

North Korea and the United States: A History Syllabus

Instructor
Matthew Abbott
Quarter: Summer 2024
Start – end date: June 11 – July 30
Session day/time: Tuesdays 10:00 am – 12:30 pm CT
Course Code and Section: HUAS32009 24U1

Email **Course Overview**

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 The United States and North Korea remain in a technical state of war since the signing of the Korean War armistice in 1953. With diplomacy between both countries stalled for years, tensions remain high as the North Korean government continues to engage in a wide variety of illicit activities ranging from cybercrime to ballistic missile development. This seminar will promote a deeper understanding of North Korea through an examination of the history of American engagement with the country as well as a review of future prospects for principled contact between both countries in a variety of contexts.

Modality

Remote Learning

Required texts

The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia by Andrei Lankov, ISBN: 978-0199390038

Books can be purchased online through the [University of Chicago Bookstore](#).

Course readings

Week	Topic	Summary, Reading Assignment
Week 1	Historical Context: North Korea and the World	This session will provide a short overview of Korean history and the root causes of the division of Korea. We will learn about the Korean War as well as North Korea’s cultural, economic, and political history. Reading: <i>The Real North Korea</i> by Andrei Lankov, Chapters 1 and 2
Week 2	Engagement between North Korea and the	Much of the official engagement that has taken place between the United States and

Week	Topic	Summary, Reading Assignment
	American Executive Branch	North Korea has taken place through the American executive branch. Yet only one sitting American president has engaged directly with a sitting North Korean leader. Two former American presidents have traveled to Pyongyang after their time in office. This session will examine the history of diplomacy with North Korea through America's executive branch.
Week 3	Engagement between North Korea and the American Legislative Branch	As early as 1973, the North Korean Supreme People's Assembly sent written correspondence to the United States Congress. In 1980, Congressman Stephen Solarz of New York became the first sitting American official to visit North Korea and meet with a North Korean leader after the signing of the Korean War armistice. Since then dozens of members of Congress and their staff members have visited North Korea and engaged directly with North Korean officials. This session will examine the history of interactions between American legislative branch officials and North Korean officials.
Week 4	Humanitarian Engagement with North Korea	Both governments and private individuals have a history of engagement with North Korea over humanitarian issues. From delivering food or agricultural supplies to reuniting family members separated by the division of Korea, humanitarian engagement is one method through which some advocates of engagement believe tensions could be reduced between North Korea and the United States. This session will explore the history of humanitarian engagement with North Korea.
Week 5	Tourism and North Korea	Though North Korea paused allowing the entry of tourists due to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism previously served as an opportunity for individuals to visit North Korea and see the country firsthand. However, tourism has also been controversial with criticism ranging from the funds it may provide to the North Korean government to it not presenting a true picture of life in North Korea. American tourists have also been detained by the North Korean government on several occasions including Otto Warmbier who was released in a coma and died several days after his release. This session will explore the history of tourism in North Korea

Week	Topic	Summary, Reading Assignment
Week 6	Economic Engagement with North Korea	<p>and people-to-people contact between Americans and North Koreans.</p> <p>North Korea is one of the most heavily sanctioned countries in the world, so commercial engagement between Americans and North Koreans is rare. However, some trade has taken place over the years, and in this session we will examine these occurrences.</p>
Week 7	North Korea and International Organizations	<p>North Korea is a member of numerous international organizations including the United Nations, and some engagement has taken place through these organizations. The country maintains a Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York, and the diplomats based there have become an important channel for the American government to relay messages to Pyongyang. In this session we will learn about North Korea’s participation in international organizations and engagement through these bodies.</p> <p>Reading: <i>The Real North Korea</i> by Andrei Lankov, Chapters 3 and 4.</p>
Week 8	The Future of Engagement with North Korea	<p>American presidents have tried a variety of approaches to engage with or confront the North Korean leadership. Yet both countries remain without diplomatic relations and are still technically in a state of war. In this session we will consider the future of American engagement with North Korea and examine many of the current impediments to its success, particularly North Korean involvement in illicit activity ranging from cybercrime to ballistic missile development.</p> <p>Reading: <i>The Real North Korea</i> by Andrei Lankov, Chapters 5 and 6</p>

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Questions? Contact Zoë Eisenman at zmel@uchicago.edu.