

**THE 2020 COMMISSION REPORT ON THE
NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR ATTACKS
AGAINST THE UNITED STATES**

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For some time now, I have been telling my children, none of whom have ever lived through any event that significantly harmed America, that sooner or later, history will return. The older ones roll their eyes; the younger ones have no idea what I mean. This book shows what I mean, through a fictionalized look at a 2020 nuclear attack by North Korea on South Korea, Japan, and the United States.

The book is an imagined report, probably a lot less dry than most actual official reports, written by a 2023 bipartisan commission examining why the conflict had occurred. It is very well written by Jeffrey Lewis, a California academic focused on foreign affairs. In short, what happens is that the North Koreans shoot down a South Korean airliner full of children, mistakenly believing it to be a United States bomber on a provocation run, at the same time annual South Korean/United States war games are being conducted. Instead of coordinating with the United States, which has a history of de-escalating and requiring the South Koreans to follow our lead, the South Korean prime minister uses missiles to destroy the North Korean Air Defense headquarters and one of Kim Jong Un's palaces. With communications largely cut off because of inferior infrastructure, and figuring this is the prelude to a full-scale invasion by the United States, Kim sends short-range nuclear weapons against Japan and South Korea, killing two million people. The United States begins a conventional attack; Kim, deciding to survive he must up the ante by showing he's willing to keep escalating, sends long-range nuclear missiles against the United States, destroying Manhattan, Honolulu, northern Virginia, and Jupiter, Florida (near Trump's Mar-a-Lago). Four million Americans die (and North Korea is promptly defeated, and Kim killed, by American and South Korean conventional forces).

So history, in this telling, returns. Verisimilitude is high. The technical details seem accurate and are compelling, even ones that are somewhat speculative, such as North Korean use of drones to blind antimissile

radar. The role of rumors and how Kim might view the same events differently from us is well drawn—he can't know that the Americans aren't actually planning to invade, though the Americans know, and in the typical American way, think that should be obvious. Other details are also gruesomely fascinating, such as the possibility that the cladding put on modern high-rise buildings for environmental reasons will burn when exposed to nuclear heat, turning, in this case, Tokyo into a series of torches (like the Grenfell Tower fire in London last year). Thus, the book is a real page-turner, though not one calculated to make you sleep better that night.

Various real people appear, drawn incisively, along with a few fictional people. All Americans profiled are Republicans; there are some side references to partisan conflict occurring after the war, but no Democrats are mentioned, which makes sense, since the decision making all takes place within the Trump administration during a forty-eight hour period. The portrayal of hawkish behavior, with the same men responsible for the Iraq debacle (and the Libya debacle) still pushing a policy of American hegemony in a world that has moved on, seems quite accurate, and the depiction of decision making is interesting, in part because it shows what was also on display after the September 11 attacks, that people at the top of government act just as muddled and confused as you and I would if put in the same position—it's not like the movies, where crisp, decisive debates and decisions feature. Oddly, an old acquaintance of mine even appears—Jon Lerner, a man who is apparently now Nikki Haley's deputy. I'm at the age when I now have a fair number of such acquaintances—not famous, exactly, but known in certain circles. Not me, though. Nobody knows who I am. Sad!

Anyway, my point is that while several of the real people profiled in this book are portrayed as having dubious characteristics, especially Nikki Haley, only one person is portrayed as having no redeeming characteristic whatsoever. That's Donald Trump, who is portrayed as one hundred percent fool, and an unintelligent, tone-deaf coward to boot. Not only are his actions portrayed as stupid, he is portrayed as, among other things, demanding his golf score on the day in question go into the Commission's report, leaving his staff behind when Air Force One lifts off ahead of the nuclear blasts, and saying only "Absolutely beautiful!" when he sees the mushroom cloud. This portrayal seems wildly unlikely,

although I suppose I can't say for sure, since I don't know Trump and it seems nearly impossible to get a straight, unbiased opinion about him, something for which he surely bears a lot of the blame.

In Lewis's telling, it's Trump's tweets that are the real cause, if there is one, of the war. One part of the reason Kim launches nuclear weapons is because, when he hears about the airliner shootdown and before Trump knows about the South Korean prime minister's launching missiles, Trump tweets that "LITTLE ROCKET MAN WON'T BE BOTHERING US FOR MUCH LONGER!" This makes Kim conclude, contrary to what the South Koreans claim, that the missiles are merely the spearhead of a coordinated invasion by the United States and South Korea. Certainly, this seems like a plausible result of such a tweet by Trump. But is it a plausible tweet by Trump? I have heard a lot about Trump's tweets, and, like everyone else, I read the ones that are highlighted by the media. However, those are the only ones I see; like most people, I don't read or even see the others. So I went and read the past few months' worth. Trump sure tweets a lot. But none of his tweets seem unhinged or even stupid, which is the certainly the impression one gets from the few tweets that get wide play in the media (which is probably why they get wide play in the media).

For example, in a typical missive, yesterday Trump tweeted (and then re-tweeted), "Presidential Approval numbers are very good—strong economy, military and just about everything else. Better numbers than Obama at this point, by far. We are winning on just about every front and for that reason there will not be a Blue Wave, but there might be a Red Wave!" As far as I know, most or all of that is true, or a reasonable prediction. I went back a long way in Trump's Twitter feed, and no tweet seemed in any way particularly odd, or showing any evidence of stupidity, foolishness, or any other notable vice. Yes, the limitations of the medium make some statements seem half-developed, and Trump's phrasing is very informal. And unfiltered, personal tweeting is not something any other President has done. Certainly Obama, a disciplined man, didn't do it. So why does Trump do it?

The answer traditionally given seems to be he lacks self-control, wants the attention, and gets a feeling of aggrandizement from tweeting. These seem unlikely to be the primary reason (even if all those things are true, which they probably are). A much more likely primary answer

is that Trump realized, early on, that Twitter is the only way he can talk directly to the public, who get most of their news filtered through the Left's organs (which no longer even pretend to objectivity). He knows that any interview he gives with any mainstream television or print reporter will be used for one purpose, and one purpose only—to attempt to destroy him, by suppressing anything positive, playing up anything negative, using out-of-context (or wholly made up) quotes to paint him in a bad light, and pairing the writing with unappealing visual images. He knows this treatment is the precise opposite that given to any politician of the Left. Trump seems like a man with a nose for weakness and a fondness for aikido moves. Simply avoiding the hostile media, and forcing them to cover all of what he really says by making it short, rather than allowing them to edit it, is the answer. Frankly, it strikes me as genius, even if it may come from a form of instinctive low cunning, rather than the three-dimensional chess that people like Scott Adams ascribe it to. (And if Trump really is such a fool as portrayed in this book, he is blessed, so far, in both his enemies and circumstance.)

But tweeting is not without limitations, certainly. Why does Trump tweet without first getting advice or filtering his tweets through the State Department or other government functionaries? Probably because he's figured out that would delay and neuter the effects he desires. Why does he tweet himself, given that he could have hired consultants to write and post tweets for him? I imagine for the same reason, and because that's what Jeb Bush did. Remember him? Maybe realizing that Trump's actual tweeting suggests discipline, not lack of control, Lewis makes up more extreme future tweets from Trump, including attacking Kim's sister, making unflattering remarks about her physical appearance and suggesting she would grant him sexual favors. I suppose Trump might do such a thing, and if you're a dictator who thinks that removing your family from power is the goal of your enemies (about which he's not wrong), that would go down poorly and increase paranoia. But as far as I know, such tweets are far removed from anything Trump has ever tweeted. Along the same lines, Lewis reaches too far in his desperation to smear Trump, and erodes the realism of his book, by accusing Trump on no evidence of having an affair with Nikki Haley. He claims all his pre-August, 2018 facts are supported by endnotes, but this is often false, and when it's true, for anti-Trump statements it's usually to

an “anonymous source” repeated in some unhinged anti-Trump outlet. Really, Lewis makes out Trump as more of a villain than Kim, even ending the book with a caricatured ranting “statement” from Trump attacking the 2020 Commission. It gets tedious.

That Trump can get around media gatekeepers using social media is a big problem for the legacy media and the Left (but I repeat myself). The Left realizes this truth, which is why they are at this moment aggressively and successfully moving to deplatform and censor conservatives across all alternative media outlets. For example, this week Google, Apple, and Facebook (but not Twitter, yet), in a collusive, coordinated attack, totally deplatformed conspiracy-monger Alex Jones. Sure, Jones is an idiot. But such deplatforming only ever attacks the Right, and the Lords of Tech (and their allies in Congress) are increasingly open about the goal of extending the deplatforming to all conservatives, other than those who are willing to be docile and obedient subordinates, such as Jonah Goldberg. Not to mention that since a lot of conservative figures on social media rely on that media to make a living, the chilling effect of deplatforming, even if they are not themselves directly targeted, makes them censor themselves. Which is the desired effect. The only answer is to curb these companies and their executives. A good start would be to immediately regulate them as public utilities, and subject them to rules that forbid any viewpoint discrimination in which the federal government could not engage under the First Amendment (yes, I know the First Amendment doesn't apply to private companies—this will be statutory). We can begin with a private right of action for violations (as well as government enforcement, including felony criminal penalties for deliberate or repeated violations), with minimum statutory damages of \$500,000 per violation, a second private right of action against their executives personally, and one-way fee shifting for all plaintiffs who bring any lawsuit determined to be non-frivolous, even if they don't prevail. Unfortunately, this sort of thing isn't what Republicans do; it's only Democrats that believe they need to actually attack and win battles. That needs to change—and Trump threatens to change it, which is why the Left knows it must destroy him.

At the end of the book, Lewis portrays an America in deep trouble, with its economy in tatters and facing a rebuilding cost of \$40 trillion. That seems an impossible amount to spend, given that it's more than ten

times the current federal budget, much of which is already borrowed, and which absorbs more than twenty percent of the current GDP. And why would you re-build Manhattan? Or Northern Virginia, for that matter. I'd leave both in ruins, and use it as an excuse to rusticate all federal bureaucrats, scattering them around the country and wholly abandoning Washington, D.C. As Rahm Emanuel famously said, "You never let a serious crisis go to waste. And what I mean by that it's an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before." Moreover, events such as those portrayed in this book might be the fracture that jolts Americans into changing our entire system, or accepting a change given to them, such as the wholesale neutering of the federal government or, even better, the fragmenting of the country into multiple successor entities. I'm certainly not in favor of disasters; any person with children can't be. But whether we want it or not, disasters is what we will get, of this type or another, something we seem to have largely forgotten over the past several decades, and we might as well be thinking of to what advantage they can be turned.