

that Kim had his uncle's entire family—including children—executed as well.

Under Kim's rule, North Koreans continue to live in a totalitarian "Big Brother" state, in which even thoughts are controlled—as George Orwell depicted in his novel *1984*. Ordinary citizens have no Internet access, and TVs and radios receive only government channels. Homes are equipped with loudspeakers that blare state-sponsored slogans and sanitized news all day long and can't be shut off.

Food is scarce. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, North Korea's economy, which had long relied on Soviet aid, began a catastrophic decline. While millions have starved, the regime has spent billions on a massive army and nuclear weapons program.

Anyone who dares to challenge the government is treated mercilessly. A 2014 United Nations report accused the Kim regime of committing "crimes against humanity" and estimated that there are up to 120,000 political prisoners in four camps. Starvation, the report says, has been used to control and punish North Koreans, both in the camps and in the general population.

With so many problems at home, Kim seems to have calculated that cementing the country's status as a nuclear power will boost his standing and distract North Koreans from the dire state of the nation's economy.

"The benefits of being a nuclear power—to deter external threats and prove strength domestically—must in his mind outweigh the costs of facing yet another round of condemnation and sanc-



Grass for lunch: Amid widespread famine, North Korean girls collect grass to eat in the village of Jung Pyong Ri in 2010.

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tions, which [North Korea] is used to by now," says John Delury, a North Korea expert at Yonsei University in Seoul. "So with this test, he projects power and claims to enhance national security."

A Bargaining Chip?

Many analysts believe that North Korea may be trying to use its nuclear power as a bargaining chip to get the international community to agree to send more aid. Others suggest that North Korea genuinely fears an attack by the U.S. or South Korea and sees the nuclear tests as a deterrent. Highlighting a perceived threat from abroad is a favorite tool of the North Korean government to encourage domestic unity.

But the latest nuclear test has infuri-

ated China, North Korea's only major ally.

"China strongly opposes this act," says Hua Chunying, a spokeswoman for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "China will firmly push for denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

In 2014, trade between China and North Korea totaled \$6.4 billion and included shipments of critically needed resources like oil and food, so the threat that China might suspend, or even reduce, trade should concern North Korean leaders. But at the same time, China is in a bit of a bind.

"Putting more economic pressure on North Korea might also lead to the fall of Kim, the collapse of the regime, and all kinds of unpredictable situa-

tions China does not wish to see," says Cheng Xiaohu, a professor of international relations at Renmin University in Beijing.

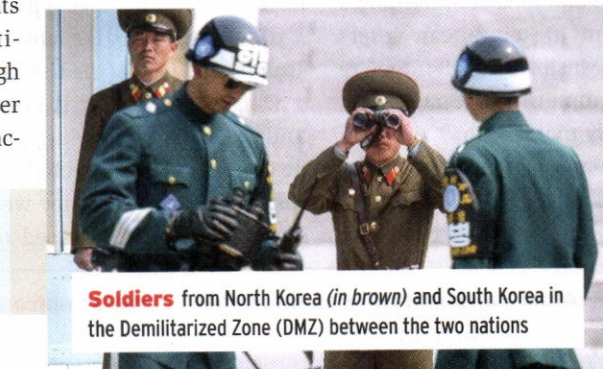
Just after the most recent nuclear test, the United Nations Security Council condemned North Korea and met to consider new sanctions against the Kim regime—even though it was becoming increasingly clear that his government hadn't tested a hydrogen bomb, as it claimed.

Bush, the North Korea expert at Brookings, says that even though Kim appears to have exaggerated what his scientists accomplished, it's not a time for other nations to be complacent.

"We should not just breathe a sigh of relief because it wasn't a hydrogen weapon and go back to business as usual," he says. "They are making progress; this was an advance." •

With reporting by Choe Sang-Hun and Javier C. Hernández of The New York Times.

2006 North Korea tests its first atomic weapon despite efforts by the U.S. and the U.N. to prevent it from becoming a nuclear power.



Soldiers from North Korea (in brown) and South Korea in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between the two nations

Today When Kim Jong Un inherited control from his father in 2011, there were hopes he would mend relations with the world. But he continues to threaten other nations, including South Korea and the U.S.