

# CROSS-CURRENTS



## EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

### **Not There for the Nutmeg: North Korean Advisors in Grenada and Pyongyang's Internationalism, 1979–1983**

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#### **Abstract**

This article looks at North Korea's relationship with Grenada, a small Caribbean spice island, from 1979 to 1983 as a case study of Pyongyang's socialist internationalism during the Cold War era. Compared to capitalist globalization's emphasis on profits, markets, and competition, socialist internationalism gave priority to sacrifice, comradeship, and solidarity. As a postcolonial Eastern-bloc nation with one foot in the socialist Second World and the other foot in the anticolonial Third World, North Korea sent advisors, military specialists, equipment, and supplies to recently decolonized nations in Africa, southern Asia, and Latin America as a way to export its peculiar brand of anti-imperialism and spread its image abroad as the legitimate Korean government. The North Korean leadership viewed the socialist Grenadian government as brave revolutionaries fighting U.S. imperialism in the Caribbean. Thus, the North Koreans offered large amounts of free assistance to the Grenadian government. However, in October 1983, U.S. armed forces invaded Grenada and removed the socialist leadership from power. North Korea's support of the distant Grenadian Revolution demonstrates the extent to which the regime in Pyongyang committed itself financially, politically, and ideologically to the tenets of socialist internationalism.

Keywords: North Korea, Pyongyang, Caribbean, Cold War, foreign relations

#### **Introduction**

On October 25, 1983, American military forces invaded the Caribbean island of Grenada during Operation Urgent Fury, the first major U.S. military action since the Vietnam War ended in the 1970s. The U.S. forces hoped to overthrow the socialist government of this tiny spice island and thwart the advance of communism in the Caribbean region (Clegg, Lewis, and Williams 2015; Raines 2010). When American forces landed on Grenada, an island famous for its nutmeg, they encountered a variety of advisors, doctors, teachers, engineers, and officials from the Communist bloc sent by their respective governments to assist the Grenadian Revolution and promote

socialist internationalism. In addition to finding Cubans, Russians, East Germans, and Bulgarians on the island, the Americans unexpectedly discovered fifteen North Korean agricultural advisors (Kaufman 1983). Soon after the U.S. forces took over the island and removed the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) from power, the North Koreans, along with their Communist-bloc allies, fled to Cuba. When the North Koreans landed at the airport in Havana, Western reporters described the Cubans on board as stepping out of the airplane holding their fists rebelliously in the air. However, the North Koreans had vastly different reactions to leaving Grenada. They cried into their handkerchiefs as they walked onto the tarmac (Pryor 1990, 163–164).

Why were the North Koreans, thousands of miles from home, so emotional over the end of a socialist revolution on a tiny Caribbean island? Using materials from the U.S. National Archives, declassified Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) documents, captured Grenadian government documents housed at Georgetown University's Special Collections Center, South Korean Foreign Ministry documents, North Korean press reports, and an interview with a former high-ranking Grenadian government official, I explore this question and use the case of the short-lived alliance between North Korea and Grenada as a way to explain North Korean leader Kim Il-sung's internationalist foreign policy during the Cold War era.

Sociologist Catherine Krull defines internationalism as “the promotion of increased economic and political cooperation amongst nations” (Krull 2014, 1). Although this definition gives a general sense of the term, “internationalism” or “socialist internationalism,” used interchangeably in this article, refers to unconditional aid in the form of equipment, labor, or military assistance given from one established communist government to a nascent leftist-oriented government, typically in a recently decolonized and newly independent Third World country, for little or no payment.<sup>1</sup> Socialist internationalism prioritizes cooperation over profit and solidarity over development. As historian Toni Weis explains, “Often used in deliberate opposition to the Western concept of ‘development,’ ‘solidarity’ was meant to describe a relationship among equals, based on the idea of reciprocity and the membership in a shared moral community” (Weis 2011, 352).

In 1986, Kim Il-sung explained that aid from Western countries was an underhanded neocolonial maneuver meant to exploit recently decolonized countries, and that nonaligned powers, such as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), needed to form a unified

anti-imperialist front to assist newly independent nations in their fledgling nation-building projects. Kim said, “By entangling many developing countries in the neocolonialist web of so-called ‘aid’ and ‘cooperation,’ the imperialists now have seized the economic lifelines of these countries, made them nothing more than their sources of raw materials and their markets and grown rich by squeezing tremendous amounts of profit out of them” (Kim 1986). Whereas some studies portray North Korean soldiers, agricultural advisors, and engineers sent abroad during the Cold War era as proxies for the Soviet Union, the North Korean DPRK government engaged in an internationalist foreign policy of its own accord (Bechtol 2013, 137; Y. Kim 1980). The Kim family regime provided skilled laborers, military advisors, and equipment (often free of charge) to newly independent, left-leaning countries in the Third World as a way to foster solidarity, build friendship, and promote the cause of international socialism. Internationalist North Korea of the Cold War era stands in stark contrast to the dominant portrayals of contemporary North Korea as isolationist, hermitic, and rogue. This article historicizes North Korea and acknowledges the regime as a dynamic, evolving entity that adapts its foreign policy based on a combination of internal and external conditions.

Whereas historians have highlighted Cuba’s internationalist activities during the Cold War era, North Korea has remained out of the purview of scholarly discourse related to socialist internationalism (Hatzky 2015; Gleijeses 2002, 2013). By analyzing Grenada as a site of North Korean solidarity, this article situates North Korea as an active agent in the communist tradition of internationalism during the Cold War era, which is vastly different from the DPRK’s current status as a nuclear-armed pariah state. The only other study that has focused on North Korean-Grenadian relations is a chapter in Dae-Ho Byun’s 1991 book, *North Korea’s Foreign Policy: The Juche Ideology and the Challenge of Gorbachev’s New Thinking*. Whereas Byun’s chapter on the DPRK-Grenada relationship focuses primarily on North Korea’s independent foreign policy, my study concentrates on the Kim family regime’s solidarity with the PRG as being representative of Pyongyang’s socialist internationalism.

As a self-described Marxist-Leninist state during the Cold War era, the DPRK felt obligated to support revolutions abroad, especially in the recently decolonized Third World, in order to advance the cause of world communism. As Marx originally proposed, socialist revolutions around the world would eventually lead to global communism and the dissolution of the nation-state. Not merely an empty rhetorical device during the Cold War era, socialist

internationalism was realized on an everyday level. It involved the exchange of ideas, materials, goods, and people across national borders and became one of the earliest forms of globalization (Méhilli 2017).

Grenada serves as an important and unique case of North Korean internationalism because the PRG threatened the U.S. government to the extent that U.S. military forces invaded the island in 1983. Thus, Grenada should not be downplayed as merely another Third World nation with a socialist government. The Grenadian Revolution was important enough to attract the attention of a small mountainous republic on the other side of the world, North Korea, and the regional hegemon, the United States.

### **Internationalism**

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the Kim family regime routinely asked small Third World nations to support Pyongyang in the international competition with Seoul for diplomatic recognition as the legitimate Korean government and depicted the South Korean government as a puppet of the United States (Young 2018). As long as a Third World government had representation in the United Nations, the size of the country was irrelevant to Kim Il-sung. Thus, it is no surprise that Pyongyang spent millions of dollars on lobbying during the 1970s and 1980s. According to estimates provided by foreign diplomats posted in Pyongyang, North Korea spent more than U.S.\$100 million by 1982 on its lobbying efforts abroad.<sup>2</sup> Kim Il-sung primarily focused his diplomatic efforts on fostering solidarity with newly independent states in the Third World as a way to combat the growing popularity of an economically resurgent South Korea during the late 1970s and 1980s.

Although the competition with Seoul for diplomatic recognition was critical to Pyongyang's foreign policy-making during the Cold War era, internationalism also played an important role. Kim Il-sung was able to balance nationalism with what he saw as the duty of socialist nations to assist one another in the struggle against U.S. imperialism. In 1968, Kim wrote, "The peoples of the countries making revolution should join efforts to tear left and right arms from U.S. imperialism, tear off its left and right legs and behead it eventually everywhere it stretches out its crooked hands of aggression" (Kim 1968). Kim did not see competition for diplomatic recognition and internationalism as mutually exclusive activities. Rather, he deemed them complementary, as assisting the development of Third World nations was a way to

showcase the DPRK's internationalist principles and earn the support of these governments in international forums.

Whereas scholars mull over whether North Korea is a Stalinist, neo-Confucian, corporatist state or a race-based, paranoid ultra-nationalist one, the internationalist aspect of Kim Il-sung's foreign policy has been downplayed in the historiography (Cumings 2013; Lankov 2013 Myers 2010). Kim asserted that internationalism was a fundamental role of the Korean revolution and could not be ignored. Kim explained, "It would be wrong to advocate patriotism alone and neglect internationalist solidarity. For the victory of the Korean revolution and for the great cause of the international working class, we should strengthen solidarity with the Soviet people, our liberator and helper, and with the peoples of all the socialist countries. This is our sacred internationalist duty" (Kim 1955). During the Cold War era, North Korea rarely requested payment for its development programs abroad. From helping to build factories in sub-Saharan Africa to constructing irrigation systems in Grenada, the North Korean government was genuine in its efforts to further the development of Third World countries.<sup>3</sup>

Historian Charles Armstrong (2013) argues that North Korea had "little profile" in Latin America and the Caribbean region during the Cold War era.<sup>4</sup> However, that statement is inaccurate, because the DPRK actively sought ties with many Latin American and Caribbean governments in an effort to extend its influence to the Western hemisphere and be on the front line of battle against U.S. imperialism.<sup>5</sup> In particular, North Korea established close ties with Cuba, Peru, and Nicaragua (Lee 1987). The North Koreans also disseminated propaganda to anticommunist governments in the Caribbean in order to provoke domestic instability. For example, Eugenia Charles, the former prime minister of the Caribbean nation of Dominica, told a *New York Times* reporter in November 1983 that "North Korea pays a Dominican \$1,500 a month just to disrupt things, spreading this or that rumor, trying to persuade people to their line of thinking that perhaps we should not be friends with the Western countries and that the only hope is the Eastern bloc" (Weintraub 1983). After hearing that the North Koreans were planning to help rebuild the electrical grid in Dominica after Hurricane David in October 1979, the Deputy Director General of the South Korean (Republic of Korea, or ROK) Foreign Ministry's American Affairs Bureau told a U.S. official that he "marveled at the financial commitment North Korea was making in the [Latin American and Caribbean] area."<sup>6</sup> The DPRK's Latin American and Caribbean outreach program even impressed its chief rivals, the South Koreans.

## The First Korean-Grenadian Encounters

North Korea's forays into the Caribbean region did not begin in Grenada but rather in Guyana, an English-speaking nation in South America. As historian Moe Taylor investigates in an article on North Korean-Guyanese ties, the North Koreans exported the Mass Games, a massive gymnastics event designed to promote collectivism, to the former British colony in 1980. According to Taylor (2015), "North Korean-style Mass Games became a major facet of the cultural and political life of Guyana" during the early 1980s.

In addition to exporting the Mass Games to Guyana, North Korean officials also disseminated propaganda and visited Jonestown, the infamous 1970s socialist utopian cult located in the Guyanese jungle and led by the eccentric American Jim Jones, who forced his followers to commit mass suicide by drinking a cyanide-laced beverage in November 1978 (Young 2013). In a speech earlier that year, Jones said the North Koreans "have been very friendly, and also used to visit us. Their embassy has been very, very appreciative of our program."<sup>7</sup> Jones also lauded the success of North Korea's Juche ideology. He explained, "The DPRK, communist North Korea, attributes its advances to a strong political line summed up in the Korean word, 'juche,' j-u-c-h-e. The word does not have an equivalent in English. Roughly it can be translated as self-reliance." Jones continued, "Guyana gives much credit to that word and they are very good friends of the DPRK. As developed by President Kim Il Sung, juche, the concept stands on three legislative [*sic*], political independence, economic self-reliance, and military self-defense."<sup>8</sup>

North Korean influence in Guyana encompassed cultural, diplomatic, and ideological fronts and would later serve as a model for Kim Il-sung's outreach in the Caribbean. In fact, Ri Jon-ok, the DPRK ambassador in Guyana, also served as the nonresident ambassador to Grenada (Byun 1991, 126).<sup>9</sup> The North Korean embassy in Guyana served as the base of DPRK operations in the Caribbean region and was a vital agent in fostering close relations between the PRG of Grenada and the Korean Workers' Party.

The first Korean-Grenadian encounter was initiated by Seoul, not Pyongyang. On April 28, 1976, two years after Grenada gained formal independence from Great Britain, Grenada's first prime minister, Eric Gairy, flew to Seoul, where the South Korean leadership courted the new leader. According to U.S. officials, "The [South] Koreans were clearly trying to make an impression on this leader of a country with the population the size of one of Seoul's smaller sub-

districts.”<sup>10</sup> During a dinner speech in honor of Gairy’s visit, South Korean Prime Minister Kyu Hah Choi said, “Prime Minister Gairy is an outstanding statesman of the young and dynamic country, Grenada, known as the gem of the Caribbean.” Choi added, “In a relatively short period of time since her independence in 1974, Grenada has made remarkable progress in political, social, and economic fields and gained a respected place among members of the international community under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Gairy.”<sup>11</sup> Taking advantage of South Korea’s enthusiasm in developing relations with a recently independent Caribbean country, which would typically be within North Korea’s sphere of influence, Gairy asked the South Korean government for a large amount of developmental assistance. The inter-Korean competition for diplomatic recognition reached all corners of the globe, even in newly formed Caribbean countries that were thousands of miles away from the Korean peninsula.

Gairy explained that Grenada still lacked an adequate airport, wanted to improve rural education through the construction of an “audiovisual center,” and needed more farming equipment for agricultural development and plows, tractors, jeeps, and land rovers for road construction projects. The South Koreans took Gairy sightseeing around South Korea for four days during which he visited Kyung Hee University in Seoul, observed a tae kwon do demonstration at the Special Forces Operations Command, and toured the Hyundai Shipyard and the Pohang Iron and Steel Company. He also “laid a wreath at the memorial of the Unknown Soldiers and visited the grave of the late Madame Park Chung Hee to pay his respects.”<sup>12</sup> By visiting military and industrial facilities, the South Korean government sought to impress Gairy with its military strength and recent economic success.

Gairy and South Korean president Park Chung Hee concluded the visit with an agreement stipulating that the ROK government would give Grenada U.S. \$200,000 in financial assistance, conduct technical training with two or three Grenadians, provide government scholarships to two or three Grenadian students, and establish a mutually beneficial fishing operation between South Korea’s Wonyang Moolsan Company and the Grenadian government.<sup>13</sup> Chief of the ROK Foreign Ministry’s Latin American Division Hwang Yong-Chae noted, “The ROK does not expect much in return [from Grenada] except from the fisheries, but they expect Gairy will act as an advocate of the ROK position among his Caribbean colleagues, especially the states of Anguilla, St. Lucia, and Dominica.”<sup>14</sup> The South Korean government understood that in order to earn the support of newly independent countries vis-à-vis North Korea in international forums,

providing financial assistance was necessary. As the South Korean economy developed rapidly during the late 1970s and the 1980s, Seoul was able to provide funds to developing countries that prioritized economic development over political alignment (Woo 1991).

In March 1979, a coup led by Maurice Bishop removed Gairy from power while he was visiting the United Nations. Bishop, the revolutionary socialist leader of the New Jewel Movement, subsequently became the new prime minister of Grenada, named his administration the People's Revolutionary Government, and developed close ties with Eastern-bloc nations. A journalist from Barbados claimed that Bishop told him that he “desired friendly relations with all countries ‘except Chile and South Korea,’ who, Bishop claimed, gave all-out support to the corrupt Gairy regime.”<sup>15</sup> In the summer of 1979, Grenadian envoys led by Minister of Communications Selwyn Strachan visited the DPRK for seven days (Pryor 1990, 163; Byun 1991, 124). During this visit, the Grenadian delegation toured the Pyongyang Metro, the birthplace of Kim Il-sung at Mangyongdae, the Central Industrial-Agricultural Exhibition Hall, the Museum of the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War, the demilitarized zone (DMZ), and Mount Paektu. The Grenadians were “impressed by the products displayed” at the Exhibition Hall. In the countryside, Strachan was particularly enthralled with “the agricultural programs he had seen as worthy of emulation” and the “well-organized and cultivated land along the roads.” He specifically asked the North Koreans for assistance in developing Grenada’s agriculture and fishing industry (Byun 1991, 127–128). The North Koreans “promised to give aid to Grenada without hesitation” (Byun 1991, 124).

Strachan also met Kim Il-sung during this trip and described the North Korean leader as having “a very strong personality” and being “very dynamic.” Kim explained North Korea’s Juche idea to him, but Strachan thought “the character of Juche wasn’t different from what we knew as socialism.” According to Strachan, Kim asked a lot of questions about the Grenadian Revolution and promised to assist in any way he could. Kim did not know a lot about Grenada, so Strachan provided historical background information. The two features of the North Korean system that impressed Strachan the most were its discipline and efficiency. After he landed at Pyongyang airport, Strachan’s first impression of North Korea was that it was “well-organized.” Later, he saw this organization in practice when he watched North Korean workers build a hospital. Strachan said, “What impressed me was the organization of the workers in completing that objective and how they energized those workers. They used music to motivate the workers.”

Strachan added, “The way music was utilized to drive the workers was impressive.” When he first saw the hospital, it was only half complete, and in a matter of days, it was completely finished. The “efficiency” of these workers impressed Strachan. The precision of the North Korean Mass Games also captivated him, and he remarked that the “training was amazing.” Strachan unsuccessfully tried to bring North Korean-style gymnastics back to Grenada.<sup>16</sup>



Figure 1. Talks are held between President Kim Il-sung and Prime Minister Maurice Bishop.  
*Source: Pyongyang Times, April 13, 1983.*

The North Korean government viewed agricultural development as being of the utmost importance to the success of the Grenadian Revolution. Therefore, an official economic and technical agreement was signed between the two governments on April 13, 1983, during Bishop’s visit to the DPRK (Byun 1991, 154) (figure 1).

The agreement specified that North Korea would ship two hundred tons of cement, three cases of suction hoses, four cases of rubber plates, one case of water pumps, one case of engines, one case of bolt nuts, three cases of packing materials, two cases of nozzles, five cases of valves, four cases of pipe parts, and forty-three cases of plastic pipes to Grenada (Byun 1991, 153). The North Koreans also agreed to deliver thirty 28-horsepower diesel tractors; thirty sets of plows, harrows, trailers, and repair tools; three thousand pairs of boots and overalls; and two thousand

pitchforks, shovels, hoes, and rakes. The North Koreans were planning to design a system capable of irrigating four hundred hectares (988 acres) of land and train Grenadian nationals in operating and maintaining the irrigation system (Byun 1991, 155). This act of solidarity suggests that the North Koreans were not economic opportunists looking for hard currency in assisting Grenada. In addition, Grenada had officially recognized the DPRK, soon after Bishop's overthrow of Gairy in 1979, and the DPRK had already attained what it sought the most from newly independent countries: diplomatic recognition.<sup>17</sup> The North Korean government clearly wanted the nascent Grenadian Revolution to succeed in building socialism.

Dae-Ho Byun argues that North Korea ended up footing the bill for the shipping charges and agricultural advisors because it desperately needed the PRG's support on the "Korean Question" at the 1983 Seventh Non-Aligned Movement Summit Meeting in New Delhi, India (Byun 1991, 154). However, the PRG had been a member of the Non-Aligned Movement since 1979 and attended its 1979 Sixth Summit Meeting in Havana, where member nations expressed their support for the peaceful reunification of the two Koreas and the withdrawal of foreign forces from South Korean soil.<sup>18</sup> The PRG-DPRK relationship had grown stronger after the Sixth Summit Meeting, and there were no indications that the Grenadians would retract their support for Korean reunification in international forums. Although national interests were certainly considered to some degree, North Korea's aid to the PRG was primarily based on the tenets of internationalism.

Soon after the establishment of the PRG, the North Korean press praised the success of the Grenadian Revolution and the severing of diplomatic ties between Bishop's new government and South Korea. According to a *Pyongyang Times* report on Bishop's meeting with the DPRK nonresident ambassador to Grenada, Ri Jon-ok, on July 23, 1980, Bishop referenced the recent Gwangju Massacre in denouncing "the South Korean military fascist clique's brutal suppression of the people and stressed that the foreign troops must withdraw from South Korea."<sup>19</sup> Bishop also wanted the North Korean ambassador to tell Kim Il-sung that he would not seek ties in the future with the ROK and would actively support the cause of Korean reunification. That year, the DPRK government pressured the Grenadians to take "appropriate solidarity action" in response to the proclamation of the "Emergency Martial Law" in South Korea.<sup>20</sup> Bishop's government was quickly reversing the policies of the previous pro-South Korean Grenadian government. Kim Il-sung responded by praising the "revolutionary stand" taken by the PRG and offered his

“full support and encouragement” to Bishop “in defending the revolutionary gains and building a new, prosperous Grenada.”<sup>21</sup>

The North Korean government also paid close attention to domestic events in Grenada. On June 19, 1980, anti-PRG forces planted a bomb at a political rally that leaders of the PRG government attended. Three people died, and more than a hundred people were injured, at the event (Ray and Schaap 1984, 4). Kim Il-sung quickly denounced the “criminal acts of the imperialists and their cat paws trying to block the advancement of the people of Grenada in the building of a new society.” The North Korean press printed Kim’s “message of consolation” to Grenadian Prime Minister Bishop on the front page. The message said, “Upon receiving the news that the counter-revolutionary forces committed a despicable conspiracy against you some days ago but you were safe, I offer my heartfelt consolation to you.”<sup>22</sup> The North Korean leader backed up his rhetorical support for the Grenadian Revolution with financial, military, and technical assistance.

In addition to supplying the PRG with construction materials and agricultural advisors, the North Koreans also “offered to help build a 15,000-seat stadium, a party headquarters building, a fruit-processing factory, and two fishing boats” in Grenada, as noted in a CIA report.<sup>23</sup> According to Dae-Ho Byun, the North Koreans agreed to design and supply the equipment and materials for the fruit-processing factory. They also agreed to deliver two 75-horsepower diesel engines and the equipment and machinery for building two boats. Byun adds that the North Koreans agreed to send five thousand tons of cement and five hundred tons of steel to aid in the construction of the international airport in Grenada (Byun 1991, 155–158). The North Koreans also pledged to build a “tower of revolution” and a revolutionary battle site memorial in Grenada to commemorate the PRG’s 1979 revolution.<sup>24</sup> The North Koreans had experience building statues, monuments, and memorials in the Third World, since Pyongyang regularly sent its artists and sculptors abroad, especially to Africa, during the 1980s and 1990s (Kirkwood 2011).

Most importantly, the North Koreans also agreed to provide a large number of weapons to the PRG. As early as May 1979, the North Koreans were sending military jeeps to the Grenadians.<sup>25</sup> In late 1981, the North Koreans sent five military advisors to the island to instruct Grenadians in small-arms training (Bermudez 1990, 57).<sup>26</sup> According to documents captured by American military forces during Operation Urgent Fury, Maurice Bishop and Kim Il-sung signed

a secret military agreement on April 14, 1983, during Bishop's visit to the DPRK (figure 2).<sup>27</sup> This "free offer of military assistance" by the North Koreans gave the Grenadians U.S. \$12 million worth of weapons and ammunition, including a thousand automatic rifles with three hundred and sixty thousand rounds of ammunition, fifty light machine guns, thirty heavy machine guns with sixty thousand rounds of ammunition, fifty rocket-propelled grenade launchers with five hundred rounds of ammunition, two hundred hand grenades, two coast guard boats, six thousand military uniforms, six thousand knapsacks, and five "ultrashort wave wireless sets" (Taubman 1983, cited in Bermudez 1990, 57fn120). The Americans believed Communist forces were planning to make Grenada into a Caribbean arms-trafficking hub for leftist revolutionaries in the Western hemisphere.<sup>28</sup>

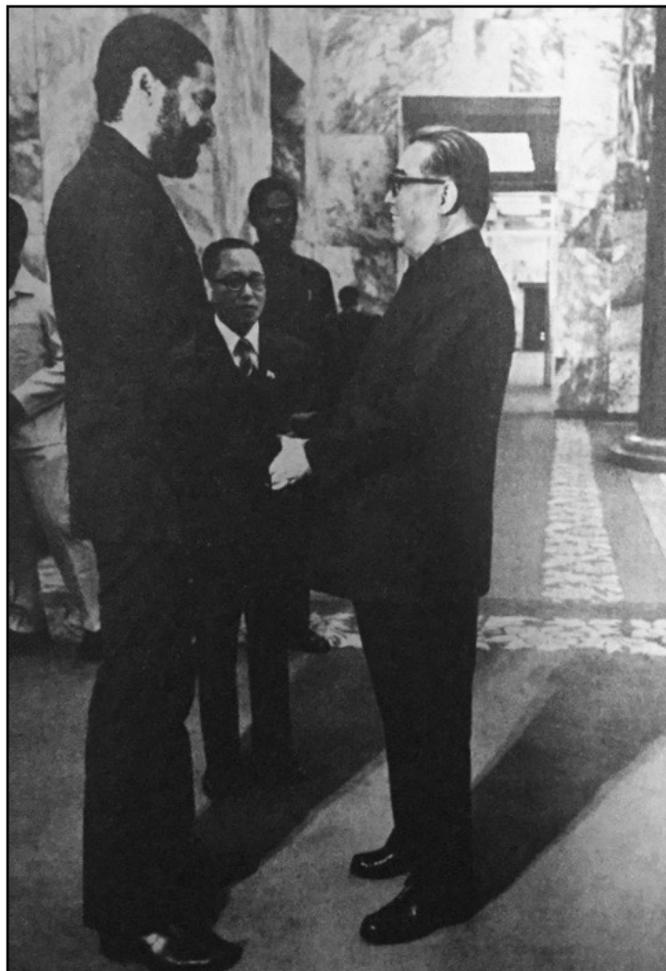


Figure 2. President Kim Il-sung shakes hands with Prime Minister Maurice Bishop. *Source: Pyongyang Times*, April 13, 1983.

During Maurice Bishop's visit to the DPRK, one hundred thousand North Koreans lined the streets of Pyongyang to enthusiastically welcome the Grenadian delegation, and a welcome banquet was held at Kumsusan Assembly Hall on April 10 in which the North Korean and Grenadian leaders spoke (figure 3). Kim Il-sung praised the "triumphant advance of the Grenadian revolution [which] patiently proves that Latin America is no longer the 'tranquil backyard' of U.S. imperialism and that the new era of *chajusong* [independence] when the masses are masters of history is forcefully unfolding in this part of the world as well."<sup>29</sup> Bishop, in his speech, celebrated the four years of close relations between the PRG and DPRK governments and commended Kim's Juche ideology. Bishop said that North Korea's successes in industry, agriculture, health, and education are attributable to "your Party's progressive and enlightened principles embodied in the Juche Idea which so correctly guide your political, economic, and social policies."<sup>30</sup>



Figure 3. North Koreans line the streets of Pyongyang to welcome the Grenadian delegation.  
 Source: *Pyongyang Times*, April 13, 1983.

During his trip to North Korea, Bishop toured the Grand People's Study House, the Pyongyang Metro, and the Mansudae Art Theater. The North Korean hosts also took the Grenadian delegation to the Revolutionary Martyrs' Cemetery, which is dedicated to Koreans who fought against the Japanese during the colonial period, and Mangyongdae, the supposed birthplace of Kim Il-sung.<sup>31</sup> At the cemetery, Bishop laid a wreath and said, "On behalf of the revolutionary people of Grenada, I pay the highest tribute to the great revolutionary heroes of Korea [who] have laid the highest sacrifice in defense of the motherland."<sup>32</sup> Bishop and Kim signed a joint communiqué that condemned the South Korean "fascist clique," U.S. imperialism, Israeli Zionism, and the white minority rule governments in southern Africa. The two leaders seemingly shared many similar viewpoints on foreign affairs.<sup>33</sup>

Despite North Korea's generous supply of military supplies to the PRG and the warm relations between Bishop and Kim, some Grenadian leaders expressed concern about the DPRK's oppressive political system.<sup>34</sup> Hudson Austin, a Grenadian military commander who overthrew Prime Minister Bishop in a military coup six days before the U.S. invasion, said after a trip to the DPRK in September 1983 that he "was surprised to see how deep the personality cult was in Korea, where the leader is almost worshipped as a God" (Pryor 1990, 163). The Grenadian government may have been thankful for the DPRK's military assistance, but many in the leadership did not wish to model their nation on Kim Il-sung's brand of totalitarian socialism.

Because U.S. forces invaded Grenada in late October 1983, the North Koreans never designed or sent supplies for the party headquarters building, fishing boats, the fruit-processing factory, or the monuments on the island. However, according to Selwyn Strachan, two North Korean technical advisors were doing preliminary work on the construction of the national stadium and were at a hotel when U.S. forces landed.<sup>35</sup> There is also evidence that the Grenadian military did receive some of the North Korean military equipment as a CIA report stated that the quantities and types of weapons captured in Grenada were consistent with those listed in the military agreements with Eastern-bloc nations.<sup>36</sup> Richard Jacobs, Grenada's ambassador to the Soviet Union, remarked at the time of the U.S. invasion, "We have the best Soviet, Czech, and North Korean military equipment [and] we will win the fight, no question about it" (quoted in Bermudez 1990, 57).

The North Korean press paid close attention to the U.S. invasion of Grenada. *Rodong Sinmun*, the main organ of the Korean Workers' Party, regularly published articles on wartime

events in Grenada.<sup>37</sup> For example, on November 6, 1983, an article titled “The U.S. Imperialists’ Invading Army Carries Out Brutal Crimes against Humanity in Grenada” described American “atrocities” and “slaughter of peaceful residents” in Grenada, such as the bombing of a hospital and the firing of missiles at residential areas, including a kindergarten.<sup>38</sup> The article also noted the Grenadians’ bravery, stating, “Despite the U.S. imperialists’ invading army’s brutal oppression, the Grenadian people continue to fight bravely against the invaders.”<sup>39</sup> The articles on wartime Grenada in the party organ should not be dismissed as mere filler material. *Rodong Sinmun* was only six pages long during this period, and North Korean propagandists had a specific purpose for including each article. Grenada was a small country bravely resisting a much more powerful invading army. This story of David versus Goliath surely resonated with the North Korean people and provided confirmation that they were not the only small nation bravely resisting the U.S. imperialists.

Despite the generous provision of free weapons to the PRG by the Eastern bloc, the Grenadian military forces soon succumbed to the better-trained and more-experienced U.S. forces, and the PRG was removed from power in December 1983. That month, near the end of Operation Urgent Fury, Prime Minister Kennedy Alphonse Simmonds of St. Kitts and Nevis, a tiny country in the Caribbean, visited South Korea on an official five-day tour. The South Korean government used Simmonds’s visit to shed light on North Korea’s involvement in the Grenadian conflict. According to South Korean media, Simmonds, at the end of the tour, “denounced North Korea for its export of violent revolution to the Caribbean region, saying that he was greatly shocked by Pyongyang’s military assistance to the former Grenadian government under a secret pact. Simmonds also said not only Cuba but also North Korea is responsible for the Grenadian situation that finally led to the U.S. invasion of the island.”<sup>40</sup> Just as the North Korean government used the situation in Grenada for propaganda purposes, the South Korean government did the same.

## Conclusion

The North Korean government was critical of the U.S. invasion of Grenada long after the completion of Operation Urgent Fury. In 1984, Grenada held general elections, which the Korean Central News Agency called “political humbuggery stage-managed by the United States.” The news agency wrote, “Today, Grenada is under the jackboots of foreign troops.

Hundreds of U.S. occupants are riding roughshod over there, controlling sociopolitical life as a whole under the mask of ‘technician,’ ‘specialist,’ and ‘advisor.’ It is unbecoming to talk about ‘democracy’ and ‘elections’ in a country where everything is topsy-turvy under the occupation of aggressive forces.”<sup>41</sup>

A year later, the North Korean press published articles that labeled the new Grenadian government a U.S. puppet. One article said, “We had formed and developed diplomatic and other normal relations with the former progressive regime in Grenada. However, as it is known to the world, this progressive regime in Grenada was trampled underfoot and obliterated by the brigandish United States military invasion.”<sup>42</sup> Another report proclaimed, “The U.S. imperialists who had regarded revolutionary Grenada, which was following the road of independent development, as a thorn in their flesh hurled their paratroopers and marines from the sky and sea all of a sudden at dawn in October 1983, and trampled underfoot this sovereign state overnight and turned it into their new colony.”<sup>43</sup>

However, the U.S. government was just as worried about North Korea’s growing role as an international revolutionary power. Dixie Walker, the U.S. ambassador to South Korea from 1981 to 1986, tried to understand North Korea’s rising involvement around the world. In a memorandum dated March 9, 1984, the director of the CIA reported that Walker said, “We are missing an opportunity to get a better understanding of what it is that has extended North Korean activity and influence so widely around the world. What things they offer? What is the nature of their protective security and security services, their economic and construction activity and their arms sales? What did we learn about their rationale and the contribution of the 17 or so North Koreans who we found in Grenada?”<sup>44</sup> The director of the CIA did not directly answer Walker’s questions in 1984. But thirty-four years later, this article sheds light on the reasoning behind Pyongyang’s decision to send advisors to a small island nation halfway around the world and the internationalist role that the North Korean leadership assumed within the world revolutionary movement.

North Korea’s “no strings attached” aid to Grenada illustrates the internationalist principles of Kim Il-sung’s regime. After investigating the DPRK’s commitment to the Grenadian Revolution, the emotional response produced by the North Korean agricultural advisors on the Cuban airport tarmac does not seem unreasonable or insincere. The Grenadian

Revolution was more than just another failed leftist revolution in the Western hemisphere. It was a display of North Korea's financial, political, and ideological obligation to internationalism. Nonetheless, there was an inescapable tension within North Korea's internationalist foreign policy. In striving to promote socialist internationalism in the Third World and idealistically erase national borders, the DPRK relied on diplomatic support from these same nations in its inter-Korean competition for legitimacy with the ROK. Thus, Pyongyang's socialist internationalism paradoxically reaffirmed the centrality of the nation-state framework in the Cold War era.

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### Notes

- 1 I do not use the term "Third World" in a derogatory or negative sense. Rather, I use it to refer to a global project that spanned multiple continents and promoted anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, and racial equality. In fact, during the Cold War era "Third World" was a term of empowerment used in a positive sense by many people fighting colonialism and imperialism around the world. It was a way to envision an alternative future that was different from U.S.-style liberal capitalism or Soviet-style bureaucratic socialism (see Prashad 2008).
- 2 Woodrow Wilson Center's *North Korea International Documentation Project* (1982).
- 3 For more on North Korean assistance in sub-Saharan Africa, see Young (2018).
- 4 Armstrong also traces North Korea's Third World policy in his problematic book, *Tyranny of the Weak*, which has been critiqued by several scholars as having text-citation inaccuracies and unverifiable sources (see Szalontai 2018).
- 5 The North Koreans also provided ideological and military training to fifty-three members of Mexico's Revolutionary Action Movement in 1969 and 1970. See Keller (2015, 226–227).
- 6 U.S. State Department document # 1979STATE260541.
- 7 Jonestown Digital Audio Archive Q759 Transcript.
- 8 Jonestown Digital Audio Archive Q309 Transcript.
- 9 Due to the early publication date of Byun's case study of Grenada-North Korea relations and Byun's position as an official in the ROK Foreign Ministry, I use his book as a primary resource for my article. However, we come to different conclusions. Although we agree that North Korea acted independent of Soviet influence in its relations with Grenada, Byun argues that North Korea wanted to export its Juche ideology to the island.

- Since North Korea never funded Juche study groups or widely disseminated publications on the ideology to Grenada, I see no evidence of this being the case.
- 10 U.S. State Department document # 1976SEOUL03532.
- 11 South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs Microfilm Roll number C-06-0099 (1976).
- 12 South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs Microfilm Roll number C-06-0099 (1976).
- 13 South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs Microfilm Roll number C-06-0099 (1976).
- 14 U.S. State Department document # 1976SEOUL03532.
- 15 U.S. State Department document #1979KINGST01921.
- 16 Selwyn Strachan, interview by the author, June 17, 2017.
- 17 U.S. State Department document #1979BRIDGE02080.
- 18 “Sixth Conference of Heads of State” (1976).
- 19 “Grenada People’s Revolutionary Government Severs Diplomatic Relations with South Korea” (1980).
- 20 Georgetown University’s Special Collections Center (1980–1983).
- 21 “President Kim Il Sung Cables Grenada PM” (1980).
- 22 “President Kim Il Sung Sends Message of Consolation to Grenadian Prime Minister” (1980).
- 23 CIA Directorate of Intelligence (1984).
- 24 Georgetown University’s Special Collections Center (1980–1983).
- 25 U.S. State Department document #1979SEOUL07938.
- 26 According to one source, there were also twenty-four North Korean military advisors present on the island when the Americans invaded in October 1983. See Plunk (1988, 405).
- 27 Document 20, Secret Military Agreement between PRG and DPRK, in Ledeen and Romerstein (1984, 262).
- 28 “U.S. Says Grenada Was Being Made Arms Depot” (1983).
- 29 “We Actively Support the People of Grenada in Their Struggle to Defend the Country’s Sovereignty: Speech of President of Kim Il Sung at Banquet” (1983).
- 30 “Your Successes Are Due to Your Party’s Principles Embodied in the Juche Idea: Speech of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop at Banquet” (1983).
- 31 “Grenadian Party and Government Delegation Arrives in Pyongyang” (1983).
- 32 “Grenadian Party and Government Delegation Arrives in Pyongyang” (1983).
- 33 South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs Microfilm Roll number 2013-0044 (1983).
- 34 Selwyn Strachan denies that there were military agreements signed between North Korea and Grenada or that North Korean military instructors were ever sent to Grenada. Selwyn Strachan, interview by the author, June 17, 2017.
- 35 Selwyn Strachan, interview by the author, June 17, 2017.
- 36 Interagency Intelligence Assessment (1983).
- 37 For examples of *Rodong Sinmun* articles discussing wartime Grenada, see “U.S. Imperialists’ Invading Army Must Withdraw Right Now” (1983) and “Leave Grenada, America!” (1983). Translations of *Rodong Sinmun* article titles and excerpts are my own.
- 38 The bombing of a Grenadian mental hospital did occur during the first day of the U.S. invasion. The North Korean press said eighty people were killed; the *New York Times* reported at least twelve people were killed. See Ayres (1983).

- 39 “The U.S. Imperialists’ Invading Army Carries Out Brutal Crimes against Humanity in Grenada” (1983).
- 40 “Global Countermeasure on North Urged” (1983).
- 41 “Daily Criticizes ‘General Elections’ in Grenada” (1984).
- 42 “The Puppet’s Silly Talk,” Pyongyang Domestic Service, February 1, 1985, in Bermudez (1990, 58fn123).
- 43 “U.S. Ringleader of World Terrorism” (1985).
- 44 “Memorandum for Deputy Director for Intelligence from Director of Central Intelligence” (1984).

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