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Abstract

This assignment was used in an LIB200 class focused on the history of the Cold War and its legacy. This was assigned during a portion of the class focusing on the Korean War and contemporary issues in North Korea. LIB 200 class is a capstone course in the Liberal Arts program; thus the students consist of Liberal Arts majors. The course learning objectives focus on two of the college's Core Competencies – Integrative and Global Learning. This assignment focuses primarily on the Global Learning competency. This low-stakes assignment should no more than an hour and a half, and is meant to be done in class, with a short article titled, "Kim Jong Un is a Survivor, Not a Madman," by Andrei Lankov. This assignment counts toward the students' participation grade, which is 10% of their final grade. I first learned of this article through the Meanings of War seminar. One of the seminar participants assigned it to the seminar in preparation for a discussion of nuclear weapons. Although I did not receive feedback on this particular assignment (the reading came late in the seminar), I did apply many of the insights about low-stakes assignments and in-class discussion activities that had been discussed throughout the seminar. Thus, the Meanings of War seminar helped me develop this assignment, in both content and form.

Is Kim Jong Un a Madman?

In-Class Quiz, Discussion, and Reflection

Instructions:

- Read the article “Kim Jong Un is a Survivor, not a Madman,” by Andrei Lankov
- Answer the questions below (bullet points are fine)
- In groups of 3-4, discuss your answers
- On your own, write 1-2 paragraphs reflecting on the following question: Why does the media/political narrative claiming that “Kim Jong Un is a madman” persist, despite clear evidence that his actions are entirely rational?
- Class discussion

Quiz Questions:

1. What is the typical view of North Korea and Kim Jong Un in the United States? Who promotes this idea? Why is this perspective potentially harmful?
2. How did Eastern bloc leaders view the Kim family in the 1980s, before the Cold War ended? How do those leaders compare to the Kim family today? What challenges have the Kim family faced over the past 25 years?
3. The article claims that Kim Jong Un faces three different threats to the survival of his regime, and that he is working hard to neutralize those threats. Describe the first threat and the actions that Kim takes to neutralize it.
4. How does Kim Jong Un see North Korea’s nuclear program? Why? How does he use it to bolster his regime? What is the “madman strategy” and why is it effective?
5. What is the second major threat to the survival of the Kim regime and what steps has he taken to neutralize that threat?
6. What is the third major threat to the survival of the Kim regime and what steps has he taken to neutralize that threat?
7. Describe the economic reforms in North Korea and their effects.