Department of State say?

The “State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research” (INR) is in charge of providing background analysis to US decision makers. The INR is one of the 16 branches of the United States Intelligence Community. Information about its budget and number of employees is classified. Of course, to be useful the analyzes of the INR must reflect the *real* situation as closely as possible. If there has been a public relation campaign for the purpose of promoting the notion of a severe famine in North Korea, the INR does not wish to be fooled by it but will try to keep its assessments as realistic as possible.

Some of the archives of the INR reports have been made available as a part of the “National Security Archives” of George Washington University. What do these reports say? Below we list reports relevant to the food situation in North Korea that were published in the years 1996-1999 during which the famine was supposed to take place.

1 [April 4, 1996](#) *DPRK: Grappling with food shortage*

State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research Intelligence Assessment, Document 4 [FOIA Release]

2 [May 11, 1996](#) *DPRK: Famine nears*

State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research Intelligence Assessment, Document 7 [FOIA Release]

3 [ca. December 1, 1996](#) *North Korea: food shortage and political stability*

State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Document 10 [FOIA Release].

4 [March 3, 1998](#) In his inaugural speech president Kim Dae Jung pledged that “South Korea would not be stingy in extending food aid to North Korea from the government and private organizations.”

State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research Intelligence Brief, Document 15.

5 [July 6, 1998](#) *DPRK: Food supply precarious*

State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research Intelligence Brief, Document 16 [FOIA Release]. An excerpt reads as follows. This brief note comments on observations of recent Western visitors to North Korea that the people seem “reasonably well-fed” and in overall better physical shape than last year, according to reports from the US Embassy in Seoul. Despite these reports, international organizations continued to forecast a persistent and deepening food crisis.

In short, there are several reports about food scarcity or about a threatening famine but we did not find a single account of a famine actually taking place.

It is true that these archives certainly do not include *all* the reports of the INR¹⁴. However, there would

¹⁴Even in the published reports some sentences are “whitened” because the information is considered sensible.

be no reason to keep out reports about the famine since this was precisely the official version.

What does the CIA World Factbook say?

The CIA World Factbook is not an internal document. It is available on the Internet. Surprisingly however, as shown by the following excerpt, it gives basically the same version as the reports of the INR, namely that there was a food shortage but no real famine.

“Large-scale international food aid deliveries have allowed the people of North Korea to escape widespread starvation since famine threatened in 1995, but the population continues to suffer from prolonged malnutrition and poor living conditions.”

In the next section we will see that the population data given by this Factbook are fairly consistent with official North Korean statistics.

What does the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) say?

We did not find mention of a famine in North Korea in the archives of the FAO. There are mentions of food scarcity and international aid through the World Food Program, but of course, many countries benefit from such programs even though they do not face a severe famine.

In a report of 23 November 2004 it is mentioned that the World Food Program has provided the DPRK with almost 4 million tons of food assistance, valued at \$1.3 billion, since 1995.

As was mentioned earlier the annual cereal consumption of North Korea is about 5 million tons. In other words, the World Food Program has provided on average 10% of the consumption. This figure is consistent with the picture of a country which needs to import part of the food that it consumes.

As a matter of fact, would it not have been a shame and a tragic failure if the UN, the FAO and the WFP had left millions of people die from starvation while these organizations were actively engaged in providing relief and had personnel in the country to manage this aid? After the Second World War, the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) was created precisely to avert such disasters in the countries which were just emerging from the war¹⁵. As far as we know, the UNRRA was indeed able to prevent major famines. Is it conceivable that 60 years later in a world in which agricultural production has greatly expanded, the FAO would be unable to prevent a disaster?

Are the North Korean population statistics reliable?

The CIA World Factbook provides basic statistics for all countries. It does not give the sources of the data but it is logical to think that the Agency tried to rely on reliable sources. So, the question which comes naturally to mind is whether or not the data about North Korea differ from those that the North Korean Government has transmitted to the United Nations.

These differences are summarized in Table 2.

The magnitude of the differences in Table 2 is *not* compatible with a famine toll of 2 millions. Of course, these differences are compatible with a death toll of 600,000 which represents only 2.6% of the population but the fact that the differences for males are about twice as large as those for females suggests that they are related to some other factors than a famine, may be a different way of counting the military.

Other cases of inflated death estimates

¹⁵In spite of its name, the UNRRA was in fact an American initiative. It was proposed to the US Congress by President Roosevelt on 9 June 1943 to provide relief to liberated areas.

Table 2 Comparison of North Korean population statistics and CIA World Factbook data (2010)

	Male Total	Male 0 – 14	Male 15 – 65	Male 65+	Female Total	Female 0 – 14	Female 15 – 65	Female 65+
CIA	11,036	2,440	7,776	820	11,626	2,376	7,945	1,305
UN	11,849	2,600	8,368	881	12,128	2,475	8,191	1,462
(UN – CIA)/UN	6.8%	6.1%	7.0%	6.9%	4.1%	4.0%	3.0%	10.7%

Notes: The data are expressed in thousands. A famine toll of 2 million would result in a difference of about 10%. Instead, the difference is about two times smaller. Moreover, the fact that the differences are notably larger for men than for women suggests that they are not due to a famine toll but to some other factors.

Sources: CIA World Factbook, UN: World Population Prospects

In the natural sciences like physics and chemistry there is a basic principle which is to never draw a conclusion from a single case. For instance, in the study of the free fall of an object under the influence of gravity one does not study the fall of just *one* object. One studies (and wants to explain) the fall of all objects whatever their size, density or shape and whatever the fluid in which they fall. It is only when this objective is achieved that one is able to claim a real understanding of the phenomenon.

Should we not do the same here?

In other words, if the reports about hardship and fatalities have been inflated (willingly or not) in the case of North Korea is it not natural to think that there have been similar episodes elsewhere? If we can find a collection of such cases we will be in a much better position for understanding the phenomenon. Naturally, this is a fairly ambitious objective because it requires to study cases in different times and places. In this section our objective will be more modest. We will describe a few cases for which there is fairly good proof of doctored fatality data. A more thorough investigation will be conducted in the near future.

How many Kosovars were killed by Serbian forces in 1999?

Let us first briefly recall some background information.

Background information

The region of Kosovo has been part of Serbia for a long time but in spite of enjoying a large degree of autonomy as indeed the other regions of the Yugoslavia Federation there has been an enduring agitation for independence¹⁶. Naturally, the accession to independence of many countries formerly part of the USSR, the subsequent disintegration of Yugoslavia and the nationalistic reaction in Serbia gave a new impetus to separatism tendencies. In 1998-1999 the conflict between the pro-independence guerrilla (the Kosovo Liberation Army or KLA) and Serbian forces became more acute¹⁷. As in all civil wars¹⁸ there was a spiral of violence and retaliations.

When NATO aircraft began to bomb Kosovo and other parts of Serbia (24 March 1999) there had been only a limited flight of Kosovars to nearby countries, namely Albania and Macedonia. On March 19 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that 28,000 Kosovo Albanians had

¹⁶More details can be found in Roehner (2002).

¹⁷The last Report on Kosovo before the beginning of the bombing campaign was released by the UN Secretary-General on 17 March 1999. It shows that with respect to killings and kidnappings the responsibility was shared by the two sides.

¹⁸As well-known examples of gruesome civil wars one can mention the American Civil War, the Spanish civil war, the conflict between Croats and Serbs during World War II.



Fig. 3: Map of Serbia, Vojvodina, Montenegro and Kosovo.

already crossed the border to these countries. (NYT 11 May 1999). In later weeks the flow of refugees became much larger reaching close to a million. As during these weeks the bombing campaign was in full swing with thousands of raids taking place during night and day it is difficult to say if they fled the bombs or the threat of Serb forces¹⁹

Similarly and fairly uncontroversially, the vast majority of the war crimes²⁰ which eventually came to light took place after the bombing began. In other words, they were hardly the reason of the intervention but rather its consequence.

What was eventually the death toll of this conflict? Estimates made with the benefit of hindsight in 2002-2003 suggest that there were fatality numbers of similar magnitude for the three following kinds

¹⁹Some of the refugees made clear reference to the bombing campaign as the reason of their departure. Here is one testimony: "Her sons [the sons of a refugee] were terrified by the thunderous concussions of NATO bombs" (NYT 20 April 1999). Of course, this is not an aspect to which much attention was given in the interviews of the refugees that took place in Albania or Macedonia.

²⁰The Racak massacre of 45 people on 15 January 1999 is an isolated exception.

of victims: (i) Kosovars killed by Serb forces (ii) Serbs living in Kosovo who were killed by Albanian Kosovars (especially in the months following the bombing campaign) (iii) Serbs and Kosovars killed by NATO bombs. Each one of this number is estimated to be around 1,500 (with estimates ranging from 1,000 to 2,000). By adding together the victims of the war crimes attributed to the Serbs (see for instance the list given on Wikipedia in the article on the Kosovo war) one gets a total of 594. The order of magnitude of this number is consistent with the body count that we cite below.

Naturally, as in all wars, it was essential to win the broadest support of public opinion especially in the countries which took part in the NATO offensive, that is to say the United States and western European countries. The NATO offensive has been started to prevent ethnic cleansing by Serb forces, so any proof (or allegation) of massacres of Kosovars was a step in the right direction from the point of view of NATO commanders and officials at the US Department of State.

Newspaper excerpts

As we have already done for North Korea we will again rely on excerpts of the New York Times. In selecting these excerpts our main goal is to show that the dynamics of this episode was basically the same as in the case of North Korea. First, there was a phase during which a broad range of death estimates was circulated along with horrific stories but still with an interrogation mark. In the second phase, an estimate of 10,000 deaths was selected as the most reliable. In subsequent years and numerous articles it was presented as *the* truth. This last phase was previously referred to as the consolidation phase.

Phase 1: April-June 1999

- NYT 19 April 1999. In San Francisco on Thursday [15 April] President Clinton said that the Serbs had displaced “over a million Kosovars” and had killed and raped²¹ “thousands upon thousands of them”

- NYT 19 April 1999. The State Department said that more than 400 cities, towns and villages in Kosovo had been destroyed by Serbian forces and it released a list of more than 100 places in Kosovo where “war crimes or violations of international humanitarian law” had been reported.

These numbers, especially the first one, are supposedly based on aerial photographs.

- NYT 1 May 1999. Near Orahovac, as many as 700 Albanian men were used as human shields last week. The men were forced to stand in front of tanks in the rain for two days with their hands tied behind their heads. A few eventually escaped by paying the soldiers 10,000 German marks, about \$5,400.

A story which although not very plausible (it seems physically impossible to stand with hands behind the head for so long) sounds true because of the details which make it real.

- NYT 11 May 1999. A report of the State Department said that refugee accounts suggested that Serbian forces had executed more than 4,000 Kosovars.

[However the article adds: there was no suggestion that American intelligence agencies had been able to verify most, or even many, of the accounts by the refugees of war crimes.

The doubts which are expressed show that one is still in the initial phase, not yet in the consolidation phase. But the later would begin soon after President Milosevic was charged with war crimes on 27 May 1999.

Turning point in late June 1999: the figure of 10,000 deaths becomes “the” truth

- NYT 18 July 1999. At least 10,000 people were slaughtered by Serbian forces during their three-month campaign to drive the Albanians from Kosovo, according to war crimes investigators, NATO peacekeeping troops and aid agencies struggling to keep up with fresh reports each day of

²¹In such conflicts the allegation about rapes can hardly ever be verified because only a small percentage of the victims complain openly and, in contrast to killings, there is no possibility of body counts.

newly discovered bodies and graves. Mr. Williamson, the tribunal official, said the numbers had grown to 280 grave sites with more than 6,100 reported bodies.

The number of 10,000 will become the accepted truth for American officials in spite of the fact that actual evidence did never reveal more than 2,000 deaths. In particular the number of 6,100 bodies is a highly inflated estimate in so far as one year later, in October 2000, only 2,788 bodies had been exhumed in Kosovo. Up to July 1999 2,150 bodies had been discovered of which 850 (40%) were thought to be victims of war crimes (Agence France Presse 3 August 1999: "Top UN official in Kosovo sparks storm over mass grave body count").

- NYT 10 December 1999. The State Department estimated today that 10,000 Kosovar Albanians were killed this year in the Serbian campaign to force out the Albanian population. The estimate of deaths is broadly in line with those provided by newspaper accounts and in recent months by human rights groups and the United Nations, as well as by NATO.

The suggestion which is made here is that such a convergence makes the estimate reliable. This is not true however because the only reliable data are the body counts and these are much lower.

Investigators of war crimes have exhumed 2,100 bodies. Investigators said they believed that they would uncover thousands of additional bodies next year.

In fact the campaign of 2000 led to the discovery of only 638 bodies. As the count was not in agreement with the 10,000 it was suggested that the Serbs had been able to destroy some evidence. Indeed, in 2001 there were some discoveries in Serbia. These numbers were in the hundreds, however, not in the amount of several thousands as would have been required to reach the "target" of 10,000.

- NYT 6 August 2000. Despite revisionist claims to the contrary, original NATO estimates that more than 10,000 Kosovar Albanians were killed in Kosovo by Serb police and paramilitaries between March and May 1999 will be proved right. [*When and by whom?*]

Consolidation phase, mid-1999 to now: 10,000 deaths is the truth After July 1999 the 10,000 deaths attributed to the Serbs remained the truth until now in spite of the fact that the number of bodies exhumed and attributed to Serb killings never exceeded 1,500. Of course, as will be seen in the following excerpts, the 10,000 estimate is never attributed to the US State Department but always to independent, non-American organizations most often the UN.

An investigation using the search engine of the New York Times shows that between 1 January 2002 and 31 December 2009 the two key-words "Kosovo" and "10,000" appear together in 72 articles (that is about once every month). In fact, almost every time that Kosovo and Serbia were mentioned in the same article this figure was cited, even when the main subject of the article was fairly different. Just like the 2 million deaths in North Korea, the 10,000 deaths in Kosovo became "the" truth being repeated over and over again.

Here are a three examples:

- NYT 15 February 2005 *Title: Serbian President visits Kosovo.* Troops sent by the central government in Belgrade to quell an insurgency by ethnic Albanian rebels were forced by NATO-led troops to leave, after being accused of widespread atrocities against Albanian civilians. **The United Nations estimates that up to 10,000 Kosovo Albanians were killed.**

- NYT 6 September 2007 *Title: Serbia says use of force is an option in Kosovo.* **United Nations officials estimate that up to 10,000 ethnic Albanians lost their lives in the conflict.**

- NYT 4 August 2009 *Title: Serbs' claim of Kosovo organ ring is investigated.* . . . a conflict over control of Kosovo in which **10,000 people were killed, most of them ethnic Albanians.**

Whereas, in the first two articles the figure is still presented as an estimate, in the third article it is presented as a fact.

NATO bombings.



Fig. 4: Map showing the locations of NATO bombings which caused the death of civilians. It can be noted that most of these bombings occurred in Kosovo. This is a German map. “Luftangriffe” means “bomber attacks”. *Source: Frankfurter Rundschau Online, 28 February 2005*

During April and May 1999 the bombings of civilians was occasionally mentioned but always from the point of view (and with the comments) of NATO officials. It is not that the other version was not available. Of course, Serb news could be read, listened and watched, but exactly as with the North Korean statistical data this source was mostly ignored.

Here is an excerpt about one of these “incidents”.

NYT 31 May 1999. About noon today in Varvarin, four allied fighter jets [F-16s aircraft according to other reports] attacked the bridge, dropping precision-guided bombs in two passes in a six-minute raid, the NATO official said. The pilots did not see any civilians when they executed this strike.

A journalist of the “Irish Times” was not far away. He wrote that the area around the bridge was filled with hundreds of people celebrating an Orthodox holiday in and around the nearby church, a market place and a fairground. The photographs that he took can be seen on the Internet. Apart from the 10 civilian who died, they show that this was a very narrow bridge of limited usefulness (200km away from Kosovo). They also show that other houses nearby were damaged as well.

A “truth” building machinery

In the case of North Korea the “truth” favored by the State Department was that in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union there was a great famine in North Korea which cost 2 million lives. As shown earlier, apart from more specific arguments, this version should have raised suspicion for the simple reason that the alleged famine occurred around 1998 that is to say 8 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990.

In the case of Kosovo the “truth” favored by the State Department was that the NATO strike prevented the Serbs from carrying out a campaign of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. This version ignored the fact that the flight of the Kosovars really began only after the bombing campaign started. Before 24 March

1999 the conflict in Kosovo was between the guerrilla troops of the KLA and Serbian forces²².

After an initial phase that lasted some 3 months (from April to the end of June) during which various data were circulated, the figure of 10,000 Kosovars killed by the Serbs became the official version. It would then be repeated at the average rate of once every week.

So far, we have described the accounts of the New York Times. It would be a fairly tedious task to show that the stories about Kosovo in the other US media were fairly similar. Just to show that such an assumption is not unreasonable we give below two excerpts. It will be seen that the sentences are very much the same as in the New York Times.

- In the “Seattle Times” of 5 July 2010 one reads: “Some 10,000 Albanians were killed and close to a million forced out of their homes”. As was the case in the New York Times this sentence appears in an article whose title is “Serb lawmaker shot in Kosovo” which has no direct relation with the Kosovo War. Altogether (as of 6 October 2010) there had been 184 articles in the Seattle Times which mentioned the key-words “Kosovo” + “10,000”.

- In “USA Today” of 10 May 2010 one reads: “. . . the mass atrocities that were committed during the bloody Serb crackdown on the Kosovo separatists that killed at least 10,000 people and left nearly a million displaced.”

In other words, in addition to being repeated in the same way in the course of time this message was also repeated identically across a broad spectrum of newspapers. From the perspective of social phenomena such a broad consensus (especially about an account which is not true) requires an explanation. During a war, newspapers accept usually to cooperate with the government for preventing leaks of sensitive information. But what was the rationale here?

The State Department’s rationale for rewriting history

Posing the problem

Needless to say, all nations write (and rewrite) history and especially their own history in a way which is consistent with how they see themselves. In history books published in the United Kingdom the British Raj²³ will be presented in a more favorable light than in books published in the United States. For instance one should not expect to see in a British book a serious investigation of the number of Indian people who were killed in retaliation after the Sepoy Rebellion of 1858. This attitude is well understandable because for almost one century between 1850 and 1950 the British Raj was part of the core identity of the British nation. Similarly, an European historian who would try to write a more realistic history of the American War of Independence would certainly be ignored both by the American public as by the historians.

For Kosovo we are on a different ground because this has no connection with the core identity of the United States or of the other countries which took an active part in the NATO operation. Here the matter is not a question about identity but rather a political issue. In rewriting the history of the Kosovo War the objective was to provide a justification of the NATO intervention. Naturally, it is the very decision of waging this campaign which made such a justification indispensable.

Thus, we must understand what was the rationale behind this decision. Was the objective of the United States only to bring peace to the region by solving a problem that the European countries were obviously unable to handle? It may have been one of the objectives, but if we want to get a deeper

²²In other words, this was a conflict of the same kind as those which have been going on for years in Kashmir, in the South of Thailand or in Sri Lanka without triggering any US Intervention.

²³This expression which uses the Hindi word “raj”, meaning reign, refers to the British colonial empire in South Asia which included Bangladesh, Burma, India, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka.

insight we should not limit ourselves to just one case. The more (similar) cases our explanation can account for, the more satisfactory it will be.

Expansionism of great powers

As in the game of chess, the strength of a great power can be measured by the area of the checkerboard that it can control, in other words by the number of close allies that it has across the world. This is nothing new. Only the forms of this criterion have changed in the course of time.

- In the Middle Age, the power of a duke or of a king could be measured by the number of his vassals.
- In the 19th century the power of a nation was in proportion to the size of its colonial empire. In control of the largest empire, Britain was also the dominant country. When a country was defeated in a war (e.g. Germany or Turkey in the First World War) it lost its colonial empire. On the contrary, the victors (e.g. Britain, France or Japan) received the colonial possessions taken away from the defeated powers.
- The Cold war was largely a struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union for winning more countries on their sides. When all Eastern European countries defected to the western side, the Soviet Union suffered a great defeat which was made worse when many Soviet republics followed the example set by the East European countries.

In this light the attempts made by the US State Department to destabilize the governments of Cuba or North Korea have an easy interpretation. They tend to complete the victory won in the Cold War by eliminating the last Communist regimes. Propagating the story of a great famine in North Korea certainly goes in this direction because this emphasizes the economic failure of the Communist system and stigmatizes its leaders²⁴.

The lasting results of the operation in Kosovo and Serbia

The case of Kosovo is far less clear however. It is true that Yugoslavia was a Socialist Republic and that its president, Slobodan Milosevic, was a Serbian communist leader. Yet, in 1999 Yugoslavia had already disintegrated into several countries the independence of which was quickly recognized by the allies of the United States and particularly by Germany. In order to understand the move that led to the Kosovo war it is useful to compare the situation before and after the war in terms of political allegiance.

Table 3 Political situation in Yugoslavia before and after the Kosovo War (1998-2001)

1998		2001
Serbia	Leader who antagonized western countries	Close ties with the US
Montenegro	Ally of Serbia	Close ties with the US
Kosovo	Powder keg	Close ties with the US

Notes: Testimony of the close ties between post-1999 Kosovo and the United States was the construction of the big US base of Camp Bondsteel in eastern Kosovo near Urosevac (see Fig. 3)

Table 3 shows that the Kosovo operation was highly successful in the sense that it turned 3 regions from opponents to allies and allowed the construction of the US base of Camp Bondsteel. As ex-

²⁴Remember the sentence cited in the book review by Bruce Cumings: "Kim Jong Il has the blood of 4 million people on his hands". If you were a head of state would you like to meet a president who has the blood of so many of his citizens on his hands?

plained on 5 June 2001 by US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to troops at Camp Bondsteel such bases are an essential element of US prosperity.

“How much should we spend on the armed services? My view is we don’t spend on you, we invest in you. The men and women in the armed services are not a drain on our economic strength. Indeed you safeguard it. You’re not a burden on our economy, you are the critical foundation for growth.”

It would be interesting to explain this statement in more detail but it would lead us too far away from our present topic.



Fig. 5a: Aerial view of camp Bondsteel in Kosovo. The camp was built after the action of NATO against Serbia in June 1999. Established near Uroševac in eastern Kosovo (see the map in Fig. 3) it houses 7,000 US troops. *Source: Wikipedia, entry “Camp Bondsteel” (public domain).*

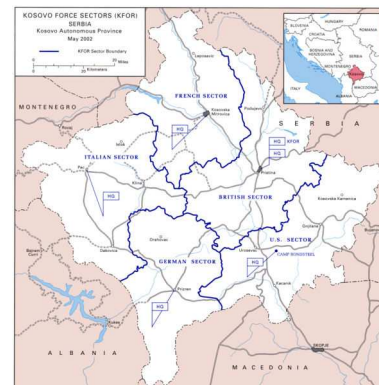


Fig. 5b: The five occupation zones of Kosovo. KFOR entered Kosovo on 12 June 1999 after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1244. The French sector is in the north; the US sector is in the south-east. *Source: Wikipedia, “KFOR” (public domain).*

How did a friendly government emerge in Belgrade?

Table 3 does not refer to the situation in 1999 after the Kosovo war, it refers to the situation 2 years later after the elimination of President Milosevic. It is highly likely that one of the objectives of the bombing campaign was to destabilize the Milosevic government in the same way as a major objective of the First Gulf war was to remove President Saddam Hussein. In both cases this objective was achieved only later on.

In the second case this objective was achieved through the Second Gulf War. How was it achieved in Serbia? This result was obtained by funding, organizing and encouraging opposition groups to Milosevic. It would take us too far away from the topic of this study to explain how this was done; more details can be found in an article by Roger Cohen (2000) in the New York Times.

One must take a moment to realize how an extraordinary achievement this really is.

During this crisis the United States had: (i) played a leading role in the bombing campaign against Serbia and Kosovo (ii) pictured Serbian armed forces as having committed atrocities and massacres on a large scale (iii) encouraged the independence of Kosovo and Montenegro.

After that, one would expect the Serbian people to develop a bitter hostility against America. Surprisingly, this is not at all what happened.

Less than two years after the bombing campaign the Serbian people brought to power a government which was on the US side to the point of delivering their former president to the international tribunal in The Hague. Actually, this is not an isolated case. The bombing of Italy, Germany, Japan, Panama,

Iraq also brought to power pro-US governments. In the case of Serbia the *tour de force* is that, in contrast to the other countries, this was achieved *without* a military occupation. It is the magic of massive public relations campaigns together with steady support provided to opposition groups which did the trick.

Two more cases: Syria-Lebanon and Tibet

In this section we briefly mention two other stories just to suggest that there is indeed a large set of similar cases. In the short accounts that follow we will raise questions rather than provide answers.

In search for the truth

Our objective is the same as in the rest of this chapter, namely to suggest that even stories which were (and still are) repeated for years in all media may not necessarily be true. In so doing, we simply follow the precept given by the philosopher and physicist René Descartes. At that time²⁵, conceptions and understandings were distorted by the influence of religion. Actually, back in the 17th century, the Church was shaping public opinions very much in the same way as the media are molding our own opinions nowadays. Religious prejudice, widespread deceptive evidence or trumped-up statements are hardly conducive to fruitful scientific investigation. Thus, as in the days of Descartes, social scientists must begin by filtering out falsehoods. It is the necessity of such a step that we wish to emphasize. If historical accounts that we think reliable are in fact riddled with misrepresentations any attempt of developing a real understanding will fail from the start. Let us illustrate this idea by an example.

In all accounts of the occupation of Japan that I have been able to read (whether written by Americans, Australians, or Japanese) the reality is misrepresented in many important ways²⁶.

- We are told that there were no confrontations between Americans and Japanese. In fact, there were hundreds. Just to mention a few of the incidents: military trains were fired at, allied warehouses and barracks were set afire, allied soldiers were beaten.
- We are told that the country was ruled by the Japanese government and the Diet. In fact, all and every law proposal or government order had to be submitted to and approved by American headquarters.
- We are told that US authorities provided relief when food and other commodities were in short supply. This is indeed true, but at the same time Japan had to export coal and other products to Korea and China. Moreover, the Japanese government had to pay the cost of the occupation (about one fourth of the budget) as well as the commodities provided by the Allies.
- We are told that the United States encouraged the economic development of Japan. In fact, occupation authorities severely curtailed it at least until 1948. For instance, there was a production ceiling for cars and trucks and a limitation on the size of ships that the Japanese were allowed to build.

Of course, such a misrepresentation had its usefulness in so far as it contributed to make Japan into a trusted ally of the United States.

As already stated, the principal objective of any major power is to turn hostile or non-cooperative governments into friendly governments. We are taking a particular interest in the actions of the US government because it has developed a whole array of tactics and strategies that in terms of effectiveness surpasses by far what is being done (or has been done in the past) by other powers. The two following stories illustrate two aspects of such strategies.

²⁵The “Discourse on method was written in 1637 that is to say 4 years after the trial of Galileo in Rome by the Church.

²⁶For more details, see Roehner (2008)

Syria and Lebanon

From the perspective of the US State Department there were basically 4 hostile forces in the Middle East in the early 2000s, namely Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Hezbollah movement in South Lebanon²⁷. The ideal scenario would have been that by destroying one of the nodes of this network the others would also collapse. This kind of domino effect worked well in Eastern Europe in 1989-1990. This was probably one of the objectives behind the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Yet, in late 2004 it became obvious that there would be no domino effect. Therefore something else had to be tried especially against Syria and Hezbollah which appeared as the weakest nodes.

During 2005 a vast public relation campaign was orchestrated for the purpose of charging the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad with the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic (also spelled Rafik) Hariri on 14 February 2005. Although the truth is not yet known (perhaps it never will) enough is known to understand that the investigation led in the name of the United Nations by the UN prosecutor, Detlev Mehlis, was highly biased. For instance, pro-Syrian Lebanese officials were jailed for over 3 years without any charge brought against them; in addition there were false witnesses and trumped-up testimonies as well as other irregularities. More fundamentally, Syrian implication was the only line of investigation that was followed; other possible leads were completely ignored. Such information was leaked progressively in the course of time. However, when the first report was published in October 2005 few (if any) media were able or willing to question the procedure or its conclusions. There was the same consensus as in the two cases that we discussed earlier.

Other attempts were made to reduce this network of opponents.

- Israel tried two military operations: one against Hezbollah (12 July 2006–14 August 2006), another against Hamas in January 2009.
- After the Iranian Presidential election of June 2009 a large-scale media campaign was conducted to bolster the protests of opponents in Iran. In this matter the question of whether or not there were irregularities is largely irrelevant. Indeed, it is obvious that elections with fraud on a much larger scale (such as the two elections, presidential and legislative, in Afghanistan in 2010) did *not* lead to media campaigns of sizeable proportion.

What will be the future? Of course, nobody knows. In recent years there have been much speculations about a bombing campaign against Iran. The previous examples of North Vietnam in 1965-1972, Iraq in 1990-1991 or Serbia in 1999 clearly suggest that bombing campaigns without ground forces cannot destabilize a government even when there is a fairly strong domestic opposition movement as was the case in Serbia. Of course, this does not mean that there will be no bombing operation for history shows that the same mistakes are repeated over and over again²⁸.

If, as many suspect, Sarah Palin will succeed Barak Obama as US president there will probably be a return to the policy of military intervention. After all, US bases and naval forces across the world must have some action opportunities. Is this not the best possible training to keep them in good shape? And US Army contractors must have new profit openings.

Over the past 50 years there has been at least one new US military intervention every decade. In 1982-1984 US Marines were sent to Lebanon; in 1990-1991 there was the First Gulf War; in 2001 the invasion of Afghanistan; in 2003 the invasion of Iraq; in early 2010 substantial reinforcements were sent to Afghanistan. So, it seems that military interventions became rather more frequent in recent years. It would be surprising therefore not to see a new major intervention in the next five years that is to say over 2011-2015. Iran, of course, would be the most obvious target at least if the present regime

²⁷After winning the Palestinian legislative election of January 2006, Hamas (mainly, but not only, established in the Gaza Strip) became a fifth hostile component.

²⁸For instance, Hitler wanted at all cost to avoid a war on two fronts; nevertheless this is what happened.

cannot be brought down by providing additional support to domestic social and political opposition movements.

Tibet

The story which is repeated in almost all media is that Communist China invaded Tibet by force in 1950 and that in the repression of various uprisings that followed over one million people were killed. This is certainly not the true story. However, we will refrain from giving an historical account because this would lead us too far away from the purpose of this chapter²⁹. In line with the inquiries conducted in the previous section, we will focus here on the question of the number of deaths.

Fig. 5 shows the population pyramid of Tibet as observed in the census of 1982, a census whose reliability is recognized by most western demographers.

One does *not* see any substantial reduction of the male adult population; nor does one see any abrupt reduction in birth rates of the kind which usually go with periods of severe hardship.

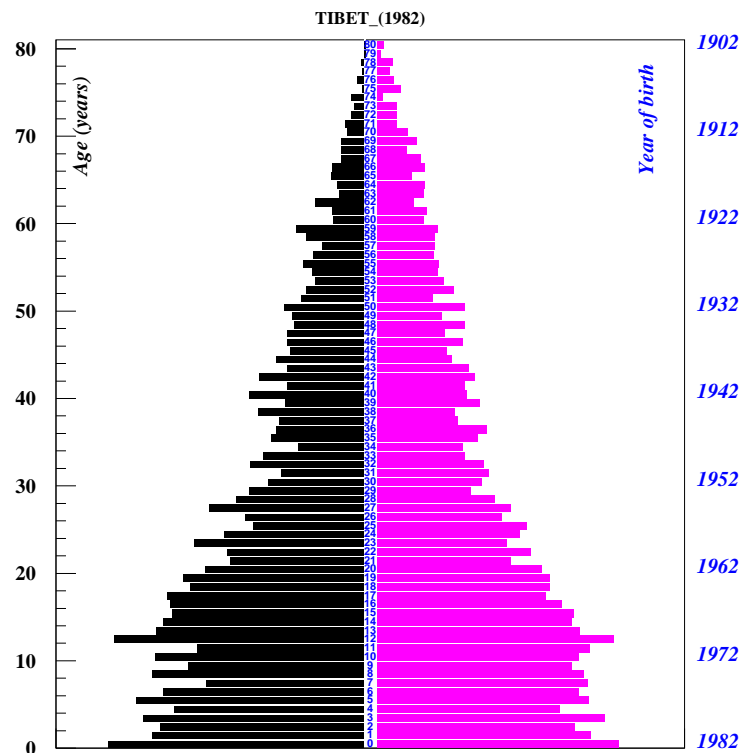


Fig. 5: Population pyramid of Tibet. Except for random fluctuations due to the small population and to the 1% sampling proportion, this population pyramid is the most regular of all the pyramids of Chinese provinces. In particular, it shows no reduction in number of births around 1961 and its male/female ratio is not substantially (and steadily) different from 1. As a death toll of one million would represent almost the whole male population of Tibet it would have a dramatic and clearly visible effect on the population pyramid. *Source: IPUMS International (University of Minnesota), 1% sample of Chinese census data.*

Only few people have had access to the archives held by Tibetans in exile in India in which the testimonies of witnesses of killings are reported. In spite of being a militant of the “Free Tibet” movement, one of these persons (see ...) writes that such testimonies have been recorded by following the same kind of procedure as used by the English authorities after the Irish rebellion of ... In this case the number of protestants allegedly killed by the Irish during the rebellion was found in many

²⁹Interested readers can find more details in a related study by the present author (Roehner 2010) which is available on his website.

places to surpass by a wide margin the total protestant population.

The procedure which was employed was beset by the following flaws.

- Hearsay and second hand evidence was accepted.
- No attempt was made to see if the same incidents were not counted several times.
- There were no attempts to check the global estimates made by refugees. This is usually the most serious problem. It has already been mentioned in relation with the famine in North Korea and with the killings in Serbia. In each case, refugees came along with global estimates that they were in no way able to substantiate through personal observations.

Conclusion

The palette of actions of hegemonic powers comprises mainly 5 elements:

1 Funding of political groups. This funding may go to opposition groups when the government in question is not favorable enough or to majority groups if he is.

2 Public relation campaigns as those against North Korea or Serbia that we analyzed in the present study.

3 Exerting financial pressure. This means is used especially if the country in question needs a loan or is facing difficulty with its creditors.

4 Bombing campaigns as those against Iraq in 1990-1991 or against Serbia in 1999.

5 Military occupation of the country as in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003.

The overall objective is to replace hostile governments by friendly governments. In so doing, as stated by US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the State Department and the US Armed forces safeguard economic growth in the United States. Because a friendly government will grant more economic advantages than a hostile government, this is an important objective at any time but especially in times of economic crisis.

In short, the 2 million death campaign or the 10,000 killings campaign did not occur just by chance. They were (and still are) important components of a global strategy.

Naturally, these two cases are not the only ones of that kind. As a matter of fact, each campaign against hostile (or not friendly enough) governments comprises the first two elements in the above list. While it is not easy to get reliable information about the first the second one can be seen by everybody. The problem is that when this kind of campaign begins usually one does not have reliable information about the events. That information may become available only years later.

So, what can we do?

I think any media campaign which is both massive and highly consensual (for instance with many websites giving the same message) should raise our suspicion even before one can get the real facts.

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