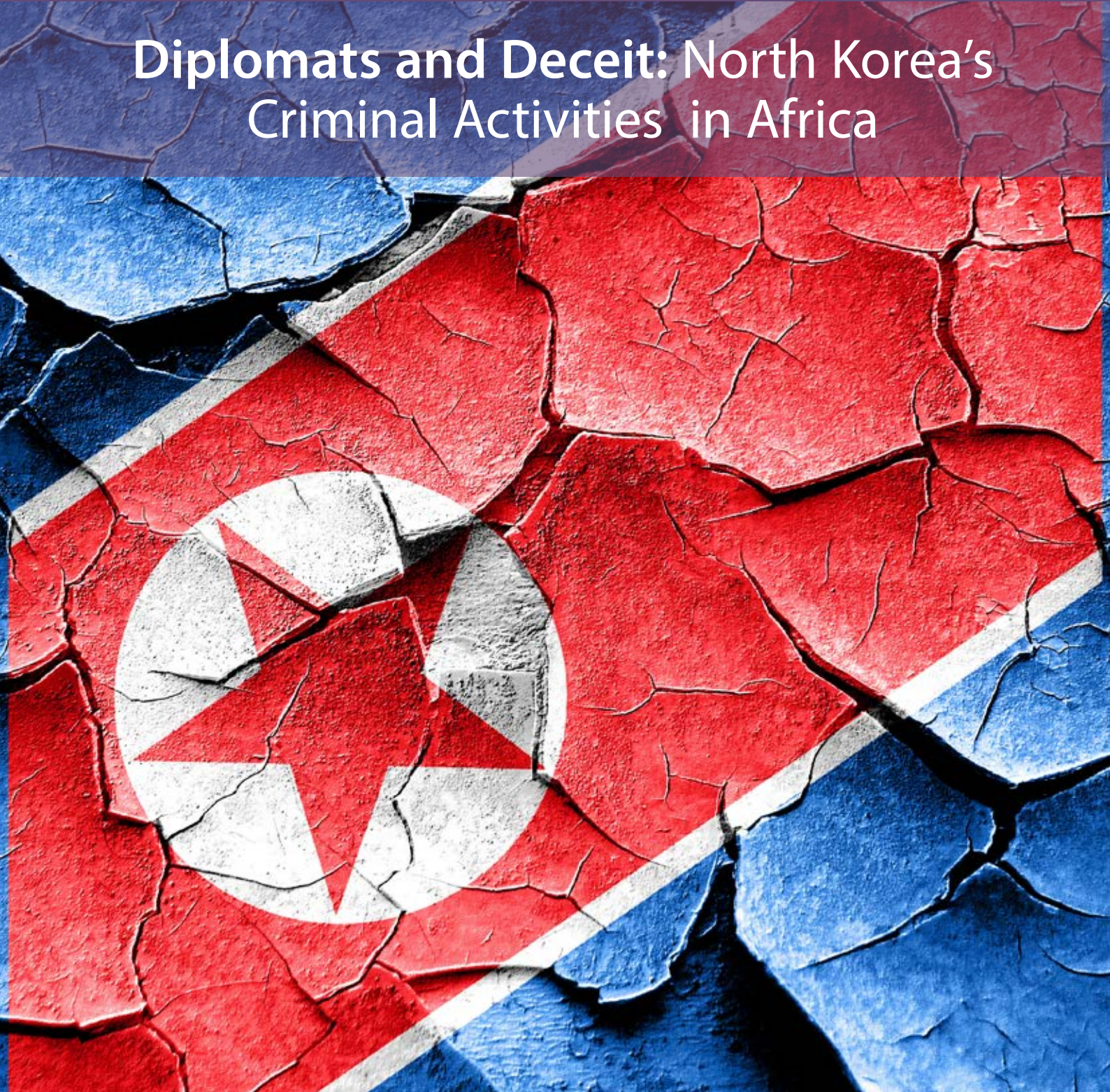
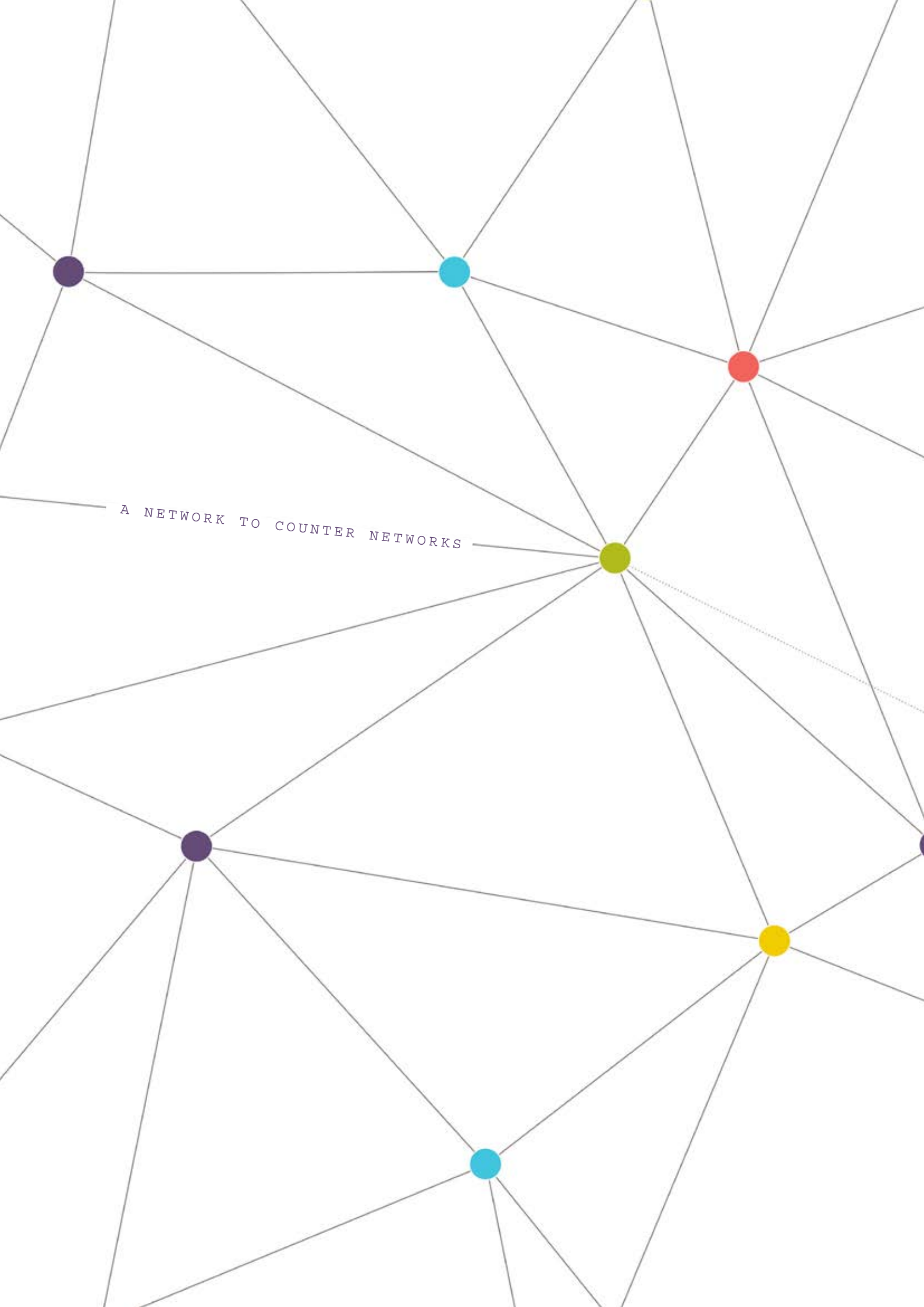


THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

Diplomats and Deceit: North Korea's Criminal Activities in Africa



September 2017

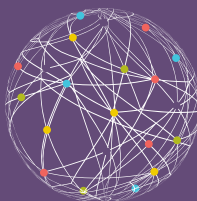


A NETWORK TO COUNTER NETWORKS



Diplomats and Deceit: North Korea's Criminal Activities in Africa

September 2017



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Julian Rademeyer, September 2017



Executive Summary

Much has been written about state-sponsored North Korean criminal activity in Asia and Europe. But relatively little attention has been devoted to North Korea's illicit activities in Africa, which run the gamut from trafficking of rhino horn and ivory to gold and tobacco.

This report – which draws on hundreds of pages of documents, academic research, press reports and interviews with government officials, diplomats and defectors in Southern Africa and South Korea – presents an overview of evidence implicating North Korea in criminal activity ranging from smuggling and drug trafficking to the manufacturing of counterfeit money and black market cigarettes.

It examines North Korea's current involvement in Africa, the complex history of African-North Korean relations and allegations that the country's embassies in several African states are intimately connected to a complex web of illicit activity aimed at bolstering the Kim Jong-un regime and enriching cash-strapped diplomats.

An analysis of press reports and other publicly available information conducted by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime shows that North Korean diplomatic passport holders have been implicated in at least 18 cases of rhino horn and ivory smuggling in Africa since 1986. Despite North Korea's waning influence on the continent, incriminating evidence linking its diplomats to ivory and rhino horn smuggling continues to emerge.

The report includes interviews with a number of high-level North Korean defectors about their knowledge of, and stated involvement in, a range of criminal activities. They claim that smuggling by North Korean diplomats is widespread, with couriers traveling regularly to Pyongyang and Beijing in China with diplomatic bags stuffed with contraband.

"[D]iplomats... would come from Africa carrying rhino horn, ivory and gold nuggets," explained one defector who ran a North Korean front company in Beijing. "Every embassy [in Africa] was coming two or three times every year."

The persistent abuse of diplomatic immunity by North Korean diplomats and agents poses a particularly vexing problem for law enforcement. Increasing economic sanctions and isolationist policies designed to cripple North Korea's nuclear weapons capabilities are likely to fuel the expansion of the regime's illicit activities and state-sponsored criminal networks.



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Acronyms

AFP	Agence France-Presse
ANC	African National Congress
BAT	British American Tobacco
CAR	Central African Republic
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CRS	Congressional Research Service
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EIA	Environmental Investigation Agency
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
KCNA	Korean Central News Agency
KOMID	Korea Mining Development Trading Corporation
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
PPRD	People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute
SWAPO	South West African People's Organisation
UN	United Nations
WPK	Workers' Party of Korea





A view across the demilitarized zone to the North Korean city of Kaesong. Photo: Julian Rademeyer

Introduction

On 17 June 2016, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea ratified the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.¹ But North Korea's accession² to the treaty comes with two important caveats. Firstly, the country does not consider itself bound by a provision referring disputes between parties to the International Court of Justice for arbitration. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the DPRK does not consider itself bound by Article 10 of the

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- 1 'United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime', 15 November 2000. https://www.unodc.org/documents/middleeastandnorthafrica/organised-crime/UNITED_NATIONS_CONVENTION_AGAINST_TRANSNATIONAL_ORGANIZED_CRIME_AND_THE_PROTOCOLS_THERETO.pdf
 - 2 "Accession" is the act whereby a state accepts the offer or the opportunity to become a party to a treaty already negotiated and signed by other states. It has the same legal effect as ratification. Accession usually occurs after the treaty has entered into force. See: https://treaties.un.org/pages/Overview.aspx?path=overview/glossary/page1_en.xml#accessio



Convention, which requires parties to “adopt such measures as may be necessary...to establish the liability of legal persons for participation in serious crimes involving an organized criminal group”. While the issue of liability of legal persons has also been contentious for other states, in the case of North Korea it takes on particular significance. The Convention also requires that legal persons held liable for criminal activities “are subject to effective, proportionate and dissuasive criminal or non-criminal sanctions, including monetary sanctions”. North Korea’s official explanation was that “the liability of legal persons is not established in DPRK Criminal Law”.³

The news went largely unnoticed, aside from a handful of articles and analysis pieces published by North Korea watchers. Writing for the specialist website, *NK News*, one commentator said the move was an “eye-opening warning” and described the DPRK as a “state-level crime family”. “Given the extent of Pyongyang’s deep involvement in transnational criminal activity, signing a convention the purpose of which is to eliminate such enterprise was, and still is, outrageous and farcical,” wrote Robert E. McCoy, a retired US Airforce Korean linguist and analyst.⁴

This report expands on work published last year by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime which revealed previously unknown details about the current involvement of North Korean diplomats in the illegal rhino horn trade in Africa.⁵

The assassination of Kim’s half-brother, Kim Jong-nam⁶, in February this year - allegedly in a plot orchestrated by North Korean intelligence agents and diplomats - escalating tensions over the North’s nuclear arsenal⁷, and the increasing number of sanctions being placed on North Korea by other governments, including the US, China and Japan,⁸ has given renewed urgency to an examination of the North’s underworld links, the country’s illicit economy and the role it plays in bolstering the hermit state.

3 ‘Signatories to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime’. Accessed 17 April 2017. https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVIII-12&chapter=18&clang=en#EndDec

4 McCoy, Robert E. ‘Make No Mistake: North Korea Is a State-Level Crime Family’. *NK News*, 9 December 2016. <https://www.nknews.org/2016/12/make-no-mistake-north-korea-is-a-state-level-crime-family/>

5 Rademeyer, Julian. ‘Tipping Point: Transnational Organised Crime and the War on Rhino Poaching’. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, June 2016. <http://globalinitiative.net/rhino-tipping-point/>

6 Campbell, Charlie. ‘The Mysterious Death and Life of Kim Jong Nam’. *Time*, 2 May 2017. <http://time.com/4688208/kim-jong-nam-north-korea-kuala-lumpur/>

7 Sanger, David E., and William J. Broad. ‘A “Cuban Missile Crisis in Slow Motion” in North Korea’. *The New York Times*, 16 April 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/08/donald-trump-north-korea-missile-threats-fire-fury>

8 Lederer, Edith M. ‘US and China report progress on new North Korea sanctions’, *Washington Post*, 25 July 2017: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/us-and-china-report-progress-on-new-north-korea-sanctions/2017/07/25/f4097720-7197-11e7-8c17-533c52b2f014_story.html





Han Tae-song (left) presents his credentials at the UN in Geneva, 24 March 2017 (UNOG)

Section 1: A 'Mafia State'?

In 1992, a young North Korean diplomat was expelled from Zimbabwe, accused of smuggling several rhino horns out of the country in a diplomatic bag. At time, Han Tae-song – also referred to in contemporary press reports as Han Dae Song - was the second secretary at the North Korean embassy in Harare. Zimbabwe's state-run *Herald* newspaper reported that the government felt its "only course of action is to deport Mr Han as an undesirable character whose activities are incompatible with his status as an accredited diplomat".⁹

Today, twenty-five years later, Han is one of North Korea's most prominent diplomats, heading up the country's permanent mission to the United Nations in Geneva and serving as its ambassador to Switzerland.¹⁰

The incident in Harare was one of several involving North Korean diplomats there in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1989, the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) accused the embassy of being "deeply involved in the illegal ivory and rhino horn trade". "Virtually the entire staff of the diplomatic missions of North Korea [in Zimbabwe and Zambia] are involved in the illegal rhino horn trade," the EIA noted in a report, with "70% to 80% of the rhino horn traded by the North Korean embassy in Harare said to originate from rhinos killed in Zimbabwe".¹¹

Notwithstanding the events in Zimbabwe, Han appears to have been rewarded by his political masters in Pyongyang. According to a diplomatic profile, he was subsequently appointed as an advisor in North Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a position he held from 1992 to 2000.¹² Then he went on to become the DPRK's representative to the UN

9 'North Korean Diplomats Caught Smuggling Rhino Horn'. UPI, 8 January 1992. <http://www.upi.com/Archives/1992/01/08/North-Korean-diplomats-caught-smuggling-rhino-horn/1952694846800/>

10 Koller, Frédéric. 'L'envoyé très spécial de Pyongyang en Suisse'. *Le Temps*, 10 February 2017. <https://www.letemps.ch/monde/2017/02/10/lenvoye-tres-special-pyongyang-suisse>

11 'A System of Extinction: The African Elephant Disaster'. Environmental Investigation Agency, 1989. <https://eia-international.org/report/a-system-of-extinction-the-african-elephant-disaster>

12 'Department of Information - Malta', November 2011. http://www.doi-archived.gov.mt/EN/press_releases/2007/11/pr1692.asp



Food and Agricultural Organization before taking up a posting in 2007 as North Korea's ambassador to Italy with responsibilities that extended to Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Portugal, San Marino and Spain.^{13 14}

The announcement of his appointment as ambassador to Switzerland and the UN in February 2017, generated a ripple of controversy as news outlets in South Korea and Switzerland dredged up his "murky past" in Zimbabwe. The North Korean embassy in Berne dismissed the claims as "pure invention".¹⁵ In a terse response to questions, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs said that yes, Han's appointment had been accepted and yes, they were aware of the allegations against him.¹⁶

The story quickly faded. Within days, North Korea had carried out a ballistic missile test, the first since US President Donald Trump took office, and Han made headlines again, this time for his vocal defence of Pyongyang's actions, telling a UN-backed Conference on Disarmament: "The various test fires conducted by DPRK for building up self-defence capabilities are, with no exception, self-defence measures to protect national sovereignty and the safety of the people against direct threats by hostile forces."¹⁷

Han Tae-song's case highlights the impunity with which many North Korean diplomats appear to operate. Few of those implicated in criminal transgressions in Africa, Asia and Europe appear to have been prosecuted or sanctioned in any way. The UN Security Council has expressed "continued concern that the DPRK is abusing the privileges and immunities accorded under the Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic and Consulate Relations". In addition, it has declared its concern that "the personal luggage and checked baggage of individuals entering into or departing from the DPRK may be used to transport items the supply, sale or transfer of...is prohibited..."¹⁸

"North Korea earns between \$700-million and \$1-billion annually through exports of weapons and trading drugs and counterfeit money."

A US State Department document, circulated to a number of governments in April 2017, urged "strict scrutiny of North Korean officials claiming to be diplomats", referring to "multiple instances of North Korea's abuse of diplomatic privilege to facilitate prohibited activities".¹⁹ In November 2016, the UN Security Council took the unprecedented step of imposing a travel ban and asset freeze on two DPRK diplomats: Pak Chun-il, the country's ambassador to Egypt, and Kim Chok-sol, who had acted as DPRK ambassador to Myanmar. Both men were linked to the Korea Mining and Development Corporation (KOMID), described as North Korea's "primary arms dealer".²⁰

Since the 1970s, North Korean diplomats have repeatedly been implicated in a wide range of criminal activity; from drug trafficking to illicit trade in diamonds, gold, ivory, rhino horn, counterfeit currency, pharmaceuticals, tobacco and cigarettes.

A 2008 report prepared by the US Congressional Research Service (CRS) estimated that North Korean "crime-for-profit activities generated "as much as \$500-million in profit per year (about a third of DPRK's annual exports", although it cautioned that "dollar value estimates of clandestine activities are highly speculative".

13 Ibid

14 Macdonald, Hamish. 'Despite His Murky Past, Switzerland Accepts New North Korean Ambassador'. *NK News*, 3 February 2017. <https://www.nknews.org/2017/02/despite-his-murky-past-switzerland-accepts-new-north-korean-ambassador/>

15 Koller, Frédéric. 'L'envoyé très spécial de Pyongyang en Suisse'. *Le Temps*, 10 February 2017. <https://www.letemps.ch/monde/2017/02/10/lenvoye-tres-special-pyongyang-suisse>

16 Macdonald, Hamish. 'Despite His Murky Past, Switzerland Accepts New North Korean Ambassador'. *NK News*, 3 February 2017. <https://www.nknews.org/2017/02/despite-his-murky-past-switzerland-accepts-new-north-korean-ambassador/>

17 Nebehay, Stephanie. 'North Korea Says Missile Launch "Self-Defence", U.S. Demands Action'. *Reuters*, 14 February 2017. <http://in.reuters.com/article/northkorea-missiles-un-envoy-idINKBN15T14T>

18 'Resolution 2321 (2016)'. United Nations Security Council, 30 November 2016. https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2321%282016%29

19 'Non-Paper on Addressing Travel of Designated North Korean Individuals'. US Department of State, 6 April 2017.

20 'Korea Mining Development Trading Corporation Listing'. United Nations Security Council. Accessed 9 February 2017. <https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1718/materials/summaries/entity/korea-mining-development-trading-corporation>



Other estimates suggest that North Korea earns between \$700-million and \$1-billion annually through exports of weapons and trading drugs and counterfeit money.²¹ “A core issue,” the CRS report states, “is whether the income from the DPRK’s reportedly widespread criminal activity is used to finance the development of weapons of mass destruction or other key military programmes, thereby contributing to the DPRK’s reluctance to curb its aggregate level of such activity.”²²

A more recent report, published in 2014 by the Washington-based Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, argues that North Korea has “exhibited extensive involvement in transnational criminal smuggling network” for almost forty years and the pattern of these activities suggests they are “primarily driven by economic factors, specifically the Kim family regime’s need for hard currency.”²³

One of the earliest incidents on record is also one of the most extraordinary. In October 1976, 12 North Korean diplomats and embassy staff were summarily expelled from Norway, Finland and Sweden after being “caught red-handed in a massive smuggling racket involving liquor, cigarettes and dope”.

According to a Time Magazine report published at the time, Norwegian officials accused the North Koreans of smuggling 4,000 bottles of alcohol – mostly Polish vodka – and 140,000 cigarettes into the country which were later sold to black market traders. In Denmark, police and customs officials impounded more than 4.5 million cigarettes, 147kg of hashish and 400 bottles of alcohol. The hashish had been sold to two Danish drug dealers by North Korean embassy staff. In Denmark, customs officials became suspicious after the North Korean diplomats imported 2.5 million duty-free cigarettes for the “personal use” of a single embassy staffer. The North Koreans protested their innocence but Scandinavian officials reportedly had “little doubt that the smuggling was ordered by Pyongyang as a desperate measure to help resolve the government’s horrendous financial crisis”. Elsewhere that year, Egyptian officials detained two North Korean diplomats with 400kg of hashish and a North Korean embassy official in Malaysia was recalled after being caught dealing in smuggled goods.²⁴

Between 1976 and 2003, according to US government officials, North Korea was “linked to more than 50 verifiable incidents involving drug seizures in at least 20 countries” and a “significant number” of cases involved North Korean diplomats and officials.²⁵ Perhaps the most infamous case involved the Pong Su - a North Korean freighter – which attempted to put 50kg of “almost pure heroin” with an estimated street value of \$50-million ashore on Australia’s southern coast in April 2003. A dinghy carrying the drugs capsized and one of the crew drowned. His body washed ashore with two tightly-wrapped blue plastic bundles containing 144 blocks of heroin. A police launch tried to stop the Pong Su, but the freighter headed for deep water. It was pursued for four days by Australian Federal Police and special forces before it was finally boarded and the crew arrested.²⁶

Incidents of North Korean involvement in drug trafficking appear to have declined sharply since then and, in 2008, the US State Department’s International Narcotics Control Strategy Report found that there have been “no instances of drug trafficking suggestive of state-directed trafficking for five years.”²⁷ The Department’s 2011 report said that the available evidence “suggested considerably less state trafficking, and perhaps a complete end to it.”²⁸ The most

21 “PSI Will Hit N. Korea Where It Hurts.” The Chosun Ilbo, 27 October, 2006. http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2006/10/27/2006102761024.html?related_all

22 Wyler, Liana Sun, and Dick K. Nanto. “North Korean Crime-for-Profit Activities.” *Congressional Research Service*, 25 August 2008. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33885.pdf>

23 Greitens, Sheena Chestnut. ‘Illicit: North Korea’s Evolving Operations to Earn Hard Currency’. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2014. <https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/SCG-FINAL-FINAL.pdf>

24 ‘Scandinavia: Smuggling Diplomats’. *Time*, 1 November 1976. <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/printout/0,8816,914629,00.html>

25 Greitens, Sheena Chestnut. ‘Illicit: North Korea’s Evolving Operations to Earn Hard Currency’. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2014. <https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/SCG-FINAL-FINAL.pdf>

26 Struck, Doug. ‘Heroin Trail Leads to North Korea’. *The Washington Post*, 12 May 2003. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/05/12/heroin-trail-leads-to-north-korea/017fa657-ce96-4eae-b44e-16f9376816ff/?utm_term=.fe2208960f70

27 ‘International Narcotics Control Strategy Report’. Washington DC: US State Department, 2008. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/102583.pdf>

28 ‘International Narcotics Control Strategy Report’. Washington DC: US State Department, 2011. <https://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2011/vol1/index.htm>





Thai police seized approximately 20kg of methamphetamine believed to be of North Korean origin on 29 October 2012.
Photo: US Drug Enforcement Administration

recent 2016 report stated that “[t]here is insufficient information to determine whether DPRK state entities are currently involved in the production or trafficking of methamphetamine or other illicit drugs”. “The absence of incidents over the past decade could indicate either curtailed state involvement in drug trafficking, or, alternatively, that the DPRK regime has become more adept at concealing its involvement.”²⁹

In 2013, a report in South Korea’s *Chosun Ilbo* newspaper alleged that North Korea “sent a large amount of illegal drugs to its embassy in an East European Country”. Citing an unidentified diplomatic source it said that Pyongyang had ordered each diplomat in its embassy in the unnamed country to raise “US\$300,000 to prove their loyalty and mark the birthday of nation founder Kim Il-sung...”³⁰

The most recent recorded case involves an attempt to smuggle 100kg of “pure” North Korean-manufactured methamphetamine into the United States. In this instance, North Korean involvement was largely peripheral.

In June 2016 a British citizen, Scott Stammers, was convicted in a Manhattan district court and sentenced to 15 years in prison for his involvement in the scheme. Four other defendants have also pleaded guilty. Stammers had worked in a “managerial role” for a global criminal organisation based in the Philippines and headed by a Zimbabwean-born “criminal mastermind” and “IT-geek” called Paul Calder le Roux. Le Roux, who is currently in custody in the United States, is assisting Drug Enforcement Administration agents in the US to hunt down his former partners-in-crime. He has been linked to half-a-dozen murders, and a lengthy list of drug and arms deals in Africa, Asia, South America and the United States.^{31 32}

In a series of encrypted emails, the conspirators referred to kilograms of methamphetamine as “DVDs” and discussed smuggling quantities of the drug into the US and Australia. According to prosecutors, the contraband was obtained

29 ‘International Narcotics Control Strategy Report’. Washington DC: US State Department, 2016. <https://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2016/vol1/index.htm>

30 ‘N. Korean Diplomats “Sell Millions of Dollars’ Worth of Drugs”’. *Chosun Ilbo*, 20 March 2013. http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2013/03/20/2013032001084.html

31 Schliebs, Mark. ‘The Geek, the Guns and the Bodies’, 2 April 2016. <http://at.theaustralian.com.au/link/5e21610c24b36726cf0581f085a09163?domain=theaustralian.com.au>

32 Ratliff, Evan. ‘The Mastermind’, March 2016. <https://magazine.atavist.com/the-mastermind>





Left photo: A rare photograph of Paul Calder Le Roux, taken while he was in the custody of US Marshalls in Minnesota. Photo: Sherburne County Sherriff's Office Right photo: Scott Stammers (man on the left wearing a dark shirt)

from a "Hong Kong network" that was "involved in the distribution of multi-hundred kilogramme quantities of North Korean-produced methamphetamine".³³ Using a pseudonym, Stammers wrote in one email, dated 4 February 2013, that one of the Hong Kong conspirators' "guys is in prison in manila now, this guy was working in north korea making dvd's [methamphetamine] and his good connects there for buying huge amounts, he can go there anytime he wants... Apparently he will be coming outta prison soon. He could be usefull in getting a connection in north korea. There telling me the dvd's are basically legal there now and there's huge amounts to be made." (sic)

One of Stammers' co-accused, Ye Tiong Tan Lim - who had run an import-export business fronting for the "HK Network" - reportedly claimed during discussions with Stammers and others that the North Korean government "burned all the labs to show the Americans they aren't selling [methamphetamine] anymore." But, he added, "our labs are not closed" and offered to supply a ton of "ultra-pure North Korean meth".³⁴

Court documents state that Le Roux – who is only referred to as "CW1" (Confidential Witness 1) – obtained an initial shipment of 48kg of methamphetamine from the "HK Network" in 2011. Around 30kg was sent to Thailand and the remainder was stored in the Philippines. Thai police seized at least 20kg of methamphetamine. Small samples of methamphetamine were also FedExed to prospective dealers in Liberia by Le Roux's organisation. But a middleman who set up the deal later turned out to be a US Drug Enforcement Administration informant. In September 2012, Le Roux was detained in Liberia's capital Monrovia by DEA agents and flown to New York on a chartered jet. There he confessed to his involvement in murders, narcotics and arms deals. The authorities kept his identity a tightly guarded secret. Le Roux has worked closely with DEA investigators to set up his former employees and criminal consorts leading to a rash of sting operations and criminal indictments.

Amid conflicting claims and a dearth of reliable inside information, the extent of drug manufacturing and trafficking by North Korea remains something of a mystery. According to the 2016 US State Department's Narcotics Control Strategy report, "the best available information on the subject continues to come from DPRK refugees, defectors, and media reports from neighbouring countries".³⁵

"According to these sources, methamphetamine production and consumption appears to have expanded considerably within North Korea over the past decade. The increased availability of the drug has also fuelled cross-border smuggling of the drug into China and other countries... Methamphetamine use is apparently widespread across multiple strata of society, including students, workers, and the relatively affluent."³⁶

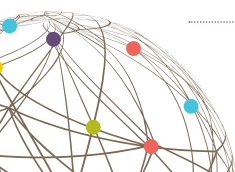
In a 2013 monograph examining methamphetamine abuse in the northernmost reaches of North Korea, scholars Andrei Lankov, Kim Seok-hyang and Kim Suk concluded that "[n]owadays drug production in North Korea is

33 'United States of America v Scott Stammers'. Southern District of New York: Government's Sentencing Memorandum, 31 March 2016

34 Ratliff, Evan. 'The Mastermind', March 2016. <https://magazine.atavist.com/the-mastermind>

35 'International Narcotics Control Strategy Report'. Washington DC: State Department, 2016. <https://www.state.gov/j/in/rls/nrcrpt/2016/vol1/index.htm>

36 Ibid



increasingly managed not by the state and its agents but by independent operators who act in defiance of existing laws and regulations. From our research, it appears that the lion's share of privately consumed narcotics come to the North Korean internal market not from state-operated factories but from illicit private laboratories."³⁷

A North Korean police officer who defected to South Korea, told the authors that "methamphetamine manufacturing is frequently a joint operation of the Chinese and North Korean underworld". "Chinese gangs provide the raw materials and then a significant part of the ready product is smuggled back to China. Such arrangements make sense for both sides: the North Korean manufacturers get ingredients more cheaply, while the Chinese partners minimize the risk of exposure. Due to the smell and fumes, tell-tale signs of the manufacturing process, methamphetamine labs are difficult to hide in densely populated China... North Korea's higher level of official corruption, and more lenient approach to narcotics in general also means that producers, even if discovered in North Korea, run less risk compared to those faced in China."³⁸

An analysis of Chinese-language media published by Peng Wang and Stephan Blancke in 2014 concluded that while the large-scale production, trafficking and sale of illegal drugs may have fallen, it has not stopped and the "narcotics trade is still regarded by Kim Jong-un as an important means of earning hard currency for his impoverished nation". Media reports in China and South Korea suggest that since the early 2000s, the North Korean government "has managed to conceal its criminal activities by exporting the major part of its illegal drugs, especially methamphetamine, to northeast China."³⁹

Tied to this are allegations of North Korean involvement in the manufacture and distribution of counterfeit pharmaceuticals. Testifying during a Senate committee hearing in 2006, Peter A. Prahar, director of Africa, Asia and Europe programmes in the US State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, warned that "there are also indications, as yet rather sketchy, that North Korea has entered the enormously lucrative market for counterfeit pharmaceuticals."⁴⁰ There have however been few arrests. In 2004, a South Korean man was arrested in Seoul with 4,000 pills of counterfeit Viagra which he claimed had been obtained from North Korea. In 2005, Japanese authorities claimed that North Korea was counterfeiting Viagra in official factories in Chongjin for sale in Hong Kong, Southeast Asia and the Middle East.⁴¹

Aside from entanglements in the drugs trade, North Korea has also frequently been accused – primarily by US authorities – of involvement in counterfeiting US dollars. Dubbed "Supernotes" by investigators, the \$100 bills are reputed to be of such high quality that they are difficult to detect. In 2004, Bruce Townsend, a deputy assistant director with the US Secret Service, described a "family of counterfeit notes... emanating from North Korea" and said the sophisticated techniques involved in their production were "evidence of a well-funded, ongoing criminal enterprise."⁴² Counterfeit "Supernotes" have turned up in various countries including Iran and Lebanon, Russia, China, Cambodia and Ireland. There are no reliable estimates of how many notes North Korea has produced but, in her detailed analysis of North Korean criminal activity, Sheena Chestnut Greitens cites a range of sources estimating that anywhere between \$15-million and \$250-million in counterfeit currency was being produced each year. Whether the North Korean state is directly involved and how the sophisticated printing presses necessary were obtained remains unclear. As Greitens notes, much of the detail of North Korea's alleged counterfeiting activity comes from high-level defectors whose accounts cannot be verified.⁴³

37 Lankov, Andrei, and Seok-hyang Kim. A new face of North Korean drug use: *Upsurge in methamphetamine abuse across the northern areas of North Korea*. McFarland, 2013.

38 Ibid

39 Wang, Peng, and Stephan Blancke. "Mafia State: The Evolving Threat of North Korean Narcotics Trafficking." *The RUSI Journal* 159, no. 5 (2014): 52-59.

40 North Korea: Illicit Activity Funding the Regime, § Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (2006). <http://library.uoregon.edu/ec/e-asia/read/dopekor.pdf>

41 Greitens, Sheena Chestnut. 'Illicit: North Korea's Evolving Operations to Earn Hard Currency': Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2014. <https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/SCG-FINAL-FINAL.pdf>

42 Ibid

43 Ibid



Testifying before a US Senate Committee on Homeland Security in 2006, Michael Merritt – a deputy director in the US Secret Service’s Office of Investigations – said the Secret Service had “seized approximately \$50-million of the Supernote globally, which equates to seizures of approximately \$2.8-million annually”. Merritt said “[t]he high quality of these notes and not the quantity circulated is of primary concern to the Secret Service”. He added that “numerous” North Koreans travelling throughout Europe and Asia had been apprehended throughout the 1990s for “passing large quantities of the Supernote” and in “each of these cases, the North Korean officials evaded prosecution for these crimes based upon their diplomatic status”.⁴⁴

Since 2008, only three cases of North Korean Supernotes have been detected and none have been reported in the last five years, according to Sheena Chestnut Greitens.⁴⁵ “I don’t think they’re currently involved in counterfeiting anymore,” Michael Madden, a contributor to 38 North, a North Korea analysis website maintained by the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, told *Vice News* in 2016.⁴⁶

North Korean hackers have also reportedly targeted several major institutions including the World Bank, European Central Bank and Bank of America in recent years. The hackers “left a trail of information about their intentions to steal money from more than 100 organisations around the world” when they targeted Polish banks in late 2016. According to the security firm Symantec, the same hackers are believed to have been behind an \$81-million theft from the central bank of Bangladesh⁴⁷ and a 2014 attack on Sony Pictures.⁴⁸ Citing unnamed South Korean sources, the *New York Times* reported in March 2017 that “North Korea’s hacking network is immense, encompassing a group of more than 1,700 hackers aided by 5,000 trainers, supervisors and others in supporting roles”.⁴⁹

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Cigarette-smuggling remains another lucrative outlet for North Korean diplomats seeking to fund the regime and line their pockets. As described earlier in this report, North Korean diplomats were accused of smuggling millions of cigarettes into Scandinavian countries in the 1970s and selling them on to black market dealers. In 1996, three diplomats were once again expelled from Sweden after customs officials found cigarettes worth around \$140,000 in a van driven by two of the suspects.⁵⁰ Then in 2009, two North Korean diplomats based in Moscow were arrested in Sweden with 230,000 cigarettes packed into their car.⁵¹ The suspects – a man and a woman - claimed diplomatic immunity. Swedish authorities argued that they were not accredited there and that the Vienna Convention did not apply. The couple were sentenced to eight months’ imprisonment.⁵² Bangladesh expelled a North Korean diplomat in August 2016 after he was caught smuggling more than a million cigarettes and electronic goods in a container he claimed contained food and soft drinks.⁵³ On 27 September 2015, two

44 North Korea: Illicit Activity Funding the Regime, § Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (2006). <http://library.uoregon.edu/ec/e-asia/read/dopekor.pdf>

45 Walters, Greg. ‘North Korea’s Counterfeit Benjamins Have Vanished’. *VICE News*, 16 March 2016. <https://news.vice.com/article/north-koreas-counterfeit-benjamins-have-vanished>

46 Ibid

47 Corkery, Michael. ‘Hackers’ \$81 Million Sneak Attack on World Banking’. *The New York Times*, 30 April 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/01/business/dealbook/hackers-81-million-sneak-attack-on-world-banking.html>

48 Cieply, Michael, and Brooks Barnes. ‘Sony Hacking Fallout Includes Unravelling of Relationships in Hollywood’. *The New York Times*, 18 December 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/19/business/media/sony-attack-is-unraveling-relationships-in-hollywood.html>

49 Mozur, Paul, and Choe Sang-hun. ‘North Korea’s Rising Ambition Seen in Bid to Breach Global Banks’. *The New York Times*, 25 March 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/25/technology/north-korea-hackers-global-banks.html>

50 ‘Sweden Expels North Korean Diplomats’. UPI, 23 August 1996. <http://www.upi.com/Archives/1996/08/23/Sweden-expels-North-Korean-diplomats/2560840772800/>

51 ‘Diplomats Arrested for Cigarette Smuggling’. *Reuters*, 20 November 2009. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-odds-idUSTRE5AJ2Z420091120>

52 ‘Diplomat and Wife Jailed for Smuggling Cigarettes’. *The Local*, 16 December 2009. <http://www.thelocal.se/20091216/23886>

53 ‘Bangladesh Expels North Korean Diplomat for Smuggling’. *Agence France-Presse*, 8 August 2016. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/bangladesh-expels-north-korean-diplomat-smuggling-160808080537964.html>



North Korean diplomats were detained at an airport in Sao Paulo, Brazil after returning from Panama with 3,000 Cuban cigars which they planned to smuggle into the country.⁵⁴

These activities are not limited to Europe, Asia and South America. High-level North Korean defectors interviewed for this report have claimed that significant quantities of tobacco and cigarettes have also been shipped from Africa to North Korea, notably from Zimbabwe and Namibia. One defector, who served as a secretary at a DPRK embassy, said diplomats frequently took advantage of duty-free allocations to buy cigarettes and alcohol which would then be sold locally or exported. "It is very common for diplomats to make money from illegal activity. The pay we get is very small and some people in North Korea don't even earn \$1 a month. When we get the opportunity to go abroad, we will do anything to earn as much money as possible."⁵⁵

In 2005, British American Tobacco (BAT) faced embarrassing revelations that it had invested heavily in a "secret" cigarette factory in Pyongyang through a joint venture with the Korea Sogyong Trading Company. The factory reportedly produced up to two billion cigarettes a year.⁵⁶ Two years later BAT announced its withdrawal from Pyongyang but insisted that the move had nothing to do with political pressure.⁵⁷ A North Korean defector interviewed for this report, claimed that despite BAT's withdrawal, the plant is still in operation and now produces counterfeit brand name cigarettes. "They still have the BAT factory in Pyongyang," Park Ji-wan – who ran an import-export company in China for the North Korean regime – said. "They are making various kinds of cigarettes including Dunhill and Benson and sometimes they are smuggling it to Romania and other places."⁵⁸

North Korea has also re-exported cigarettes manufactured by BAT in Singapore for the North Korean market. At least 15,000 cases of "NK 555" cigarettes worth an estimated \$6.3-million "rebounded" out of the North Korean port of Nampo to ports in Vietnam and the Philippines where they commanded a higher price. This was despite heightened UN sanctions and bans on luxury goods from North Korea.⁵⁹

Gold, diamonds and luxury goods are also alluring prospects for North Korean diplomats and smugglers. In March 2015, a North Korean diplomat was caught smuggling gold worth an estimated \$1.4-million out of Bangladesh. Son Young-nam, the first secretary at the North Korean embassy in Dhaka, had returned to the country on a flight from Singapore. He was stopped by customs officials who asked to search his bags. "He insisted that his bags cannot be scanned because he's carrying a red passport and he enjoys diplomatic immunity," Moinul Khan, head of Bangladesh's customs intelligence department told *AFP*. "After more than four hours of drama, he gave in and we found gold bars and gold ornaments weighing 26.795kg, which is worth 130 million taka (\$1.67-million)." Son was released but customs authorities vowed to prosecute him because they believed he was acting as a courier for a "local criminal racket."⁶⁰ North Korea's ambassador subsequently apologised to the government and the diplomat was expelled without being tried. Son's successor as first secretary, Han Son-ik, was expelled from Bangladesh in August 2016 after being caught smuggling cigarettes. A Rolls-Royce Ghost that Han had illegally brought into Bangladesh without paying the necessary customs duties, and which he intended to sell to a local buyer, was seized in early 2017.⁶¹

North Korean diplomats have also reportedly used smuggling routes through Mongolia to send banned luxury goods to Pyongyang in violation of UN sanctions. In March 2016, shortly after the UN announced tougher new

54 'N. Korean Diplomats Caught Smuggling Cuban Cigars in Brazil'. *KBS World Radio*, 19 October 2015. http://world.kbs.co.kr/english/news/news_in_detail.htm?No=114114

55 Interview with defector 'Mr Kim', 10 November 2016, Seoul.

56 Cobain, Ian, and David Leigh. 'Tobacco Firm Has Secret North Korea Plant'. *The Guardian*, 17 October 2005. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/oct/17/northkorea.smoking>

57 Kollwe, Julia. 'Tobacco Company Pulls out of North Korea'. *The Guardian*, 8 June 2007. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2007/jun/08/britishamericantobaccobusiness>

58 Interview with 'Park Ji-wan', Seoul, 10 November 2016.

59 Tom Mitchell, and Pan Kwan Yuk. 'North Korea Draws on Tobacco for Cash'. *Financial Times*, 9 March 2010. <https://www.ft.com/content/05f5e7ae-2aea-11df-886b-00144feabdc0>

60 'Bangladesh Seizes Gold from North Korean Diplomat'. *BBC News*, 6 March 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-31768756>

61 'Bangladesh Seizes North Korean Diplomat's Rolls-Royce'. *Agence France-Presse*, 9 January 2017. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2017-01-09-bangladesh-seizes-north-korean-diplomats-rolls-royce/#.WLKt4H9Py2k>





Taekwon-Do master Kim Jong-su prior to his arrest in Mozambique. Photo: Facebook

sanctions that included bans on North Korea’s imports of luxury goods like watches, jet skis and snowmobiles valued at over \$2,000, *Radio Free Asia* quoted an unnamed “China-based source” saying that Mongolia was being used to circumvent a Chinese crackdown on North Korean trade.⁶²

North Korea’s criminal activities in Africa

While much has been written about North Korean criminal activity in Asia and Europe, far less attention has been given to the illicit activities of North Korean diplomats and smugglers in Africa. Much of that activity has centred on trade in endangered species products but there are also allegations of North Korean involvement in smuggling counterfeit cigarettes, duty-free goods and minerals.

The most recent cases on record occurred in September and October 2016 when two North Korean nationals travelling on diplomatic passports were separately detained at Bole International Airport in Ethiopia en route to China.

In the first incident, a man identified as Jon Kwang-chol was detained on 24 September 2016 after 76 pieces of worked ivory were allegedly found in his possession. On 13 October 2016 another North Korean national,

62 Shim, Elizabeth. ‘Report: North Korean Diplomats Smuggling Luxury Goods through Mongolia.’ *UPI*, 4 March 2016. http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2016/03/04/Report-North-Korean-diplomats-smuggling-luxury-goods-through-Mongolia/7961457116454/



Passport of Kim Jong-su



Passport of Pak Chol-jun





North Korean diplomats react after being confronted about allegations linking their embassy in Pretoria to rhino horn smuggling. Photo: Julian Rademeyer

Kim Chang-su, was arrested at Bole International in transit from Zimbabwe as he was about to board a flight to Shanghai. Two hundred ivory bangles were allegedly found in his possession. Kim is believed to be the North Korean trade representative in Harare, Zimbabwe. He was released without charge once he was identified as a diplomat.⁶³

The events come in the wake of an incident in May 2015 when Mozambican police detained two men in the country's capital, Maputo. The men were travelling in a Toyota Fortuner 4x4, registered to the North Korean embassy in Pretoria, South Africa when they were stopped. Close to \$100,000 in cash and 4.5kg of rhino horn was discovered during a search of the vehicle. The suspects, later identified as Pak Chol-jun – the political counsellor at the Pretoria embassy – and Kim Jong-su – a Taekwon-Do master and suspected North Korean spy were released by Mozambican authorities after the North Korean ambassador to South Africa intervened. In November 2016, South Africa's Ministry of International Relations and Co-operation gave Pak 30 days to leave the country or be declared *persona non-grata*. He flew to Pyongyang on 11 December 2016. Kim – the Taekwon-Do master – left South Africa in late October or early November, telling acquaintances he was returning home to “visit family”. He has not returned.

The incident was not an isolated one. An analysis of press reports and other publicly available information conducted by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime has found that North Koreans have been implicated in 18 of at least 31 detected rhino horn and ivory smuggling cases involving diplomats in Africa since 1986.

Interviews conducted by the Global Initiative with law enforcement, diplomatic and government officials in Southern Africa and South Korea, along with “high-level” North Korean defectors now living in Seoul, suggest that a number of North Korea's African embassies form a nexus of illicit trade in rhino horn, ivory, cigarettes and minerals.

The motives are complex. For some diplomats, the immunities bestowed on them by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations offer the opportunity to enrich themselves in the knowledge that they are unlikely to be caught and, if they are, that they will face few repercussions.

63 Government and diplomatic sources.



North Korean diplomats are also notoriously badly paid and the “diplomatic corps has long been under pressure to support the maintenance of foreign missions by earning foreign exchange.”⁶⁴ Thae Yong-ho, North Korea’s deputy ambassador to the United Kingdom until his defection to Seoul in August 2016, has said that ambassadors are paid between \$900 and \$1,100 a month. As a result, they are “desperate for extra income through work outside the embassy” and live a “communal life” behind the embassy walls to save costs.⁶⁵

In South Africa, there is evidence that North Korean diplomats have used their positions to engage in commercial activities in violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations which proscribes diplomats from practicing any commercial or professional activity for personal profit.⁶⁶ In Chul Ryang, the third secretary at the DPRK’s Pretoria embassy – is listed as a director of a company called Global Peak Image Resource (sic) Enterprise which was registered in 2013.⁶⁷ The embassy has also been linked to a restaurant called Propaganda, which opened in August 2015 and abruptly closed a year later. At the time of its closure, a notice taped to a wall outside, read: “Closed. Pending a decision by the DPRK Korea”.

In one extreme case in the mid-1990s, cash-strapped staff at the North Korean embassy in Zambia used an embassy minibuss to run a private taxi service and were forced to go fishing in a nearby river to obtain food for guests attending a reception marking North Korea’s national day. They also “engaged in trafficking ivory, gemstones and rhino horns, which were sold to China and some Middle Eastern and Asian countries.”⁶⁸

More sinister is the apparent involvement of two shadowy departments within the Secretariat of the Korean Workers’ Party: Bureau’s 38 and 39. The distinction between the two is not entirely clear and far more is known about Bureau 39 than Bureau 38. Bureau 39 appears to control a complex network of business operations and front companies tasked with obtaining hard currency for the Party and Pyongyang through both licit and illicit means.⁶⁹ The US Treasury has described Bureau 39 as “a secretive branch of the [DPRK] government...that provides critical support to North Korean leadership in part through engaging in illicit economic activities and managing slush funds and generating revenues for the leadership.”⁷⁰ Andrea Berger, a North Korea expert at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), says Bureau 39 plays an “extremely important” role and is “generally regarded as the regime slush fund.”⁷¹ Greitens describes Bureau 39 as “one of several Central Committee offices that procure luxury items for party and military elites, obtain technology and components for weapons programmes and pursue illicit activity to fund the first two tasks.”⁷²

Bureau 38 – also known as “Department 38” and “Office 38” – has been characterised as an entity established to raise money directly for the Kim family and the country’s ruling elite.⁷³ In 2009, Bureau 38 and 39 merged but,

**“Office 39...
drives revenue
by dealing in
narcotics, arms,
natural resources
and others.”**

64 North Korea: Illicit Activity Funding the Regime, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (2006). <http://library.uoregon.edu/ec/e-asia/read/dopekor.pdf>

65 Sang-hun, Choe. ‘North Korea’s Nuclear Hopes Have Surged, Defector Says’. *The New York Times*, 27 December 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/27/world/asia/thae-yong-ho-north-korea-defector.html?_r=0

66 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961. http://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/9_1_1961.pdf

67 Companies and Intellectual Property Commission. Record accessed 23 April 2017. The company is currently listed as being deregistered.

68 Reuters. ‘N. Korean Diplomats ‘Smuggled Ivory to Survive’, December 2, 1997. <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2492&dat=19971202&id=2-NDAAAIBA&sjid=IroMAAAAIBA&pg=951,140340&hl=en>

69 Ibid

70 ‘Press Release - Treasury Designates Key Nodes of the Illicit Financing Network of North Korea’s Office 39’, 18 November 2010. <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg962.aspx>

71 Burgis, Tom. ‘North Korea: The Secrets of Office 39’. *Financial Times*, 16 March 2016. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/4164dfe6-09d5-11e5-b6bd-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3zsCUprth>

72 Greitens, Sheena Chestnut. ‘Illicit: North Korea’s Evolving Operations to Earn Hard Currency’. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2014. <https://www.hrnk.org/uploads/pdfs/SCG-FINAL-FINAL.pdf>

73 ‘Kim Tong-Un Named Kim Jong-Il’s Fund Manager: Source’. *Yonhap*. 20 February 2011. <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2011/02/20/39/0401000000AEN20110220000300315F.HTML>



according to an unconfirmed 2011 report by South Korea's Yonhap news agency, Bureau 38 was subsequently revived. The report cited a South Korean Unification Ministry official as saying that "Office 38 mainly oversees transactions involving foreign currency, hotels and trade...while Office 39... drives revenue by dealing in narcotics, arms, natural resources and others."⁷⁴

According to a defector - who says he laundered money and ran an import-export business in China at the behest of Bureau 38 - the department "works to gain US dollars or hard currency through restaurants, hotels and service staff". The thousands of construction workers dispatched by North Korea to parts of Asia, the Middle East and Africa, fall "mostly" under Bureau 39. "Thirty-nine have their own structure and are involved in trade and the financial sector." But whether they are diplomats, foreign ministry officials or workers employed by Bureau 38 or 39, "they are all eager to work with smuggling", he said. "Smuggling makes more money" and the North Koreans can afford to pay both the "loyalty money" required of them by the regime and save money for themselves.⁷⁵

These activities appear to be supported by a loose network of North Korean "bankers" and bagmen who ferry and ferret away cash for DPRK companies and diplomats. One individual, a 32-year-old whose name is known to the Global Initiative, travelled frequently to South Africa between September 2012 and February 2016. During that time, according to documents seen by the Global Initiative, he also travelled to Beijing, Hong Kong, Singapore, Maputo, Harare, Luanda, Doha, Abu Dhabi and Munich. He is alleged to have used a diplomatic passport and have links to diplomats at the North Korean embassy in Pretoria, although government sources - speaking on condition of anonymity - said that he appeared to "keep his distance" from the embassy.

Information about North Korean involvement in criminal activity in Africa is patchy at best. Few incidents make newspaper headlines and African governments with ties to Pyongyang have demonstrated a reluctance to embarrass the regime or take action against diplomats implicated in illicit activities.

"A DPRK company will make a contract with a Chinese company and the normal salaries for one worker would usually be around \$1200 [a month]. But the worker will only see \$150 a month and the rest is taken by the company and the [DPRK] government."

74 'Kim Tong-Un Named Kim Jong-Il's Fund Manager: Source' *Yonhap*. 20 February 2011. <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2011/02/20/39/0401000000AEN20110220000300315F.HTML>

75 Interview with Park Ji-wan, Seoul, 10 November 2016.





North Korean defector Kim Hyung-soo at a media briefing in Seoul on 7 November 2016. Photo Julian Rademeyer

Section 2 – Defectors and Dodgy Diplomats

Information emanating from North Korea is fiercely controlled and defectors remain a vital source of knowledge about the hermit state, but the reliability of their testimony is often difficult to gauge. More often than not, the incidents they describe cannot be independently verified. In a number of high-profile cases, elements of defectors' accounts of their experiences have been shown to be false.⁷⁶

The interviews conducted for this report with individuals described as “high-level” defectors were arranged through South Korea's Foreign Affairs Ministry. Where possible, we have attempted to verify aspects of their stories through other contemporary accounts, dates provided and descriptions of places and people. The interview subjects were quick to scotch some of the more sensational tales told by prominent defectors who are regularly trotted out on television and in the press. In two cases, interview subjects stated that they had avoided giving television or newspaper interviews as they did not want to draw attention to themselves.

The stories told below require further investigation and corroboration. But, if accurate, they shed new light on a network of criminal activity involving North Korean diplomats across the African continent.

The Smuggler

Park Ji-wan⁷⁷ is a relatively recent defector to South Korea. (He asked that the date of his defection not be published). The name he uses today is not his real name. “I lost my real name some time ago,” he says, laughing. Educated in Pyongyang, he says he was not born into one of the elite families – the “so-called national heroes” – that dominate many of the structures in the Korean Workers' Party. He studied English and Chinese at Pyongyang's University of Foreign Studies before being selected to join Bureau 38.

“They gave me an allowance to go to China and asked me to give them a plan of how I can make an office there and how I can make money through trade and financial business.” Armed with a diplomatic passport, he established a

⁷⁶ Song, Jiyoung. ‘Why Do North Korean Defector Testimonies so Often Fall Apart?’, 13 October 2015, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/13/why-do-north-korean-defector-testimonies-so-often-fall-apart>

⁷⁷ Interview with ‘Park Ji-wan’, Seoul, 10 November 2016.



small freight company and describes his role as “part banker, part import-export”. He won’t divulge the company’s name but says he was registered as the sole shareholder and “all the business bank accounts were in my name”. Accounts were opened in China “and other countries”.

Like most expatriate workers, he was expected to raise funds for Pyongyang. As the business grew, the amount he was required to pay in “loyalty money” also increased. “In the first year, they asked me to pay \$30,000. The next year it went up to \$60,000. The loyalty money is a requirement for doing business. This is the cycle of economic life for all the North Korean traders and those who are doing business. Everyone who does business outside North Korea is required to pay loyalty money to the government.”

According to Park, North Korean construction workers are paid minimal amounts and “loyalty money” is deducted from the salaries allocated to them in terms of construction contracts and paid to Pyongyang. “A DPRK company will make a contract with a Chinese company and the normal salaries for one worker would usually be around \$1200 [a month]. But the worker will only see \$150 a month and the rest is taken by the company and the [DPRK] government. The same thing happens with waitresses [working in North Korean restaurants around the world].”

Park says he kept his declared profits purposely low to avoid “paying them too much loyalty money”. “I kept 30% of the profits for myself to afford my livelihood and the other 70% was loyalty money.”

Park says he imported sugar from Tanzania and Malaysia, cigarettes, cut rag tobacco and cooking oil from Namibia and Zimbabwe, ferried cash from Mozambique to Pyongyang on behalf of North Korean construction companies, workers and medical doctors employed there and acted as an intermediary for far more illicit transactions.

“When I was in China, [DPRK] diplomats... would come from Africa carrying rhino horn, ivory and gold nuggets... Sometimes they were coming with antique gold decoration [and] ornaments. Ancient history, used by kings... They would fly to Beijing and meet directly with Chinese smugglers or I would arrange it and we would exchange it into hard currency. Ivory and gold came mostly from Congo. There was also ivory from Angola and a lot of rhino horn from South Africa and Mozambique. The military attaché [at the embassy in Ethiopia] would bring some ivory and gold rock. They also brought rhino horn. Sometimes also from Angola they were bringing the rhino horn... Every embassy was coming two or three times every year. They were making cash off the horn and ivory in China and maybe one percent of the rhino horns went to DPRK.”

Pak Chol-jun, the political counsellor at the North Korean embassy in Pretoria who was detained in Mozambique with cash and rhino horn and subsequently asked to leave South Africa, was a regular visitor to Beijing from around 2011, Park Ji-wan claims. “Pak Chol-jun was ‘Number 1’ in smuggling in South Africa.”

A North Korean trade official based in Harare, Zimbabwe also travelled to Beijing at least twice a year and made so much money that “in 2013 and 2014 he paid loyalty money of \$200,000”. Then there were the military attaches from Ethiopia and the second secretary from the DPRK embassy in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The diplomatic smugglers would carry the contraband in their hand luggage. “Sometimes it would be two guys with one suitcase. But usually one guy, one suitcase. The ivory took various forms: chopsticks, cigarette cases, sculptures, chopped ones. Maybe 7kg to 10kg each time. It didn’t make as much as rhino horn. I think the original cost was about \$20,000 for 7kg to 10kg and they were making a profit of about \$10,000 for a [suit]case.”

The DPRK embassy in South Africa was a key supplier of rhino horn, Park says. “It was cut into big pieces. Sometimes they were coming with white rhino horn, which was cheaper than the black rhino. Half price. At the time, I think it was \$35,000 a kilogram. And they were making two times that in China. Every year they brought rhino horn.”

Over the course of several years, beginning around 2010, Park says he regularly facilitated transactions between diplomats based in Africa and Chinese organised crime networks. “There are many customers in China. Sometimes the Chinese tell me that they use it as decoration and second, as bribery to give as a present to officials and third, they are using it to make some medicines... Making some tablets for their nightlife.”

“When I was in China, [DPRK] diplomats... would come from Africa carrying rhino horn, ivory and gold nuggets...”



In most cases, he says, he “made 5% commission off each deal.” “After closing the deal, [the diplomats] would get their cash and if they wanted to send it as loyalty money, they would ask me to get it to Pyongyang or they would take it themselves. . . . Usually they would keep 15% to 20% for themselves and the rest would be paid as loyalty money.”

Ambassadors were never directly involved in the transactions, he says. They would “give allowance to diplomats to travel. . . . [T]he ambassadors know that they are going with ivory and rhino horns. Usually [the couriers] would be the secretary of the embassy and sometimes the second level at the embassy, the counsellor.”

Park says he never tried rhino horn himself. “I heard that it has many properties but one of my close friends said I mustn’t waste my money.”

The Diplomats

“In cases where you do illegal trade, there are always [local] people who are up for it,” says “Mr Kim”, a former North Korean embassy secretary who defected to Seoul in the 2000s.⁷⁸ He won’t say exactly when or why he defected because he still has family in North Korea and fears for their safety.

Diplomats, he says, earn paltry salaries and it is “very difficult and hard” to survive.

“The monthly pay check for ambassadors does not exceed \$1,000. Depending on whether you are the first or third secretary, you can get between \$400 and \$700 [a month]. . . . Even if we do have some money, we can’t use it because it is not enough and on top of that we have to try and save. For example, instead of going to restaurants, I will just have to eat white rice.”

As a result, many diplomats seek out other sources of income. “When we get the opportunity to go abroad, we will do anything to earn as much money as possible.” Not all diplomats are required to obtain funding for the North Korean government by illicit means, he says. Many choose to exploit their positions for personal gain. “Trade and economic officers get those kinds of orders. . . . from the ministry to bring back some money as a slush fund for the Kim regime. . . . But it is not like these orders are given to all types of diplomats.”

“There are many ways to earn money. In China and Southeast Asia, they get money by exporting and importing goods. In Nepal, you can get good quality gold and sell it in Singapore for a good profit. In Europe, diplomats are allotted alcohol by the ministry and they can either sell them on the black market or export them to countries where these products fetch high prices. In the Middle East, they also sell alcohol and in Africa they get ivory goods such as spoon and chopstick sets which are very popular in China. . . . Usually they only take as much as they can fit into a travelling suitcase. There are always customs officials who have to check these products and many times they are bribed. Diplomats can usually get away with a lot of stuff [because] they have immunity. They don’t really get screened.”

While diplomats have been implicated in drug smuggling in the past, Mr Kim says it is “really not common these days.” “Right now, the regime bans these drug deals and when people are caught they are punished for the damage they have done to North Korea’s national status in the world. But in the mid-1990s, when there was a great famine going on, then some elites in the State Security department and some people in the Party engaged in such activities.” He says he has no direct knowledge of embassy involvement in drug trafficking.

Mr Kim also says he has little knowledge of diplomatic involvement in smuggling rhino horn. “People in North Korea know rhino horn as a medicine for leukaemia. Most people cannot get this rhino horn because it is very expensive.”

Finding local “business partners” is relatively easy, he says. Corruption “exists everywhere.” “In some cases, the person who was in your position previously, provides you with links to business partners. Sometimes you have to find

“In Africa, they sell material such as rhino noses [horns] and teak to China, and that’s the way they gain money. What embassies do in the end is to help the North Korean regime.”

78 Interview with ‘Mr Kim’, Seoul, 10 November 2016.



new ones. In cases where you do illegal trade, there are always people who are up for it. ...You meet them for tea or coffee, get to know them and when you become close enough, you can ask secretly if they will do business. Sometimes you can just tell that they do these kinds of businesses. Some people will say they don't know anything about it, but others welcome the opportunity. It is really not difficult to get these links."

Mr Kim claims that North Korea does exert some controls over illicit activities by diplomats. "The regime does monitor people and does try to control activities, so the ambassadors always warn their workers not to engage in these activities. Even the people from the Workers' Party and State Security do the same, but these officials are also hungry for money so if they are bribed they don't do anything about it."

Diplomats caught smuggling are occasionally demoted on their return to Pyongyang. "It depends on the seriousness of the case and how much damage it has done to the global image of North Korea. If what you have done is reported by the media around the world and causes a lot of controversy, then you cannot work as a diplomat or in public service. You are sent to remote regions in the countryside where you have to work on a farm or in a factory. You are completely demoted."

Another former diplomat who served in Pakistan and Thailand, Hong Soon-kyung, says smuggling was commonplace. Speaking at Cambridge University on 17 November 2016 and in a subsequent interview with British journalist Michael Havis, Hong said: "We often smuggled tax-free alcohol and cigarettes to sell overseas and we sent the cash back to North Korea for the regime to use."

"We do not get any payment or any kind of support from the North Korean regime, so how would the diplomats make a living? What they do is illegal trading. What I did, for example, is we smuggled tax-free alcohol and cigarettes and we sold them in Pakistan. This way, because we don't pay any tax, we would be able to make four or five times as much profit. In Africa, they sell material such as rhino noses [horns] and teak to China, and that's the way they gain money. What embassies do in the end is to help the North Korean regime."⁷⁹

The Biophysicist

Kim Hyung-soo escaped to China across the frozen Yalu River in 2009. He had been beaten and tortured by security officials just days earlier. "We were beaten non-stop with a stick, fist and feet until our bodies were totally ruined," he says. His family remained behind in the "land of hell". His mother, who also tried to defect, was arrested and sent to a prison camp where she was reportedly tortured to death.⁸⁰

From 1990 to 1994, Kim says he worked as a biophysicist at North Korea's Mansumugang Institute – also known as the Long-Life Health Institute. Staffed by dozens of scientists, the Institute was charged with conducting scientific research to ensure the longevity of Kim Jong-il and his family.⁸¹ He subsequently became a supervisor for the Workers' Party of Korea before being imprisoned and "sent for re-education".

Kim's research at Mansumugang focused on the foods that the leader consumed. Kim Jong-il, he says, suffered from hypertension and diabetes and his diet had to be carefully moderated. More "exotic foods" were smuggled to North Korea by diplomats to "help boost [the leader's] sexual performance". These included the "reproductive organs of lions from Africa and seals".

Kim says he did not conduct research on the use of rhino horn, but says that "it is very popular with affluent people in North Korea and most people believe it cures a certain type of cancer". "It is sold by the gram because it is very expensive to buy the whole thing."

79 Recording supplied by Michael Havis

80 'North Korean Human Rights Revisited: Perspective of a Former North Korean Elite'. *Korea Society*, 16 December 2015. http://www.koreasociety.org/policy/north_korean_human_rights_revisited_perspective_of_a_former_north_korean_elite.html

81 Interview with Kim Hyung-soo, Seoul, 8 November 2016





Heroes' Acre memorial outside Windhoek, Namibia, built by the DPRK's Mansudae Overseas Projects in 2002.
Photo: Adobe Stock

Section 3: North Korea's African Odyssey

Over the course of the last half century, North Korea has actively targeted African liberation movements and leaders, seeking recognition as the legitimate government of a unified Korea and support for its efforts to undermine the legitimacy of South Korea abroad.⁸² In exchange, it has traded ideology, aid, weapons, military trainers, construction workers, doctors, engineers and monolithic monuments. For North Korea – and the Cold War antagonists embroiled in proxy and ideological conflicts rippling across the continent in the 1960s, '70s and '80s – post-independence Africa presented a blank slate ripe with opportunities to carve out new spheres of political and economic influence.

By 1975, North Korea became a fully-fledged member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the grouping of developing countries and former colonies in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East who refused to join the Warsaw Pact and NATO Cold War power blocs. (North Korea, however, also concluded separate "Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance" treaties aligning itself with Russia and China.) The DPRK leadership placed emphasis on NAM's role in protecting and promoting "anti-imperialist and independent forces".⁸³

"Generalissimo" Kim Il-sung, North Korea's "founding father", "Dear Leader" and "Sun of the Nation"⁸⁴ positioned himself as a leader of a Third World vanguard against Western capitalism and, more particularly, the United States of America, which he described as "the chieftain of world imperialism". In a 1968 treatise calling for the intensification of the "anti-imperialist, anti-US struggle", Kim described the "struggle of the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America" as the "sacred liberation struggle of hundreds of millions of oppressed and humiliated people and, at the same time, a great struggle for cutting this lifeline of world imperialism".⁸⁵

82 DuPre, Annie, Nicolas Kasprzyk, and Noël Stott. "Cooperation between African States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea." Pretoria: Institute for security Studies, November 2016. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/research-report-dprk.pdf>

83 Krishnan, R. R. "North Korea and the Non-Aligned Movement." *International Studies* 20, no. 1-2 (1981): 299-313. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/002088178102000123>

84 Lankov, Andrei. "NK's Founding Father, Kim Il-Sung." *The Korea Times*, April 17, 2016. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2016/04/304_202760.html

85 Kim Il-sung. "Let Us Intensify the Anti-Imperialist Anti-US Struggle." Foreign Languages Publishing House, Pyongyang, Korea, 1968. <http://collections.mun.ca/PDFs/radical/LetUsIntensifytheAntiImperialistAntiUSStruggle.pdf>



“The peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America,” he wrote, “have common interests and have a relationship of mutual support in their anti-imperialist, anti-US struggle. When Africa and Latin America are not free, Asia cannot be free... In whatever part of the world the US imperialist forces of aggression may be wiped out, it will be a very good thing for all peoples of the world.”⁸⁶

Despite Kim Il-sung’s strident declarations of support for anti-imperialist movements, Andrei Lankov, a professor at Seoul’s Kookmin University who studied in Pyongyang in the mid-1980s and has written extensively about the hermit state, argues that “North Korea was not very active in assisting the worldwide ‘progressive’ movements, and its aid efforts in Africa in the 1970s and early 1980s might be the only exception to the rule.” “Some role was probably played by the national vanity, the dream of promoting [Kim’s *Juche* ideology⁸⁷] and making it into a truly international ideological force, but to a large extent these North Korean efforts reflected sincere idealism and solidarity, the belief in the unity of what was seen as the ‘downtrodden nations’ of the world.”⁸⁸

Benjamin R. Young, a researcher who has studied North Korea-Africa relations, believes that “[s]elf interests, specifically the struggle to gain diplomatic recognition as the ‘true’ Korean government, rather than notions of racial equality or Third World solidarity, dictated North Korea’s African policy.”⁸⁹

In a 2014 interview, Ko Young-hwan – who headed the North Korean Foreign Affairs Ministry’s Africa section from 1985 to 1987 before defecting to South Korea during a diplomatic posting to the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1991 – made similar observations, saying, “Kim Il-sung took Africa seriously because he wanted to use votes in the United Nations for the withdrawal of US troops from South Korea. He believed that if he could get the socialist Eastern bloc and African countries on board, then he could make withdrawal happen.”⁹⁰

North Korea’s anti-Western, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist rhetoric found ready ears among the emerging leaders and dictators of many post-colonial African states attempting to define their national identities and break ranks with their former colonial masters. North Korea’s African expansion reached its peak in the 1970s. Between 1971 and 1980, the DPRK established diplomatic relations with 29 African countries.⁹¹

Across Africa in the 1960s, ‘70s and ‘80s, North Korean diplomats and spies fanned out to create “a network of study groups and research institutes... dedicated to the propaganda of Kim Il-sung’s ideology and heavily subsidised by Pyongyang.”⁹² But as Lankov has observed, it “soon became clear... that the scheme did not work as intended: many entrepreneurial activists were happy to receive cash, but their commitment to the Great Leader was doubtful...”⁹³ A number of African countries experimented with *Juche* in the 1970s and 1980s, Young writes, but most eventually “became disillusioned with the ideology since it primarily consisted of humanistic bromides and was largely devoid

86 Ibid

87 Kim Il-sung first mentioned his grand “Juche Idea” in a speech in 1955. In his book, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, Andrei Lankov argues that it is an “imprecise and vague” doctrine. Brian Myers, an American academic and former journalist, who has written extensively about North Korean propaganda, memorably dismissed it as a “farrago of Marxist and humanist banalities”. In North Korea, though, it is regarded as Kim’s “original, brilliant and revolutionary contribution to national and international thought”. The word, *Juche*, is usually translated as “self-reliance”. But Lankov argues that this misleading and that it would be better understood as meaning “self-importance” or “self-significance” – “the need to give primacy to one’s own national interest and peculiarities”.

88 Young, Benjamin R. “North Korea: Opponents of Apartheid.” *NK News*, December 16, 2013. <https://www.nknews.org/2013/12/north-korea-opponents-of-apartheid/>

89 Young, Benjamin R. “The Struggle for Legitimacy: North Korean-African Relations, 1965-1992.” *British Association for Korean Studies Papers* 16 (2015). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280599543_The_Struggle_for_Legitimacy_North_Korean-African_Relations_1965-1992

90 “Interview: Meet Ko Young-Hwan, the First Diplomat Who Escaped N.Korea.” *New Focus International*, August 22, 2014. <http://newfocusintl.com/ko-young-hwan-unification-preparatory-committee-member/>

91 DuPre, Annie, Nicolas Kasprzyk, and Noël Stott. “Cooperation between African States and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.”

92 Lankov, Andrei. *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*. OUP USA, 2013.

93 Ibid



of any practical advice for Third World development.”⁹⁴ According to Ko Young-hwan – the DPRK diplomat and defector – “African nations were only interested in following [Kim Il-sung] when he could afford to provide them with aid.”⁹⁵

Some African leaders were openly dismissive of Pyongyang’s ideological efforts. Referring to *Juche* principals of “self-reliance”, Tom Mboya, the influential Kenyan trade unionist and cabinet minister who was assassinated in 1969, once remarked: “I accept the slogan of self-reliance. The man in the bush has always been self-reliant and that is the reason why he is still in the bush.”⁹⁶

Rodong Sinmun, the official propaganda mouthpiece of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea, took a far more rose-tinted view, extolling the virtues of the country’s African strategy to readers and leading them to believe that in that 1970s “perusing works of Kim Il-sung was a favourite pastime of many an African villager.”⁹⁷

Today remnants of North Korea’s *Juche* evangelism can be found in some African countries. *Juche* study groups still exist in countries like Benin, Ethiopia, the DRC, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and South Africa, occasionally issuing tepid statements offering praises or condolences to North Korea.⁹⁸ In an interview in 2014, the chairman of a Nigerian group claimed 2,500 members, adding there were “more than 10,000 non-registered members but ardent sympathisers across Nigeria”. Alhassan Mamman Muhammed, who had visited North Korea several times and described it as a “fantastic country”, claimed that “[e]very African nation as far as I am aware, has a similar organisation, though they may not be active.” He said his group’s relationship with the DPRK was limited to occasional visits, “celebrating their national days... and, of course, the birthdays of their leaders.”⁹⁹

In South Africa, a “Group for the Study of the *Juche* Idea” was reportedly inaugurated in 2016 under the chairmanship of Ambrose Mnisi, a South African Communist Party district secretary in the country’s Mpumalanga province. The group adopted a “congratulatory message to supreme leader Kim Jong Un”, North Korea’s Central News Agency reported.¹⁰⁰ The same year, the agency carried another report which read, in entirety: “Brief biography of President Kim Il-sung was posted by the South African Group for the Study of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism on its website on March 27. Also posted on the website was his photo.”

Among the countries eager to cement ties with Pyongyang was Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). Mobutu Sese Seko, the country’s right-wing anti-communist dictator, known for his penchant for leopard print caps and Maoist-style suits, developed close ties with Pyongyang while lining his pockets with financial aid from Washington and Paris. Zaire opened an embassy in Pyongyang and Mobutu travelled to North Korea in 1974 to meet Kim Il-sung. To the consternation of his US-backers and the CIA, Mobutu signed a key arms deal with Kim.¹⁰¹ Mobutu also expelled the Israeli advisers who had been training elite military units and replaced them with North Koreans.¹⁰²

94 Young, Benjamin R. “The Struggle for Legitimacy: North Korean-African Relations, 1965-1992.” *British Association for Korean Studies Papers* 16 (2015). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280599543_The_Struggle_for_Legitimacy_North_Korean-African_Relations_1965-1992

95 ‘Interview: Meet Ko Young-Hwan, the First Diplomat Who Escaped N. Korea.’ *New Focus International*, 22 August 2014. <http://newfocusintl.com/ko-young-hwan-unification-preparatory-committee-member/>

96 Young, Benjamin R. “The Struggle for Legitimacy: North Korean-African Relations 1965 – 1992”

97 Lankov, Andrei. *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*. OUP USA, 2013.

98 DuPre, Annie, Nicolas Kasprzyk, and Noël Stott. “Cooperation between African States and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.”

99 Byrne, Leo. “Interview: Thousands of North Korea *Juche* Supporters Exist in Nigeria.” *NK News*, June 17, 2014. <https://www.nknews.org/2014/06/interview-thousands-of-north-korea-juche-supporters-exist-in-nigeria/>

100 Korean Central News Agency. “*Juche* Idea Study Group Formed in South Africa,” May 20, 2016.

101 French, Howard W. ‘An Anatomy of Autocracy: Mobutu’s Era.’ *The New York Times*, 17 May 1997. <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/05/17/world/an-anatomy-of-autocracy-mobutu-s-era.html>

Young, Benjamin R. ‘The Struggle for Legitimacy: North Korean-African Relations, 1965-1992.’ *British Association for Korean Studies Papers* 16 (2015). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280599543_The_Struggle_for_Legitimacy_North_Korean-African_Relations_1965-1992

102 Gleijeses, Piero. *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976*. University of North Carolina Press, 2011.



Mobutu was overthrown in 1997 and died in exile in Morocco a few months later. Successive governments in the DRC have continued to maintain close ties with the DPRK. In May 2016, a UN report revealed that Pyongyang had sent firearms and 30 military instructors to the DRC in a possible violation of UN sanctions.¹⁰³

Similar violations have been flagged in Angola, a country that has had ties with Pyongyang since its independence from Portugal in 1975. That year also marked the start of a bloody civil war which saw Angola become a proxy battleground for the Cold War superpowers, Cuba and South Africa.¹⁰⁴ By the mid-1980s, an estimated 3,000 North Korean regular troops and advisers were in the country. North Korea also operated camps in Angola where members of the military wing of the African National Congress and the South West African People's Organisation received training.¹⁰⁵

More recently, Angola has been accused of violating UN sanctions by importing military goods and trainers from North Korea. In 2015, details emerged that North Korean military trainers were providing arms and security support to Angolan presidential bodyguards. Further assistance included shipments of 4.5 tons of marine engines and replacement parts for North Korean patrol boats sold to the Angolan defence forces in 2011.¹⁰⁶

In April 2016, Angola's Secretary of Interior met with North Korean representatives in the Luanda to discuss "matters relating to the sharing of experiences in the area of public order and security".¹⁰⁷ In a sanctions implementation report submitted to the United Nations later that year, Angola hinted that relations had cooled and that the DPRK had appealed for a resumption in negotiations on bilateral cooperation. Days after the report was submitted a North Korean foreign ministry delegation headed by the country's deputy foreign minister, Sin Hong-chol, visited Luanda.¹⁰⁸

Jean Bedel Bokassa, the murderous dictator and self-crowned "emperor" of what is today the Central African Republic (CAR), also developed a close relationship with North Korea. After bankrupting his country by lavishing tens of millions of dollars on a 1977 coronation in which he wore ornate costumes modelled on those once worn by Napoleon, "Emperor Bokassa I" entered into a "treaty of peace and friendship" with Kim Il-sung. North Korea agreed to provide the struggling country with agricultural equipment in exchange for high-quality timber, diamonds and coffee. Per a declassified Romanian embassy telegram,¹⁰⁹ the North Koreans – at the CAR's request – agreed to build Bokassa a palace in the style of Pyongyang's Kumsusan Assembly Hall, then Kim's official residence.¹¹⁰ Bokassa was deposed by French paratroopers in 1979.

Elsewhere in Africa, Kim Il-sung developed a friendship with Francisco Macías Nguema, the drug-addled, kleptocratic first – and only – democratically-elected president of Equatorial Guinea. Macias – "a man besieged by demons"¹¹¹ – oversaw a country in which public executions were commonplace and thousands were massacred in a campaign targeting intellectuals and political opponents. Entire families and villages were wiped out.

103 Shim, Elizabeth. 'North Korea Sent Arms and Military Trainers to Congo, U.N. Report Says'. *UPI*, 13 May 2016. http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2016/05/13/North-Korea-sent-arms-and-military-trainers-to-Congo-UN-report-says/6711463159099/

104 Wertz, Daniel, JJ Oh, and Insung Kim. 'DPRK Diplomatic Relations'. Issue Brief. The National Committee on North Korea, August 2016. http://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/NCNK_Issue_Brief_DPRK_Diplomatic_Relations.pdf

105 Bechtol, Bruce E. *The Last Days of Kim Jong-Il: The North Korean Threat in a Changing Era*. Potomac Books, Inc., 2013.

106 Gertz, Bill. 'North Korea Provides Angola with Military Aid, Violates U.N. Sanctions'. *The Washington Times*, 11 June 2015. <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jun/11/north-korea-provides-angola-with-military-aid-viol/>

107 Macdonald, Hamish. 'Angola Discusses Public Security Cooperation with North Korea'. *NK News*, 8 April 2016. <https://www.nknews.org/2016/04/angola-discusses-public-security-cooperation-with-north-korea/>

108 'N. Korea Calls for Resumption of Bilateral Cooperation with Angola'. *Korea Times*, 10 August 2016. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2016/08/485_211544.html

109 "Telegram 066.793 from the Romanian Embassy in Pyongyang to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs," July 17, 1978, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116497>

110 Today, called the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, it has been transformed into a mausoleum for Kim il-sung and his son, Kim Jong-il.

111 Gardner, Dan. 'The Pariah President'. *Ottawa Citizen*, November 6, 2005. <https://web.archive.org/web/20080612161320/http://www.dangardner.ca/Featnov605.html>



Macias' daughter, Monique, recalls that her father and Kim became "good friends and my father would grow to greatly trust Kim Il-sung's judgment and character".¹¹²

"Even though [Equatorial] Guinea was not a communist country and did not share this ideology with North Korea, it turned out that Kim Il-sung and my father nevertheless had a lot in common: both fought against colonial powers and both built their support base through nationalism."¹¹³

In 1979 Macias was overthrown in a coup d'état led by his nephew, Teodoro Obiang Nguema. Charged with genocide, mass murder, embezzlement, human rights violations and treason, Macias was convicted by a military tribunal and executed by firing squad hours later.¹¹⁴ His wife and daughter sought refuge in Pyongyang and Kim took responsibility for them, saying that Macias was "like my brother". Monique Macias spent the next 14 years in Pyongyang, attending school and university there.¹¹⁵

Obiang, one of Africa's longest-surviving dictators, has governed Equatorial Guinea with an iron fist for the past 38 years. Like his uncle, he has killed and exiled opponents and looted the country's coffers. While Equatorial Guinea has vast oil reserves, most of its people continue to live far below the poverty line.¹¹⁶

Obiang has maintained relations with North Korea and its embassy in Equatorial Guinea's capital Malabo – which opened in 1969 – is one of its longest running in Africa. In 2011, Yang Hyong-sop, the vice president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly made a four-day visit to Equatorial Guinea.¹¹⁷ Two years later, Obiang was presented the "First International Kim Jong-il Award" by a North Korean delegation.¹¹⁸ This was followed in 2016 by "amicable" talks between Obiang and Kim Yong-nam, the president of the Supreme People's Assembly and North Korea's nominal head of state. According to Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reports, Obiang pledged his support for North Korea.¹¹⁹

North Korea found another ally in Ethiopia after the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. While Ethiopia under Selassie had enjoyed warm relations with the West, the new socialist military government, commonly known as the Derg, looked to new partners including the Soviet Union and North Korea. Pyongyang helped with agricultural projects, built hydropower plants, worked to improve the local fishing industry and gave the country an interest-free loan to construct a shipyard. By the 1980s, the DPRK was supplying Ethiopia with small arms, tanks, armoured personnel carriers and artillery and was heavily involved in training the country's special forces soldiers.¹²⁰ In 1987, it helped establish a munitions factory near the town of Ambo in central Ethiopia. Another plant was opened in 1989.¹²¹

Ethiopia has been described as "one of the larger conventional arms purchasers from North Korea"¹²² but arms deals between two countries remain, for the most part, shrouded in secrecy. In 2001, Ethiopia was reported to have spent

112 Macias, Monique. 'How I Unintentionally Ended up Spending 15 Years of My Life in North Korea'. *NK News*, February 21, 2014. <https://www.nknews.org/2014/02/how-i-unintentionally-ended-up-spending-15-years-of-my-life-in-north-korea/>

113 Ibid

114 Artucio, Arturo. 'The Trial of Macias in Equatorial Guinea: The Story of a Dictatorship'. International Commission of Jurists and the International University Exchange Fund, 1979. <http://www.opensourceguinea.org/2013/10/artucio-arturo-trial-of-macias-in.html>

115 Ibid

116 Withnall, Adam. 'The Brutal Central African Dictator Whose Playboy Son Faces French Corruption Trial'. *Independent*, September 12, 2016. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/teodoro-obiang-nguema-mbasogo-equatorial-guinea-french-corruption-trial-a7238501.htm>

117 'Visita Del Vicepresidente de La República Popular Democrática de Corea'. *Página Oficial Del Gobierno de La República de Guinea Ecuatorial*, 4 June 2011. <http://www.guineaequatorialpress.com/noticia.php?id=1625>

118 'El Presidente de La República Recibe El Premio Kim Jong-Il'. *Página Oficial Del Gobierno de La República de Guinea Ecuatorial*, 7 August 2013. <http://www.guineaequatorialpress.com/noticia.php?id=4083>

119 Ramani, Samuel. 'North Korea's African Allies'. *The Diplomat*, 4 June 2016. <http://thediplomat.com/2016/06/north-koreas-african-allies/>

120 Oliemans, Joost, and Stijn Mitzer. 'North Korea and Ethiopia, Brothers in Arms'. *NK News*, 4 September 2014. <https://www.nknews.org/2014/09/north-korean-military-support-for-ethiopia/>

121 Berger, Andrea. 'Is Ethiopia Violating UN Sanctions against North Korea?' 38 North. US-Korea Institute at SAIS, 23 December 2014. http://38north.org/2014/12/aberger122314/#_ftn14

122 Gordon, Michael R., and Mark Mazzetti. 'North Koreans Arm Ethiopians as U.S. Assents'. *The New York Times*, 8 April 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/08/world/africa/08ethiopia.html>



as much as \$20-million on North Korean weaponry and spare parts.¹²³ In 2005, the country reported importing arms and ammunition worth \$365,000 from the DPRK – the first and only time it had done so in twenty years.¹²⁴ In April 2007, the *New York Times* reported that three months after pressing the UN to impose strict sanctions¹²⁵ on North Korea, the Bush administration allowed Ethiopia to complete a secret arms purchase with Pyongyang, despite it being in violation of the restrictions.¹²⁶

Later that year, according to a US State Department diplomatic cable leaked by WikiLeaks, Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, allowed US diplomats to visit a munitions factory in the central part of the country which had been established and operated in conjunction with North Korea. The factory produced munitions for small arms and projectiles for rocket propelled grenade launchers and truck mounted rocket launchers. Meles told the Americans that the DPRK was able to “help Ethiopia produce munitions cheaply”, aiding Ethiopia’s participating in African Union-UN peace-keeping operations in Darfur and Liberia, its counter-insurgency operations in the Ogaden and its involvement in Somalia.¹²⁷

At least two North Korean diplomats based in Addis Ababa have defected in recent years. In 2009, a 40-year-old doctor working at the North Korean embassy reportedly sought refuge at the South Korean embassy. Then, in 2013, an unnamed DPRK embassy official who worked in the office of the trade attaché, also approached the South Korean embassy and defected to Seoul.¹²⁸

Zimbabwe’s Robert Mugabe was another African leader who reportedly “fell in love with North Korea’s propaganda and its cult of personality”.¹²⁹ According to some accounts Mugabe visited Pyongyang in 1980 and returned to Harare “a different man”.¹³⁰ Pyongyang provided military assistance, small arms, ammunition, artillery and tanks to Zimbabwe. In 1981, 106 North Korean military instructors helped train the new Zimbabwean army – alongside 160 British military advisers.¹³¹ The North Koreans played a key role in training Mugabe’s ruthless Fifth Brigade, an elite military unit that would later carry out massacres in Matabeleland in which an estimated 20,000 “dissidents” were killed.¹³²

North Korea opened an embassy in Zimbabwe’s capital, Harare. In 1998, the embassy quietly closed its doors. The reasons for the closure have never been disclosed, but there is speculation it was linked to embarrassing evidence of widespread North Korean diplomatic involvement in the smuggling of rhino horn, ivory and other contraband.¹³³

In a 2009 Mugabe reminisced about his relationship with Kim Il-sung, saying he “provide[d] us with training facilities

“South Africa is arguably the most influential country on the African continent with diplomatic ties to North Korea.”

123 Ibid

124 DuPre, Annie, Nicolas Kasprzyk, and Noël Stott. ‘Cooperation between African States and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’. Pretoria: Institute for security Studies, November 2016. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/research-report-dprk.pdf>

125 UN Security Council Resolution 1874 prohibited the purchase of “all arms and related materiel, as well as to financial transactions, technical training, advice, services or assistance related to the provision, manufacture, maintenance or use of such arms and materiel” from North Korea. <http://www.un.org/press/en/2009/sc9679.doc.htm>

126 Gordon, Michael R and Mazzetti, Mark. ‘North Koreans Arm Ethiopians as U.S. Assents’. *The New York Times*, 8 April 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/08/world/africa/08ethiopia.html>

127 ‘Prime Minister Meles on North Korean Arms Relationship’. WikiLeaks, 13 December 2007. https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07ADDISABABA3528_a.html

128 Hotham, Oliver. ‘North Korean Diplomat Defects in Ethiopia’. NK News, 25 October 2013. <https://www.nknews.org/2013/10/north-korean-diplomat-defects-in-ethiopia/>

129 Young, Benjamin R. “The Struggle for Legitimacy: North Korean-African Relations, 1965-1992.”

130 Ibid

131 Hawkins, Tony. “N. Korea to Train Zimbabwe Army.” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 2, 1981. <http://www.csmonitor.com/1981/0902/090248.html>

132 Doran, Stuart. “Mugabe’s Hand in Zim Massacres Exposed.” *The M&G Online*. Accessed January 29, 2017. <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-05-18-mugabes-hand-in-zim-massacres-exposed/>

133 Rademeyer, Julian. “Beyond Borders: Crime, Conservation and Criminal Networks in the Illicit Rhino Horn Trade.” Geneva: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, July 2016. <http://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Global-Initiative-Beyond-Borders-Part2-July-2016-1.pdf>



for our cadres... We thank him today as we did yesterday". In 2013, Nehanda Radio, an independent station reporting on Zimbabwe, claimed that "Mugabe's military henchmen have reportedly signed an arms trade agreement worth millions of dollars with North Korea". Citing an unnamed "senior Zanu-PF Politburo member", the report stated that North Korea would be given access to uranium reserves in the Kanyemba district, 160 miles north of Harare.¹³⁴ No further evidence of the deal has emerged.

Speaking during a visit to Tokyo in 2016, Mugabe suggested that Zimbabwe no longer had close ties with North Korea, but left the door open for renewing bilateral relations. "We have lost connection with North Korea. If North Korea would want to re-establish connections, I suppose we'd reciprocate."¹³⁵

South Africa is arguably the most influential country on the African continent with diplomatic ties to North Korea. The two countries struck up formal bilateral relations in 1998 following a Non-Aligned Movement summit hosted by South Africa in the coastal city of Durban. Aziz Pahad, the South African deputy minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, oversaw the process and subsequently visited Pyongyang. Years later, when asked about the relationship, he chuckled and said that his memory did not serve him well enough to explain it.¹³⁶ In 2013, during an official visit to Pyongyang by Ebrahim Ebrahim, South Africa's deputy minister of International Relations, a press release from his department stated that the "two countries enjoy a cordial relation that dates back to the historic support which DPRK provided during the struggle against colonialism and Apartheid."¹³⁷

That historic support included providing military training to Southern African liberation movements in training camps in Angola. North Korea was also particularly outspoken in its condemnation of South Africa's Apartheid government in the 1980s, regularly issuing statements through the Korean Central News Agency and the party mouthpiece, *Rodong Sinmun*, condemning the "South African racist clique". A typical statement, published in July 1984, referred to the "South African racists' crafty, double-faced tactics"¹³⁸

Aside from its abhorrence of the Apartheid regime and its racist policies, the North's enmity towards pre-1994 South Africa may also have been influenced by that country's participation in the Korean War between 1950 and 1953. South Africa contributed a fighter squadron consisting of 826 pilots and ground support staff. Thirty-seven were killed in action.¹³⁹

While relations between Pyongyang and the post-apartheid South African government have been friendly, South Africa has opposed the North's nuclear ambitions. In a statement issued at the time of Ebrahim's visit, South Africa's Department of International Relations said South Africa "holds very strong views on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, which it conveys to the DPRK on all occasions by indicating that the strength of a country is in its economy, not in its military as one can win war but lose peace."¹⁴⁰

In contrast, South Africa's responses to human rights abuses in North Korea have been markedly muted. In 2014, South Africa abstained from voting on a motion before the United Nations calling for diplomatic and legal action against North Korea over continued human rights abuses that include mass murder, rape, forced abortions, torture,

134 Mushekwe, Itai. 'Zimbabwe in "Arms for Uranium" Pact with North Korea'. *Nehanda Radio*, 19 September 2013. <http://nehandaradio.com/2013/09/19/zimbabwe-in-arms-for-uranium-pact-with-north-korea/>

135 "Zimbabwe: Mugabe Speaks On Loss of Contact With North Korea, Says Willing to Re-Establish Ties." *New Zimbabwe*, March 31, 2016. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201603310075.html>

136 Patel, Khadija. 'South Africa and North Korea: "With Friends like These...".' *Daily Maverick*, 6 November 2013. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-11-06-south-africa-and-north-korea-with-friends-like-these/#.WJXj8H9Py2k>

137 'Deputy Minister Ebrahim Ebrahim Undertakes Official Visit to North Korea'. Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 4 November 2013. <http://www.polity.org.za/print-version/sa-statement-by-the-department-of-international-relations-and-cooperation-deputy-minister-ebrahim-ebrahim-undertakes-official-visit-to-north-korea-04112013-2013-11-04>

138 'Korean Affairs Report'. Washington D.C.: Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 3 August 1984. https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiS5suUyPbRAhWBNBOKHQucAk0QFggjMAE&url=http%3A%2F%2F-handle.dtic.mil%2F100.2%2FADA338533&usg=AFQjCNE2W7nK8iZ3d8cW68Ti5DGFAUO_TA&sig2=667nWwldKj_uzR0gZxihLg

139 *War Memorial of Korea, Seoul*.

140 'Deputy Minister Ebrahim Ebrahim to Undertake an Official Visit to North Korea'. Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 4 November 2013. <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2013/dprk1104.html>



and enslavement. The motion came against the backdrop of a 400-page UN report which concluded that the country's appalling human rights track record "exceeds all others in duration, intensity and horror".¹⁴¹

There is currently little trade between the two countries. According to a recent study published by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), South Africa's trade balance with North Korea was positive with an average surplus of US\$35-million a year between 1996 and 2015. Much of that involved imports and exports of iron, iron ore and steel. International sanctions imposed on the DPRK in 2006 and 2009 "coincided with South Africa's increasing its trade with the DPRK, reaching a peak of US\$180-million in 2010". Recently, though, that has fallen off and in 2015 "South Africa's trade balance with the DPRK was, in fact, negative, with a deficit amounting to \$US2.1-million". The total value of trade between the two countries amounted to just \$US7.5-million in 2010. In 2014, South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs approved sales of live animals to the Pyongyang Zoo, including two white rhinos, two lions, a tiger, three caracal and two servals.¹⁴² The ISS report concluded that North Korea is "no longer a market for South African commodities".¹⁴³

Today, North Korea's embassy in South Africa's capital, Pretoria, is central to its wider activities in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Namibia. Relations with Botswana ended abruptly in 2014, with the country citing "human rights violations" as the reason for its decision to terminate relations. Botswana's vice president, Mogweetsi Masisi, was particularly outspoken, describing North Korea as an "evil nation" in an address to the UN General Assembly in New York.¹⁴⁴

Namibia, South Africa and Mozambique's relations with North Korea also appear to have cooled in recent years. In recognition of Pyongyang's support for the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) during the country's struggle for independence from Apartheid South Africa, bilateral relations were formalised by the post-independence SWAPO government in 1990.¹⁴⁵ By 2005, Namibia had signed arms deals with the DPRK and, as recently as 2015, the DPRK was involved in the construction of a munitions factory near Namibia's capital, Windhoek.¹⁴⁶

North Korea's largest exports to Namibia have been monolithic monuments produced by Pyongyang's Mansudae Art Studio. They include the vast Heroes' Acre complex and an 11-metre high statue of an Unknown Soldier bearing a striking resemblance to Namibia's first president, Sam Nujoma. In Windhoek, Mansudae constructed an oddly-shaped Independence Memorial Museum that locals have dubbed the "Coffee Pot". Mansudae also built Namibia's new State House in 2008 and a memorial to the Herero genocide in Windhoek. The studio was also contracted to do work on several large-scale projects for Namibia's Ministry of Defence and there have been suggestions that it was operating as a front for the Korea Mining Development Trading Corporation (KOMID), which is subject to UN sanctions and has been accused of being Pyongyang's "primary arms dealer and main exporter of goods and equipment related to ballistic missiles and conventional weapons".¹⁴⁷

**"North
Koreans
were operating in
Namibia despite the
decision by government
to terminate their
contract in June
last year."**

141 Allison, Simon. 'SA on North Korea: Realpolitik Trumps Human Rights, Again and Again'. *Daily Maverick*, 19 November 2014. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-11-19-sa-on-north-korea-realpolitik-trumps-human-rights-again-and-again/#.WJgMhH9Py2k>

142 Email correspondence. Department of Environmental Affairs. 19 May 2016.

143 DuPre, Annie, Nicolas Kasprzyk, and Noël Stott. 'Cooperation between African States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea'. Pretoria: Institute for security Studies, November 2016. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/research-report-dprk.pdf>

144 Dam-young, Hong. 'Botswana Severs Ties with N. Korea over Human Rights'. *Korea Times*, 25 September 2016. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2017/02/103_214672.html

145 Wertz, Daniel, JJ Oh, and Insung Kim. 'DPRK Diplomatic Relations'. Issue Brief. The National Committee on North Korea, August 2016. http://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/NCNK_Issue_Brief_DPRK_Diplomatic_Relations.pdf

146 DuPre, Annie, Nicolas Kasprzyk, and Noël Stott. 'Cooperation between African States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea'. Pretoria: Institute for security Studies, November 2016. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/research-report-dprk.pdf>

147 'Korea Mining Development Trading Corporation Listing'. United Nations Security Council. Accessed 9 February 2017. <https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1718/materials/summaries/entity/korea-mining-development-trading-corporation>



News of North Korea's involvement in military projects made headlines in Namibia in March 2016 and, according to one account, "the government scrambled to put together a response" with officials reportedly "confused about the issue at hand as ministers contradicted one another's statements". In one "bizarre" incident, two Japanese journalists reporting on the controversy were detained at an airport and their footage confiscated. The Namibian government claimed that they had been "filming naked Korean labourers taking baths outside their compounds".¹⁴⁸

In April 2016, a Namibian government delegation travelled to New York to offer a "full explanation" to the UN. They claimed they had no knowledge of the links between Mansudae and KOMID and said that contracts with North Korean companies had been put in place prior to the imposition of UN sanctions.¹⁴⁹ Two months later, Namibia announced that it had terminated its relationship with Mansudae and KOMID. But by January 2017, it had become clear that Namibia continued to have ties with the companies. According to a report in the Namibian newspaper, "North Koreans were operating in Namibia despite the decision by government to terminate their contract in June last year". The paper quoted a Mansudae site manager, Erik Sok, claiming that the company was winding up its operations and that most North Korean construction workers had returned to Pyongyang.¹⁵⁰

As North Korea's influence on the continent has waned in recent years, so South Korea has mounted a concerted diplomatic effort to win over African states friendly with Pyongyang. In May 2016, South Korean President Park Geun-hye visited East Africa and held talks with the leaders of Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya. She left a meeting with Uganda's president, Yoweri Museveni, with an agreement that the country would cut all military ties with North Korea. Within days, as many as 60 North Korean military and state security officials had been asked to leave the country.¹⁵¹

"The government is making concerted efforts to cut North Korea's contacts to some of these rather remote parts of Africa, as well as Cuba," Rah Jong-yil, a former South Korean ambassador to London and Tokyo, told Deutsche Welle at the time. "And because of South Korea's economic power, we have much more to offer than the North," he said.¹⁵²

Two months after Park's visit, a North Korean delegation led by Ri Su-yong, Pyongyang's "top diplomat" and the DPRK's former foreign affairs minister, travelled to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Namibia, Angola and South Africa in an apparent effort to shore up relations. But the meetings were markedly low-key. Namibia, for instance, downplayed Ri's visit, saying that he was a guest of the Angolan ruling party and had asked to pass through Namibia en route to South Africa. Namibia's deputy Prime Minister, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, said it was simply a "friendly visit" and a "solidarity visit".¹⁵³

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ri met with Henri Mova Sakanyi, the general secretary of the country's ruling People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy (PPRD). He also held talks with the African National Congress's deputy secretary general, Jessie Duarte, in Johannesburg. There were no press statements and the meeting went largely unnoticed, aside from a brief report on the Korean Central News Agency website which quoted Duarte as expressing her "deep" gratitude for the DPRK's support, adding: "Whatever the situation, the ANC will always remember the Korean people who proactively supported the struggle of the people of South Africa, and fully

148 Weylandt, Max. 'Is It All over between Namibia and North Korea?' *African Arguments*, 13 July 2016. <http://africanarguments.org/2016/07/13/is-it-all-over-between-namibia-and-north-korea/>

149 'Namibia Offers Full Explanation to UN As Govt Terminates Korean Contracts'. *New Era*, 1 July 2016. <https://www.newera.com.na/2016/07/01/namibia-offers-full-explanation-un-govt-terminates-korean-contracts/>

150 Kahiurika, Ndanki. 'North Koreans Rehire Namibians'. *The Namibian*, 23 January 2017. <http://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?page=read&id=50253>

151 Ryall, Julian. 'North Korea Losing African, South American Allies'. *Deutsche Welle*, 21 June 2016. <http://www.dw.com/en/north-korea-losing-african-south-american-allies/a-19344851>

152 Ibid

153 Angula, Sonja. 'North Koreans Jet in for "solidarity Visit"'. *Windhoek Observer*, 24 August 2016. <http://www.observer.com.na/index.php/national/6807-north-koreans-jet-in-for-solidarity-visit>



support the [Workers' Party of Korea] in its struggle for defending the sovereignty of the country. We will positively learn from the experience of the WPK which achieved the single-minded unity that is stronger than 'nuclear weapon'".¹⁵⁴ The Korean Central News Agency has in the past been accused of fabricating quotes attributed to foreign leaders.¹⁵⁵

Today, North Korea has embassies in ten sub-Saharan countries; South Africa, Angola, Tanzania, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda, Guinea and Equatorial Guinea. Many of the embassies that opened their doors in the 1960s, '70s and '80s have closed as funds to run them have dried up, bilateral relations have weakened and significant numbers of diplomats have been implicated in criminal activity, particularly the illicit trade in rhino horn and ivory.

154 'Talks between Vice-Chairman of C.C., WPK and Deputy Secretary General of ANC Held'. *Korean Central News Agency*, 27 August 2016. <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2016/201608/news27/20160827-26ee.html>

155 'Further "praise" From Maltese Politicians in North Korean News'. *The Malta Independent*, 24 April 2012. <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2012-04-24/news/further-praise-from-maltese-politicians-in-north-korean-news-309093/>



Conclusion

Increasingly stringent economic sanctions and isolationist policies designed to cripple North Korea's nuclear weapons capabilities will likely fuel the expansion of the regime's illicit activities and state-sponsored criminal networks. As legitimate revenue sources dry up, the quest for dark money to bolster the Kim regime is almost certain to intensify.

North Korea has a long history of involvement in criminal activity. Its smuggling networks, front companies and state-sponsored criminal actors are sophisticated, efficient and adept at circumventing sanctions, laws and regulations.

The persistent abuse of diplomatic immunity by North Korean diplomats and agents poses a particularly vexing problem for law enforcement. The diplomatic privileges enshrined in the Vienna Conventions on diplomatic and consular relations were never intended to give licence to individuals to flout national and local laws and regulations. They were intended to safeguard the efficient and effective performance of official missions on behalf of their governments and ensure diplomats are not subject to arbitrary arrest, detention and harassment.

But for far too many North Korean officials, a diplomatic passport, a diplomatic bag and the inviolability of an embassy presents a tantalising opportunity to commit, what is in effect, the perfect crime.

The Vienna Convention does offer some recourse to law enforcement officials if they suspect that a diplomat or embassy is smuggling contraband. For instance, a diplomatic bag "may contain only diplomatic documents or articles intended for official use". And while a diplomat's personal baggage is usually exempt from inspection it can be searched "if there are serious grounds for presuming that it contains articles not covered by the exemptions ... or articles, the import or export of which, is prohibited by the law or controlled by the quarantine regulations of the receiving State". The diplomat, or an "authorised representative", has to be present if an inspection is carried out.

However, few law enforcement officials are likely to risk the wrath of their superiors – and their governments – by stopping, searching or arresting someone carrying a diplomatic passport, even if the evidence is overwhelming.

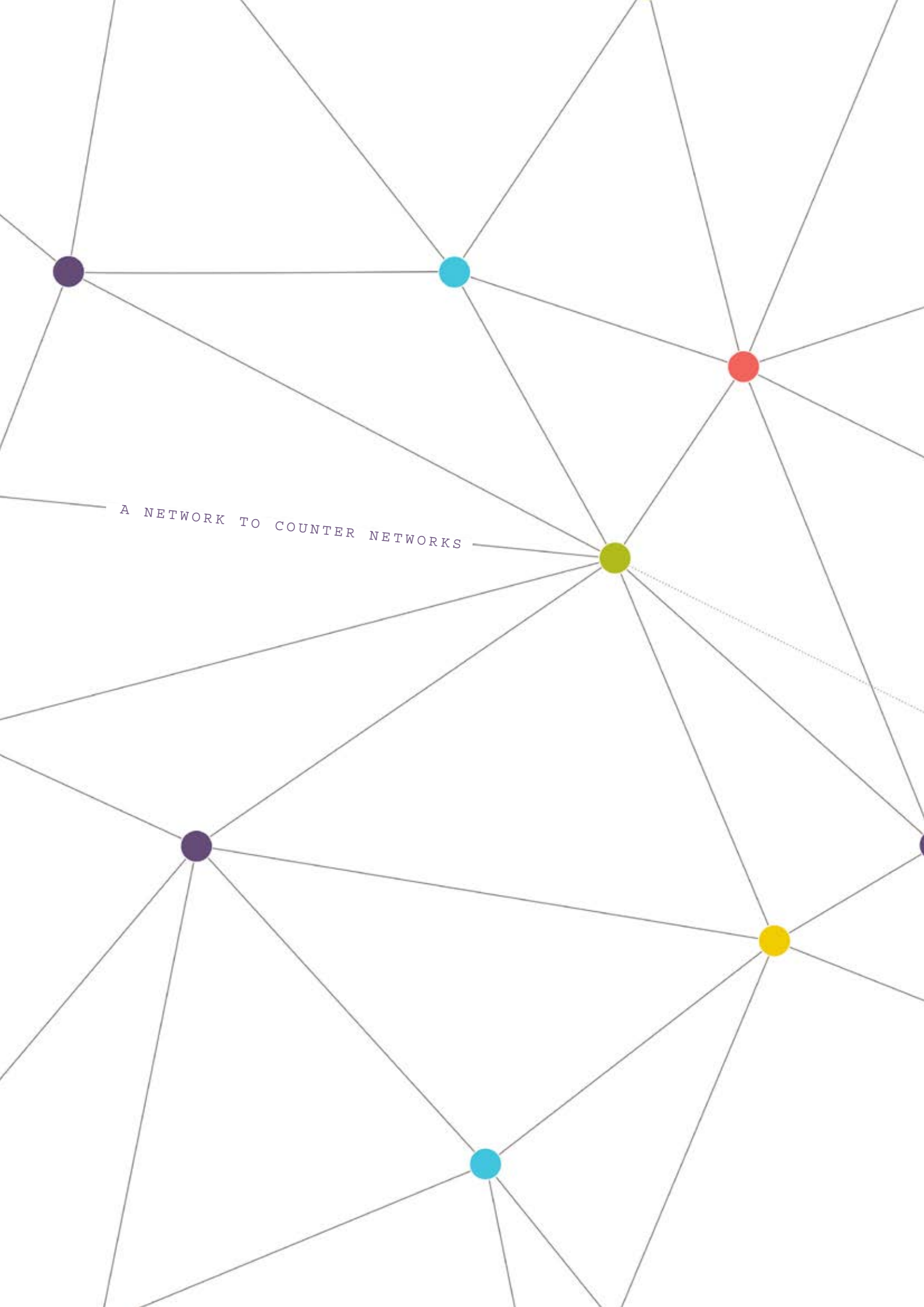
The UN has endeavoured to address some of these concerns in sanctions resolutions which require member states to reduce the number of staff affiliated to North Korean diplomatic missions, limit North Korean embassies, diplomats and consular officials to one bank account each and prevent the use of real estate in member states' territories for any non-diplomatic or consular activities.¹⁵⁶

Historically though, few African countries with long-standing ties to Pyongyang have demonstrated a willingness to act pre-emptively and decisively. Some routinely turn a blind-eye to the activities of the diplomats and embassies on their soil until they become too egregious or embarrassing to ignore, or until they are finally pressured into taking action.

The extent of North Korea's criminal activities in Africa and the involvement of embassy personnel is still little known and little understood. The evidence presented in this report, coupled with the testimony of high-level defectors and government officials in Africa and Asia with knowledge of criminal activity in Africa, suggests that it is far more concerted and widespread than previously thought. These activities pose a very real threat and one that requires far more attention from law enforcement and intelligence agencies on the continent.

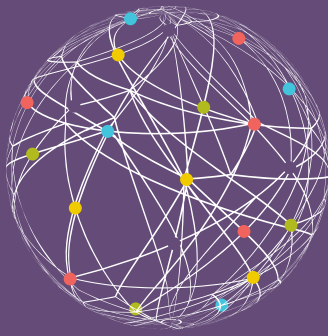
156 'Resolution 2321 (2016)'. United Nations Security Council, 30 November 2016. https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2321%282016%29





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