

# **Hungry for Peace**



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***International Security,  
Humanitarian Assistance,  
and Social Change in North Korea***

Hazel Smith



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The views expressed in this book are those of the author alone. They do not necessarily reflect views of the United States Institute of Peace.

United States Institute of Peace  
1200 17th Street NW, Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20036-3011

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*To Mihail with love*



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# Foreword

**N**ORTH KOREA IS TYPICALLY PORTRAYED in American media as at best bewilderingly unpredictable and at worst as a brutish hell-on-earth. Either way, the regime in Pyongyang is seen as profoundly unsuitable as a diplomatic partner, given that diplomacy demands of its participants a degree of both transparency and reliability, if not a degree of commonality of interests and values. Explicitly or otherwise, this line of reasoning is frequently used to justify a policy of treating North Korea as a boxer would treat an unknown opponent: keeping him at arm's length, eyeing him warily, waiting for his inevitable attempt to land a painful punch. Ironically, given that so many voices in the West proclaim North Korea to be paranoically fearful of the outside world, this pugilistic stance mirrors Pyongyang's own edgy, snarling attitude when dealing with other countries.

It is time, argues Hazel Smith in this challenging volume, that the West changed its approach. Not only is it unproductive, contends Smith, who has spent more time in North Korea than all but a handful of Westerners, it is ultimately self-defeating. If North Korea was ever an unknown quantity, it is no longer; if the narrowest of military-political calculations once circumscribed and poisoned its national outlook, now a broader range of national interests, including the welfare of its people, dictate a less confrontational outlook.

What prompted this apparent change in North Korea's approach to the outside world was a tragedy of dreadful proportions. The famine that ravaged North Korea in the 1990s obliged the obsessively self-reliant regime to work with the international humanitarian community and to allow aid agency personnel—including Smith herself, who was seconded into the agencies—to live and work in the country. Interaction with UN relief agencies and with various NGOs from South Korea, Europe, North America, and other parts of the West gradually led North Korea to accept some international norms and spurred the social changes that followed the regime's decision to permit the growth of markets. As North Korea gained experience working with members of the international community, it learned, too, that its security as a nation depended not just on the strength of its armed forces but also on the health of its people. This shift, says the author, has been gradual, and there is still a very long way to go before North Korea finds it natural and easy to cooperate with foreign partners. But the change, however driven by dire events, presents the West—not least the United States—with what may be an important opportunity to encourage Pyongyang to exchange the boxing ring for the negotiating table. At a time when policy for dealing with North Korea seems paralyzed by indecision, Smith's analysis presents a perspective that may offer a new approach to dealing with this beleaguered regime.

Given the more than half century of seemingly zero-sum relations between North Korea and the rest of the world, Hazel Smith's arguments certainly challenge conventional wisdom. They are also compelling in several respects, notably in demolishing the notion that North Korea is altogether inscrutable and unchanging. They are a counterpoint to far more common images of the Kim Jong Il regime and thus deserve to be heard by policymakers and analysts from Washington to Seoul and from Tokyo to Brussels, as well as in universities and think tanks in both the East and the West. That is not to say, of course, that Hazel Smith's views will be accepted. The subject of North Korea excites strong feelings, and policy advocates on all sides have firm opinions that will not easily be modified, let alone transformed. Even so, the United States Institute of Peace, whose congressionally mandated mission is to promote and disseminate thoughtful research into the ways in which international conflict can be peacefully prevented, managed, and resolved, is pleased to have

supported Professor Smith's work. The Institute does not endorse or reject the arguments in *Hungry for Peace*, but it does support the idea of injecting new, constructive perspectives into debates on topics of great import for national and international security. (This same commitment to spurring serious debate lay behind the Institute's publication of Andrew Natsios's book, *The Great North Korean Famine*, which, though it addresses much the same subject as *Hungry for Peace*, offers a very different assessment of the regime in Pyongyang and of the best way to deal with it.)

In addition to bringing challenging ideas into the intellectual marketplace, the Institute is dedicated to disseminating useful knowledge. And even those readers who may remain unpersuaded by Hazel Smith's thesis will surely appreciate the contribution she makes to our knowledge of North Korea in general and of its response to the great famine of the 1990s in particular. The author not only draws on her very considerable first-hand experience of the international relief efforts but also complements it with material culled from a wide variety of sources, including documents and data generated by relief agencies working within North Korea. *Hungry for Peace* provides a rare, perhaps unique close-up account of the dreadful spread and terrible impact of the famine, of the relief community's heroic efforts to battle it, and of the eye-opening interactions between aid workers and North Korean officials and ordinary citizens.

Offering, as it does, much needed information as well as a fresh perspective on international relations with North Korea, *Hungry for Peace* will appeal to a wide range of audiences: policymakers from numerous countries, humanitarian workers from a yet more numerous array of NGOs and intergovernmental agencies, area specialists, international relations theorists, students of the region and of relief operations, and anyone interested in evolving definitions of "security" and of the unfolding story of North Korea, its nuclear weapons program, and its government, economy, and society.

*Hungry for Peace* joins a growing library of titles published by the United States Institute of Peace that focus on the diverse countries of East Asia—but that have implications and lessons that stretch far beyond that part of the world. These titles include two other volumes on the peculiar problems and outlook of North Korea: Andrew Natsios's *The Great North Korean Famine*, which I have mentioned above; and Scott Snyder's exploration of

North Korea's distinctive approach to international interaction, *Negotiating on the Edge*. Snyder's work is part of a larger Institute endeavor that examines cross-cultural negotiation, a project that has generated studies of half a dozen important nations, among them two neighbors of North Korea, *Case Studies in Japanese Negotiating Behavior* by Michael Blaker, Paul Giarra, and Ezra Vogel, and my *Chinese Negotiating Behavior*. These book-length studies are complemented by shorter pieces that likewise analyze how best to encourage peace and stability within the Asian region. Just within the past two years, for instance, the Institute has published chapters by David Steinberg on human rights in the Republic of Korea and by Merle Goldman on human rights in China, both of which appear in *Implementing U.S. Human Rights Policy*, edited by Debra Liang-Fenton; assessments by William Drennan of recent U.S. policy toward North Korea and by Robert Ross of the U.S. approach toward the Taiwan Straits dispute, which are to be found in *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy*, edited by Robert Art and Patrick Cronin; and special reports such as *The Mindanao Peace Talks: Another Opportunity to Resolve the Moro Conflict in the Philippines*, *A Comprehensive Resolution of the Korean War*, and *U.S.-China Cooperation on the Problem of Failing States and Transnational Threats*.

Individually, many of these studies are designed, like *Hungry for Peace*, to appeal to a diverse audience. Collectively, they reflect the great breadth of the Institute's interests and its commitment to bringing challenging ideas, fresh perspectives, and new knowledge to as wide an audience as possible. Bold, illuminating, and instructive, *Hungry for Peace* embodies this commitment perfectly.

Richard H. Solomon  
President  
UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

# Acknowledgments

**M**ANY PEOPLE HAD A HAND in the making of this book—consciously and unconsciously—the genesis of which occurred during my first visit to the DPRK, back in 1990. I was then researching and writing on the Nicaraguan revolution and the international system—and was interested in the whole phenomenon of what happens when “non–status quo” states collide with status quo patterns of international relations. So first I want to thank Fred Halliday, without whose exemplary teaching I would never have started on a research career, and whose example reinforced my view that solid, high-quality scholarly research can and should be done on even the most non–status quo of states. Second, I wish to thank Keith Bennett, who facilitated my first visits to the DPRK, in 1990, 1991, and 1994.

This book would never have been written if I had not had the good fortune to be selected to spend a year as a Jennings Randolph Senior Fellow in Washington, D.C., at the United States Institute of Peace in 2001–2. Joe Klaitz, Elizabeth Drakulich, and John Crist made me welcome and provided a research home of which most writers can only dream. Jacob Bercovitch, a fellow “fellow,” shared in the general writing anxieties and was a hugely supportive colleague and friend. Clara Cole was a wonderful research assistant in every way—intellectually, organizationally, ethically, and humanly. I feel fortunate to have worked with her at this early stage of what I’m sure will be a prestigious future career.

This book would also not have been written without continued, consistent, and generous support from the University of Warwick, which permitted me to take large chunks of time away from the university. I thank all those who demonstrated confidence that I would eventually produce this book, particularly Professor Stuart Palmer, who, as deputy vice chancellor, authorized my research leave.

Some of the ideas developed in this book started life in earlier forms. The theoretical framework of chapter 1 builds on an article titled “Mad, Bad, Sad or Rational Actor? Why the ‘Securitization’ Paradigm Makes for Poor Policy Analysis of North Korea,” which appeared in *International Affairs* (vol. 76, no. 3 [July 2000]: 593–617). Other concerns and ideas developed through the interactive and cumulative process of research and writing, as illustrated in articles and papers mentioned in the bibliography. I am grateful to all those who have offered comment on these ideas along the years.

I would like to thank those in Pyongyang, Washington, DC, New York, Tokyo, Beijing, Seoul, London, and elsewhere who have been kind enough both to share their views on the DPRK over the years and to listen to my ideas. I have been privileged to get to know some very remarkable and very decent human beings as a by-product of my work on the DPRK, among them Fred Carrière and Ambassador Donald Gregg at the Korea Society, New York, whose sterling efforts to help the United States understand both Koreas have never been more necessary; Brad Babson, Sig Harrison, Svante Kilander, Karin Lee, John Merrill, Yi-Sook Merrill, Kathi Moon, Oh Jae-Sik, Jong Park, and Jon Watts. Tom McCarthy, a good friend and one of the few sane voices in the Washington debate on the DPRK for a very long time, is very badly missed after his premature death on May 8, 2003.

The research for most of this book comes out of my experiences working with and for various humanitarian organizations in the DPRK in 1998, 1999, and 2000–2001, in the United Nations World Food Program (WFP), UNICEF, UNDP, and Caritas. In my view, the individuals who have worked in the DPRK for these organizations are the unsung heroes of the North Korea story. These are the individuals who have chosen to live and work, sometimes accompanied by their families and sometimes separated from them, in an isolated, psychologically difficult, and

sometimes physically tough environment for periods of up to four years, sometimes more.

These individuals work consistently, patiently, and professionally to provide food, medical assistance, agricultural support, and clean water, and to resuscitate the education system so as to help orphaned children, babies, infants, schoolchildren, pregnant and nursing women, the elderly, the disabled, the unemployed, poor farmers, and the poor in general. Since the first humanitarian officials became resident in 1996, they have also, in a quiet and unheralded way, and as a result of sustained involvement in the DPRK, done more toward the “opening up” of the DPRK to contemporary international norms than most of the high-profile political interventions from abroad. The quiet process of confidence building and the institution of channels of communication with the outside world for the North Korean population have been undertaken by large numbers of people who have never sought publicity for themselves and are largely unknown to the public at large. They are in the DPRK simply doing their job.

This book, inasmuch as it captures any of the contribution made by these individuals—not some amorphous “humanitarian community” but real, live, complicated human beings—is meant as a tribute to them. They include Fathia Abdalla, Yvette Adda, Mohammed Adil, Pedro Amolat, Michel Anglade, Alpha Bah, Laurence Bardon, Jennifer Bitonde, Kuhmud Bomick, Douglas Broderick, David Bulman, Nina Busch, Leona Cayzer, Maria del Carmen Leal, Hom B. Chhetri, Roberto Christen, David Cole, Jean Cole, Rick Corsino, Doug Courtts, Denise Crilly, Rosa Maria Delgadillo, Annette Denny, Evaline Dianga, Eric Donelli, Rudi Fankhauser, Marta Fontana, Soraya Franco, Kim Fredriksson, Anna Gevorgyan, Edisher Giorgadze, Umberto Greco, Fe Guevara, Kauko Hakkinen, Thi Van Hoang, Zhen-Zhen Huang, Per Gunnar Jenssen, Sven-Erik Johansson, Kirsten Jorgensen, Mirjana Kavelj, Al Kehler, Ingrid Kolb-Hindarmanto, Patricia Kormoss, Oliver Lacey-Hall, Tomas Liew, Xuerong Liu, Karin Manente, Georgio Maragliano, Joe Martinico, Mike McDonagh, Brendan McDonald, Elaine McDonald, Albert Mertler, David Morton, Hanne Mueller, Hans-Joerg Mueller, Ueli Mueller, Hans Peter Müller, Aline Mutagorama, Nasiba Ghulam Nabi, Vu Viet Nga, Joseph O’Brien, John O’Dea, Iyabo Olusanmi, Omawale Omawale, Baton Osmani, Jane

Pearce, Prahbu Prabhakaran, Diane Prioux Debaudimomt, Aurelie Rajaonsin, Narayan Rajbanshi, Helmut Rauch, Andrea Recchia, Susan Riddle, Emma Roberts, Owen Saer, Hasana Shakya, Xin Shen, Kyi Shinn, Rebecca Sirrell, Eigil Sorensen, Runar Sorensen, Dierk Stegen, Temmy Tanubrata, Ahmed Tayeh, Nguyen Van Tien, Sungval Tunsiri, Pedro Vila, Andreas von Ramdohr, Zhigang Weng, Sonali Wickrema, and Ahmed Zakaria. A special mention goes to Kathi Zellweger, who cannot be praised enough for her sheer tenacity, goodwill, efficiency, and solid analysis—in other words, her personal and professional contribution to the DPRK. I would be remiss if I did not emphasize that these are only some of the individuals with whom I have worked; I cannot name them all as there have simply been too many, but I apologize to those I have not mentioned.

This list does not include the many dedicated North Koreans with whom I have worked in the humanitarian agencies over the years; they will forgive me, I know, for not mentioning them by name. They know, as much as I do, that it would not necessarily do much for their career prospects to be picked out and named in a book principally designed for a non-DPRK readership. This list does not include, for the same reasons, and also because there are too many to name, all the North Koreans I have worked with in the counties, farms, hospitals, orphanages, schools, and food-for-work sites throughout the country. These officials are as unsung as the international officials with whom they work—and much worse off in human security terms. Their incomes remain either nonexistent or so pitifully small that many continue to have difficulties even providing enough food for themselves and their families.

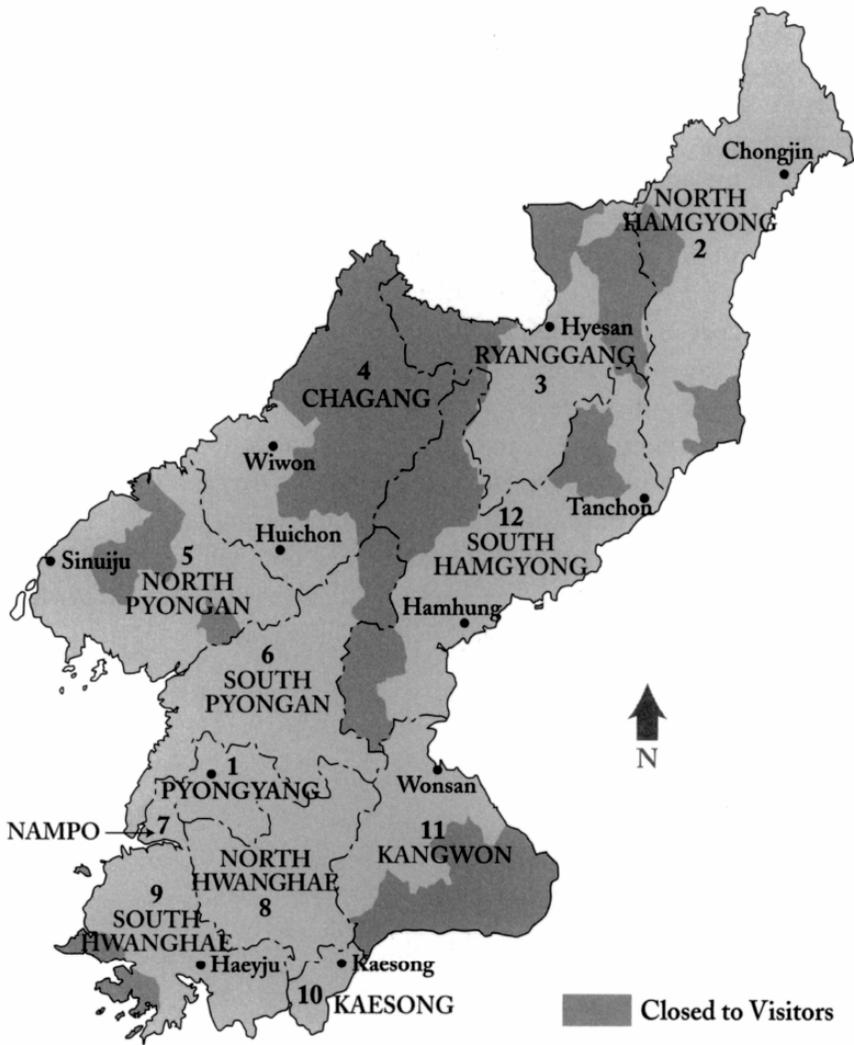
I also want to give credit to the humanitarian organizations themselves, which continue to respond to the needs of individuals who suffer from hunger and deprivation in many parts of the world, not just in the DPRK. When I started this research I subscribed to the conventional cynicism about the motives of humanitarian workers and the effects of humanitarian activity. Some of that cynicism remains, as no human being's motives are ever entirely "pure" and humanitarian activity manifestly does not and cannot respond fully to all humanitarian needs. It is now, however, tempered by my own understanding and experience of the often no-win situations in which workers and humanitarian organizations are placed. Sometimes it seems as if they are expected to solve all the

political and humanitarian problems of every country, especially countries where even the best efforts of the world's politicians have failed. In the end, humanitarian organizations can achieve only the limited objectives set out in their mandates—to relieve humanitarian need. They do this in each country in which they work to a better or worse degree, depending on circumstances often completely out of their control.

Of all the humanitarian organizations, I wish to mention the United Nations World Food Program in particular. It may not have as high a public profile as other UN organizations but, in my view, its focused mission allows it to work effectively, efficiently, professionally, and humanely—and it does so in the most difficult and often the most dangerous circumstances anywhere in the world. It gets things done—food to hungry people—when others are often still contemplating what to do next in what can seem completely intractable circumstances.

Thanks to Kathi, Joe, Denise, Ingrid, Susan, Martha, and Umberto for their continued friendship. As always, nothing would have been completed without the continued tolerance, affection, and unconditional support of my family. And a final acknowledgment to Mihail Petkovski, whom I met in Mount Myohyang, where it all started.

Humanitarian/Development Organizations Based in North Korea, 2003



## Legend

### 1. PYONGYANG

UN: FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, WFP-FALU, WHO, UNFPA, OCHA  
 Donors: AidCo (Food Security Unit), Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), Italian Development Cooperation, (ITDCO), Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC)

IOs: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC)

NGOs: Resident: Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Campus fur Christus, Cooperazione e Sviluppo (CESVI), Concern Worldwide, Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (GAA), Handicap International (HI), Premiere Urgence, PMU Interlife, Triangle GH Non-Resident: (via FALU): Caritas, World Vision, ACT, CFGB

### 2. NORTH HAMGYONG

ADRA, FALU, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, UNDP

### 3. RYANGGANG

FALU, SDC, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, WHO

### 4. CHAGANG

FALU, FAO, IFRC, SDC, UNICEF, UNDP, WFP, WHO

### 5. NORTH PYONGAN

Campus fur Christus, DWHH, FALU, FAO, ICRC, IFRC, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, WHO

### 6. SOUTH PYONGAN

ADRA, Concern, EC, DGDev, FAO, ICRC, IFRC, PMU, Premiere Urgence, SDC, Triangle, UNICEF, UNDP, WFP, WFP-FALU, WHO

### 7. NAMPO

FALU, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, WHO

### 8. NORTH HWANGHAE

ADRA, Campus fur Christus, FAO, IFRC, SDC, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, WHO

### 9. SOUTH HWANGHAE

ADRA, Campus fur Christus, CESVI, DWHH, AidCo, FALU, FAO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, WHO

### 10. KAESONG

ADRA, FALU, FAO, IFRC, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, WHO

### 11. KANGWON

CESVI, FALU, FAO, ITDCO, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, WHO

### 12. SOUTH HAMGYONG

Campus fur Christus, FALU, FAO, ITDCO, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, WHO

Source: UNOCHA, Resident International Organizations, 2003 Provincial Programme Map.



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