A Slight Case of Overbombing:
America's Forgotten Genocide over North Korea

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Given the sheer girth of scholarly analysis lavished upon the American air wars against Imperial Japan and North Vietnam, it seems strange that fewer scholars have not attempted to do justice to the United States air campaign against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea between 1950 and 1953. Drawing on reports made by journalists and visiting lawyers who witnessed this destruction firsthand, and a critical examination of American military sources, this paper will seek to frame the Air Force campaign during the Korean War as a genocidal act.

Since the publication of Bruce Cumings The Origins of the Korean War, Volume II, this subject has been in dire need of a re-examination, particularly given the impact the campaign has had on North Korean perceptions of the United States. A better understanding of this event by American policy makers would remove a major stumbling block in the path to US-DPRK normalization; most relevantly, half a century of continued nuclear threats by the United Sates must be taken into consideration when one examines the recent decision of North Korea to acquire its own nuclear arsenal.

The Air Force was a new branch of the American armed forces at the outset of the war. Seeing air superiority, and particularly the massive bombings of civilian centers in Germany and Japan towards the end of World War II, as the key to victory, military leaders sought to apply these “lessons” against North Korea. The result was a three-year campaign which rapidly shifted focus from military targets and supply intervention to a one-sided total war against Korean civilians. From the largely uncontested skies, the Air Force killed as many as two million Koreans in an attempt to sap the Sino-North Korean alliance of its ability to fight or exist. The means employed to accomplish this destruction, and the responses of groups throughout the world, will be examined herein.
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Kim Il Sung, the Great Leader of the North Korean people and Hero of the 20th Century, sat with reporters for the New York Times in 1972. He explained that open preparations for war are being made and the people were being conditioned to hate Americans. The bitterness is palpable in his responses to questions, and Marshall Kim is quick to explain why:

I do not think there is any Korean who has not suffered in the Korean War. At least relatives or friends of all of us suffered. Tens of thousands of people were killed in indiscriminate bombings. In Pyongyang alone all houses were reduced to ashes and only three houses were left intact. Not only Pyongyang but also Wonsan and Hamhung and others, and then by the end of the war, all our villages were destroyed indiscriminately. In these circumstances, we Koreans can have nothing but bad sentiments toward Americans.

The air campaign against North Korea between 1950 and 1953 is a forgotten chapter in American history. It was conveyed to the American public as a means of interdiction and explained away in afterthought as a means of hastening an end to the war. In truth, the campaign was at best a testament to the dangers of a bureaucratic-rationalist approach to modern warfare, and at worst a genocidal campaign of civilian bombing that left hundreds of thousands of Korean civilians dead. Unearthing this story is an essential step that must be taken by American policy makers to better understand the stance assumed by North Korea towards the United States.

Raphael Lemkin’s contribution to history, the term “genocide” and its definition, has given scholars a framework with which to prosecute crimes committed with the end goal of destroying entire groups of people. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, ratified by the United States in 1948 and acceded by North Korea in 1989, defines genocide as the killing of members of a group, causing

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1 A detailed list of titles formally attributed to Kim Il Sung are listed in Gavan McCormack’s Target North Korea: Pushing North Korea to the Brink of Nuclear Catastrophe, (New York: Nation Books. 2004), 54-55.
physical or mental harm to its members, inflicting conditions designed to physically destroy its way of life, seeking to prevent births within the group, and transferring children of the group to another group. It is one of the supreme ironies of history that it was under the auspices of the United Nations, the organization into which Lemkin placed so much hope for world peace, that the atrocities enumerated below were committed.

Framing the air war in North Korea in light of Raphael Lemkin's work is not a new concept; the first organization to do so was the International Association of Democratic Lawyers. In March 1952, eight members of this organization ventured into North Korea to examine reports of alleged war crimes. Their final report opens with a lengthy section outlining several international codes concerning laws of warfare. The Charter of the International Military Tribunal of Nuremberg is mentioned, with differences drawn between “War Crimes” (murder, wanton destruction of cities, devastation not justified by necessity) and “Crimes against Humanity” (extermination, other war crimes carried out under political, racial or religious grounds). The lawyers conclude by restating the aforementioned definition of genocide.

The weightiest scholarly voice in the study of the air campaign is that of Dr. Bruce Cumings of the University of Chicago. He has described it as

three years of genocidal bombing by the US Air Force which killed perhaps two million civilians (one quarter of the population), dropped oceans of napalm, left barely a modern building standing, opened large dams to flood nearby rice valleys and kill thousands of peasants by denying them food, and went far beyond anything done in Vietnam in a conscious program of using air power to destroy a society.

Cumings discusses the destruction caused by this air war in several of his books, but it is never given his undivided attention. He has only managed to give it the longest cursory glance out of the several cursory glances this subject has received by scholars. Rosemary Foot’s The Wrong War manages to capture the callous nature of most scholarship on the topic in one line: “Even in its strictly 'limited' form, the war in Korea brought

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5 Bruce Cumings. War and Television, (New York: Verso. 1992), 158.
destruction and casualties of tragic proportions.\textsuperscript{6} This statement positively smacks of the sort of excuses that one often hears from teachers and parents when asking about the less glamorous aspects of America's actions in war. Few would contest that war is hell, or in the words of the journalist Robert Fisk, represents a failure of the human spirit.\textsuperscript{7} But it is for these reasons precisely that one must learn about how wars happen, that they might hopefully be avoided.

The United States Air Force was born in 1947, but it had an impressive pedigree. Its predecessor, the Army Air Corps, was credited with winning the largest war in human history. No personality embodied this new service branch than Curtis Emerson LeMay, who masterminded the firebombing of Tokyo in March of 1945, similar attacks on sixty-five other Japanese cities, attacks that conservative estimates claim to have killed and wounded 700,000 civilians.\textsuperscript{8} These were in addition to the commonly accepted 200,000 killed at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. LeMay would later remark that, had the United States lost the war, he would have been tried as a war criminal. Instead, he became the Chief of Staff of Strategic Air Command. Recognized by many as the service branch that won World War II and equipped with bases throughout the Pacific, the USAF was and remains a major player in the rapidly-evolving East Asian security scheme. Conflicting aims of the United States and the Soviet Union for the post-war world slowly drew the allies apart into rival camps. The Korean Peninsula was one of the first victims of this schism, divided between two occupation forces sponsoring separate governments. Having their country disunified immediately after thirty-five years of brutal Japanese rule,\textsuperscript{9} neither President Syngmann Rhee nor Marshall Kim Il Sung were content with the status quo. Both men


\textsuperscript{7} Fisk, speech to students of Sydney University, October 5, 2005.

\textsuperscript{8} These figures are those given by Sahr Conway-Lanz, Collateral Damage: Americans, Noncombatant Immunity, and Atrocity After World War II (London: Routledge, 2006), 1. I feel that this is a low figure, as even conservative estimates of the victims of the Tokyo firebombing place the figure at at least 100,000 killed. For a more in-depth discussion, see Mark Selden, A Forgotten Holocaust: US Bombing Strategy, the Destruction of Japanese Cities and the American Way of War from World War II to Iraq, JapanFocus, <http://japanfocus.org/-Mark-Selden/2414>. Accessed 8 October, 2009.

\textsuperscript{9} The sensitive subject of Korean \textit{iandu} has been subject to a great deal of scholarship, but also in fiction. A fine contemporary example would be Alan Brown's \textit{Aubrey Hepburn's Neck} (New York: Washington Square Press. 1996). For a more comprehensive overview of the occupation, see Hildi Kang's Under the Black Unbmbrella: Voices from Colonial Korea, 1910-1945 (Ithica: Cornell University Press. 2001).
dreamed of ruling over a unified Korea, a dream that has yet to be fulfilled. Both countries were willing to bleed for this dream.

From the outset, the Air Force positioned itself to be the decisive factor in the Korean War. Immediate close air support was desperately needed by the Republic of Korea Army, which had nearly been driven into the Sea of Japan by the Korean People's Army. Prior to the United Nations resolution to aid South Korea, the Air Force limited its activities to airlifting refugees from Seoul and providing air cover for evacuations by land, sea and air. On June 27, Lieutenant William Hudson of the 68th Fighter All-Weather Squadron, based in Iwakuni, scored the first downed communist aircraft of the Korean War over Seoul.10 That evening, the Security Council resolved to provide its support to Syngmann Rhee and the ROK. The Soviet Union abstained from voting on this resolution, citing the fact that what was occurring in Korea was a civil war and that the UN was not entitled to interfere in such wars. The IADL would later agree with the Soviets in this regard, citing breaches of the Charter of the United Nations, Article II, Clauses IV and VII.11 The United Nations had already violated the spirit in which it was founded by endorsing the “police action” in Korea; it was left to the Air Force to further the illegality of the war.

Close-air support for the embattled ROKA and the newly-arrived American soldiers from Japan was now the top priority, and the Far East Air Force had the tools to deliver this support. Lieutenant General George Stratemeyer, commander of the FEAF, worked in tandem with MacArthur to coordinate efforts across branches. Outnumbered and outclassed by the Soviet-built T-34 tanks of the KPA, “tactical air power was now the only trump card the Americans had left.”12 This power could be most effectively employed once the FEAF had achieved air supremacy.

The phrase “air power” conjures fairly concrete images of planes wreaking havoc on ground targets,

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10 Robert Jackson, *Air War over Korea*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons. 1973), 15. Jackson’s work is a succinct and highly readable synthesis of militar accounts of the war, combining sources from the US Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps. I will refer to this book frequently from herein, as it has been indispensible in plotting out dates of events and locations of bases.
11 IADL, 5.
12 Jackson, 23.
but how does one quantify something like air power? Walter Boyne, a former Air Force colonel, co-founder of 
*Air & Space* magazine and the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, developed a rubric to frame abstract 
concepts of air power, superiority and supremacy at the outset *The Influence of Air Power upon History*:

> Air power must be understood to be different from (although a part of) the concepts of air superiority and air supremacy. Air superiority means the ability to deny the enemy the use of its own air space, while allowing the “friendly” force the ability to use that space to accomplish its tasks. If air superiority is absolute, and extends over all of the enemy’s territory at all times, it can be redefined as “air supremacy.” This is the sought-after condition, for with it the military operations of other vital land and sea forces can proceed without impediment from the air.

To achieve total air superiority, it was essential that the North Korean Air Force be grounded immediately. To this end, airfields on both sides of the 38th parallel were bombed to pieces by the FEAF, taking out most of the North Korean aircraft while still on the ground. Robert Jackson concluded from the documents presented to him that by July 21st, “although the NKAF had still not been totally destroyed, it had become almost completely ineffective as a fighting force,” allowing American bombers to “range freely over the whole of North Korea without fear of interference from hostile aircraft.” Even nine months after the intervention of the PRC, the North Korean Air Force’s estimated strength was at most a hundred fighter aircraft.

> American foreign policy experts saw an opportunity in North Korea to test the idea of “rollback,” the pushing back of communism to the Yalu River. They might have succeeded were it not for the Chinese intervention in the Korean War, which marked an important shift in world history. Hundreds of thousands of

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13 Mr. Boyne served in the Air Force for twenty-three years, enlisting near the end of the Korean War. His contributions to the study of aerospace and his service record are certainly admirable, and the amount of written work he has produced is intimidating. Yet even in his work the Korean War has been shafted, having been given the undivided attention of the author for four pages (293-6) in a four hundred page work. Boyne, *The Influence of Air Power upon History*, (Gretna: Pelican Publishing. 2003).

14 Ibid, 17.

15 Jackson, 28-9.

16 Incredibly, the CIA was convinced that Kim Il Sung would have been willing to lease these limited resources to the Soviet Union in the event of an offensive against Japan. An attack on the home islands figured rightly in American fears for their position in East Asia, as Japan and Okinawa were the primary home bases for the bombers that would cause so much destruction during the Korean War. “Special estimate: Probability of a Communist assault on Japan in 1951.” Central Intelligence Agency, August 17, 1951. Declassified October 28, 1998, pg. 7.
Chinese volunteers fought and died south of the Yalu River, including Mao Zedong's eldest son, Mao Anying.\textsuperscript{17} Yet it was this influx of socialist bloc assistance that repulsed the American forces from North Korea. In the short run, American soldiers were driven from the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel in two months, spurring rapid retribution from the Air Force. B-29 bomber strikes against Kanggye, Nanam and Chongjin were launched on November 1\textsuperscript{st}, followed by a daylight raid against Sinuiju, “a principal enemy communication and supply center near the mouth of the Yalu.” The description of these North Korean cities as “enemy supply centers” belies the fact that they were civilian population centers as well, a sobering example of the Air Force's ability to distance themselves from any potential noncombatant deaths. The effectiveness and ferocity of these attacks is attested to by the firebombing of the “military supply and communication centers” of Sonchon, Pukchin, Mansi, Chosan, and Hoeryong, “where post-strike photography showed more than 32,000 individual fire bombs destroyed ninety per cent of the target area.”\textsuperscript{18} Entire cities could be reduced to ashes from miles above ground, and the means of preventing such attacks were limited throughout North Korea.

As was done over Japan, the Far East Air Force engaged in leaflet campaigns prior to and following raids on population centers. 500 million leaflets had been spread throughout the north by June of 1951.\textsuperscript{19} Using aerial bombardment as a psychological weapon was a stated goal of the United States. By 1951, the Air Force had concluded that while radio broadcasts, and leaflet campaigns had only modest impacts on North Korean psyche, if one included “the use of weapons to achieve beneficial psychological results...then the contribution of the Air force has been very large.”\textsuperscript{20} If one is to literally interpret the UN's definition of genocide, one must accept this admission alone as proof of the illegality of the Air Force's work in North Korea.

This southward thrust of combined Sino-North Korean forces overextended the supply lines of the

\textsuperscript{17} Mao Anying was killed barely a month into the war by an American airstrike on Peng Dehuai's headquarters. Jung Chang's polemic against Anying's father cites Mao's secretary as observing that “[Mao] really didn't show any expression of great pain” upon hearing the news of his son's death at the hands of the American Air Force. Jung Chang and Mark Halliday, \textit{Mao: The Unknown Story} (New York: Anchor Books. 2005), 372.


\textsuperscript{20} Davison, 41.
communist forces, however, making them extremely vulnerable to air attack. A campaign of interdiction began, hoping to deprive the enemy of the ability to make war. During Operation Strangle, the USAF flew 81,600 sorties and dropped more than 104,000 tons of bombs onto targets north of the 38th parallel. Between August 1951 and June 1952 (between which points the operation was renamed Saturate) an average of 10,000 tons of bombs were dropped monthly on supply lines. The interdiction campaign revealed the full resolve of the combined communist forces of North Korea and China.

In April 1952 a penetrating staff study by the Air Force recognized that in spite of vast damage inflicted the interdiction operation had not achieved its objective and that such operations were becoming more costly in terms of casualties to air crews and aircraft lost and damaged. Furthermore, some of the most modern US weaponry was being effectively countered by hordes of unskilled labor and minimum amounts of easily obtainable materials.

During Operation Strangle/Saturate, over four thousand tons of napalm were dropped in an effort to interdict supplies. This accounts for a little more than a tenth of the 32,357 tons of jellied gasoline that were used during the Korean War. Tibor Méray, a Hungarian journalist who stayed in war-torn North Korea from August 1951 to September 1952, mailed an open letter to Anthony Eden, then British Foreign Secretary and future Prime Minister, decrying his statements which influenced Parliament to reject a proposal to forbid the United States’ use of napalm in Korea. He provides grizzly descriptions of napalm-burnt women and children, and states that it would not even be necessary for Mr. Eden to enter the DPRK to witness this sort of carnage: “Should you visit the vicinity of Panmunjom in South-Korean [sic], you wouldn’t find a single village without napalm-burnt women and children.” Méray accused the Americans of having “applied the napalm bomb against the South-Korean population exactly as they did against the North-Koreans, though they pretended to come to

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21 It is either an incredible coincidence or a sign of clear fudging of numbers that 104,000 tons of bombs is the same figure cited for tonnage totals used specifically against Japanese civilians in the same report. “Intelligence Report: Historical notes on the use of air power as a weapon of interdiction,” Central Intelligence Agency Directorate of Intelligence, May 1966. Declassified 30 May 2000, pg. 18.

22 Ibid, 22.
Perhaps more disturbing than the use of napalm or any other actions by the US Air Force during the war was the alleged widespread use of biological warfare. While this subject has been given some examination by scholars, most are too quick to dismiss the claims as biased (communist) opinions or propaganda. The IADL examined claims of virus-infected insects dropped by the Air Force. In 169 instances, large concentrations of insects were found in areas in which they had never existed and in temperatures between zero and five degrees Centigrade. The remains of leaflet bomb containers were found near these piles, but no leaflets were to be found. The earliest date provided in the IADL report places the attack on January 28, 1952: the first case of cholera to have occurred afterward was recorded on February 20; the first case of plague, on February 25. No epidemic diseases had broken out in northern Korea in the four years prior to these attacks. At the time of the lawyers’ departure, 13 cases of cholera and 53 cases of plague had been documented, with 48 dead from these diseases. This campaign was also witnessed by Tibor Méray.25

Dropping disease-ridden bugs as a means of warfare seems ridiculous at first, but there is evidence that this method of killing was independently envisioned by both Japanese and American personnel in the 1930s. Documented tests were conducted by the infamous Unit 731 of the Japanese army at Anda, in the puppet state of Manchukuo. Sheldon Harris established that by mid-1941, the Japanese were testing munitions loaded with plague-infected fleas on human subjects. In 1937, Lieutenant Colonel James Simmons of the Army Medical Corps suggested the idea of dispersing disease-ridden insects as a means of enemy attack against the United

24 IADL, 6-10.
25 His account of events, retold by journal articles and photographs, is an incredible document. His articles often end with ideological flourishes, and a few of his accounts of events feel as if they could just as easily be contrived. The first is hardly anything to be surprised about; Méray was certainly a communist (though he later renounced this affiliation and moved to Berlin), and was writing for a party organ. There is a certain degree of “communist jargon” one comes to expect from these sources. As for the veracity of his stories, his sober tone throughout would seem to indicate that certainly not all that was said here was invention. See Tibor Méray, Korean Testimony, (Budapest: Hungarian Peace Council and the Institute for Cultural Relations. 1952), especially the section “Bacteriological Warfare.”
26 Harris, Factories of Death: Japanese Biological Warfare, 1932-1945, and the American Cover-up, (New York: Routledge. 2002), 89.
States. 27 No evidence surfaced during Harris' thorough search for information that suggested the American biological weapons program ever conducted field tests to prove Simmons' theory.

It would be a conspiracy theorist dream to find a concrete connection between the American and Japanese BW and CW programs in relation to the accusations above. Dr. Harris is convinced that there is no such evidence available. His stance is to wait for more declassification of documents by the involved parties before making any claims. 28 Gavan McCormack, citing bias in a report filed by the an international body of scientists, as well as declassified Soviet documents, concludes that the entire episode was in fact a communist conspiracy. 29 Bruce Cumings creatively uses Méray against Méray; Tibor would later be dissuaded from his belief that the attacks were genuine by French scientists who explained to him that insects could not survive exposure to near-freezing temperatures for long periods of time. When corrected on this account by Dr. Cumings during an interview, “he waved at us with his hand, smiled with a pained look in his eyes [and said] 'Please don’t tell me this, I’ll begin to believe it all again.'” 30

None of these sources above examine the International Association of Democratic Lawyers report. McCormack focuses much of his disbelief on one English scientist, while Cumings relies on Méray. This would seem to indicate either a willful ignorance of the work of the IADL, or a blanket discrediting of lawyers representing eight nations. While a critical examination of this source is absolutely necessary considering the gravity of the charges it contains, to discredit it outright is something else entirely. The archives of the IADL are located in Brussels, and are staffed on a volunteer (as is the rest of their organization); examination of documents contained therein should be pursued. Until then, the question of American biological warfare in Korea must remain open.

An established shift in the scope of American bombing was made in June 1952, when the Joint Chiefs of Staff finally permitted attacks on previously protected elements of North Korean infrastructure, including

27 Ibid, 203.
28 Harris, 327.
29 McCormack, Target North Korea, 32-35.
30 Cumings, War and Television, 159.
hydroelectric and irrigation dams. The Suijo Dam, near the mouth of the Yalu, distributed power between the DPRK, the PRC, and to Soviet forces stationed at Port Arthur. When truce talks began to stall out, B-29 bombers struck Suijo. The “spectacularly successful” attacks on hydroelectric facilities at Suijo, Chosin, Fusen and Kyosen did succeed in asserting pressure on both the PRC and the DPRK. “North Korea experienced a nearly total loss of electric power for two weeks and never regained its former level of generating capacity before the end of the war. Manchuria, too, suffered the loss of a quarter of its supply of electricity.”

Attacks continued against the huge facility at Suijo, which was constantly being rebuilt in an attempt to maintain some sort of power supply. By June 1953, however, as negotiations between the belligerent forces over the armistice had again stalled, the commanders in the field elected to “expedite” these negotiations further and decided to attack previously untouched sensitive targets, including dams critical to North Korea's rice production. From the diplomatic perspective, the raids would demonstrate that continuance of the war would incur greater political and economic costs. The attacks on the irrigation dams, previously spared from destruction for political and humanitarian reasons, also had a psychological impact, since Asian populations associated the "empty rice bowl" with starvation. Militarily, destruction of the irrigation dams would disrupt communist preparations for a ground offensive by flooding out rail and road networks.

On May 13, after three years of conventional bombardment (and perhaps a year of biological warfare), the Air Force decided to begin attacking the North Korean food supply. “ThunderJets of the 58th FBW in the first attack against previously excluded irrigation dams bombed the Toksan Dam holding the Potong River's water twenty miles north of Pyongyang. Floodwaters swirling from the breached dam washed out six miles of embankment and five bridges, destroyed two miles of the major north-south highway, rendered Sunan Airfield inoperable, and ruined five square miles of prime rice crop.”

On 16 May, “Ninety 58th FBW sorties breached the Chasan irrigation dam. Surging waters washed away three railroad bridges and destroyed rice ripening in

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33 Ibid.
surrounding fields.”^34

The North Koreans, for the most part defenseless against American air superiority, reacted as well as they could to the new emphasis on striking dams; on 21-22 May, B-29 bombers using electronically-guided bombs “scored seven direct hits on the Kuwonga dam but failed to burst it, because the North Koreans had lowered the water level by twelve feet, significantly reducing the pressure on the dam.” This target was struck again one week later with 10,000 pounds of ordinance; the dam was not destroyed, but the North Koreans were forced to completely drain its reservoir to make necessary repairs, thus rendering it useless.^35

In the Bruce Cumings narrative put forth in *Korea's Place in the Sun* (and, by way of a nice cut-and-paste job, 2004’s *North Korea: Another Country*), the attacks reported by the *Times* on 20 June are the only ones mentioned specifically. In two separate attacks according to the FEAF report of the days actions, “F-84’s and Marine aircraft struck Toksang and Kusong dams, north of the Chongchon River, with twelve direct hits scored on the Toksang target.” Further along in the article, it is also reported “B-29 Superforts struck in two forces to unleash 150 tons of 2,000-pound bombs on Toksang Dam, north of the Chongchon River, during the night.”^36 According to Cumings in the latter book, the destruction caused by these attacks in particular was devastating:

Many villages were inundated, ‘washed downstream,’ and even Pyongyang, some twenty-seven miles south of one dam, was badly flooded. According to the official Air Force history, when the high containing wall of the Toksan Reservoir collapsed, the onrushing flood destroyed six miles of railway, five bridges, two miles of highway, and five square miles of rice paddies.^37

The Air Force, the *New York Times*, and Bruce Cumings all fail to provide any estimate of civilian casualties caused by the immediate flooding and the subsequent loss of crops. The official justification for these attacks remains the same: “[civilians] were assumed to be ‘loyal’ to the enemy, providing ‘direct support

[^34]: Ibid.
[^35]: Ibid.
to the communist armed forces.’ (That is, they were feeding the northern population.)”38 This was total war realized to its fullest; one article in a military publication proudly described the aerial campaign against dams as “lessons” to North Korea that “gave the enemy a sample of the totality of war...embracing the whole of a nation’s economy and people.”39

How many people died in the process of sampling this total war? It is a difficult task to look for solid answers. Bruce Cumings cites the figure two million in War and Television but provides no source for this figure.40 McCormack cites a cumulative figure for the entire war of between three and four million dead, the majority of whom were Korean civilians; these were in addition to ten million families split during the war onto opposite sides of the demilitarized zone.41 A number more grounded in fact may be found in Balázs Szalontai’s monograph Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era, which draws upon previously unpillered archives in Eastern Europe. 9,622,000 people were living in the DPRK in 1949, which dropped to 8,491,000 after the war.42 That places the losses during the war at 1,131,000, which even though not as high as some estimates is still certainly a shocking figure, representing more than ten percent of the population. The male population was quite disproportionately decreased, representing nearly 80% of casualties. 52 Attacks on North Korean infrastructure are noted, including on the Suijo Dam. Szalontai points out that “The rather indiscriminate nature of American air raids may be gauged from the fact that by July 1951, approximately four-fifths of primary and secondary schools had been destroyed.”43 Speaking on behalf of the American military-intelligence apparatus, the CIA estimated in retrospect that the North Korean population still stood at nine million in 1953.44

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38 Cumings, Korea’s Place in the Sun, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co. 2005), 296.
41 McCormack, Target North Korea, 49.
43 Szalontai also mentions the curious fact that “occurrence[s] of tuberculosis among teenagers was four to five times higher in the DPRK than in Hungary...at the end of 1953, a KPA physician estimated the number of tuberculosis-infected soldiers, most of whom had been demobilized, at 250,000. That data included only the serious cases.” Tuberculosis was a disease that could have easily been spread through biological weapons use by the Americans, though admittedly it seems the Air Force was more fond of cholera-laiden insects. Ibid, 44.
44 “Intelligence Report: Historical notes on the use of air power as a weapon of interdiction,” Central Intelligence Agency
Disputing numbers in the instance of the Korean War is complicated in the United States due to the muted nature of Korean War studies compared to its more recent Cold War counterpart in Vietnam. The war had begun as a hard-fought but triumphant march to the Yalu, a testament to the strength of the American armed forces and the resolve of the Dulles-Acheson school of rollback thought. It ended in a bombed-out village of mudhuts with the status quo, a prisoner exchange and the pride of the world's preeminent military power blunted by two countries barely five years old. Fears of a massive communist conspiracy were exacerbated greatly by the Chinese intervention, leading to years of witch hunts and repression during the tenure of Joseph McCarthy. Surely no other explanation was possible. A country the size of New York, completely laid to waste by three years of bombs, napalm and biological warfare, was still able to stand in defiance of the will of American policy makers. It still stands to this day, a reminder of America's first unwon war.

In July 2003, the North Koreans played host to the Pyongyang International Tribunal on U.S. Crimes in Korea. Chaired by then president of the IADL, Jitendra Sharma, the civilian tribunal heard testimony from survivors of their country's holocaust. The United States was found to have committed grave violations of the UN Charter, Nuremburg Charter, the Codes on Crimes against Peace and Security, the 1949 Geneva Conventions, and other international laws. Accused were all military and civilian personnel "involved in the mass killings of Korean people." Ignored in the United States, the Pyongyang Tribunal was the first formal and international manifestation of a desire for the recognition of crimes committed during the Korean War.

There is a void that exists in the collective American memory of all things Korean, and that void must be remedied. Since its founding, North Korea has been threatened with destruction. The Air Force emerged from

46 The International Association of Democratic Lawyers is not some a lightweight organization, nor is it an unapproachable one. My emails to the current president, Jeanne Mire, were responded to within twenty-four hours, and within two days of initial contact I was on the phone with Ms. Beth Lyons, the chief prosecutor of the Pyongyang Tribunal. She was only able to speak briefly with me at that time, as she was on a plane to the Hague to prosecute war crimes committed in Rwanda.
the Korean War seeing itself, much as it had after the Pacific War, as the bringers of victory. Its presence in East Asia is still seen as justified due to the threat of North Korean aggression. Pyongyang’s decision to develop nuclear weapons, while unacceptable in a world seeking a policy of nonproliferation, must be understood in the light of sixty years of nuclear blackmail and three years of death from above. An understanding of this conflict, and a reexamination of the role of the air forces in modern warfare, will be two of the first steps taken once the United States is fully prepared to pursue genuine relations with North Korea.