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Kim Il Sung

<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/kbank/profiles/kim/>

Born into a peasant family on April 15, 1912, in Mangyondae, Korea, Kim Il Sung was still a child when his parents left Japan-occupied Korea for Manchuria. There Kim attended Chinese schools. In 1932, he became the leader of a small group of Korean partisans, which he led in various raids against Japanese outposts in Korea. In 1941, Kim fled Manchuria for the Soviet Far East. He next received military training in the Soviet Union. In 1945, Kim returned to his homeland as a major in the Soviet army. The Soviets put him in charge of the formation of a provisional system of government in Soviet-occupied Korea. In 1948, he became the first premier of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Strongly favoring national unification by military means, Kim's regime waged a guerrilla war against the South, and with strong Soviet support built up a large military.

In 1950 Kim managed to get Stalin's permission for an invasion of the South, which he launched on June 25. But it was only thanks to a massive Chinese intervention that Kim's regime survived the U.S.-led counteroffensive in fall 1950. In 1953, Kim and his Soviet and Chinese guardians chose to settle for half the country, but Kim never accepted the division of his country and until the end of his life continued efforts to overthrow the South Korean republic and kill its rulers.

After 1953, Kim created an austere, militarized and highly regimented North Korean society that worshipped him as a deified leader. While officially extolling self-reliance, North Korea in reality relied heavily on Soviet and Chinese economic and military support. Kim's North Korea pursued many independent initiatives toward developing nations, often with the objective to undermine positions of the West. Since the 1970s, North Korea has been a major arms supplier to countries such as Libya, Iran and Syria.

In 1993, Kim's defense policy became a great concern for Washington when intelligence analysis estimated that North Korea was less than two years away from being able to strike South Korea and Japan with nuclear missiles. The ensuing crisis was eased in June 1994 when former U.S. President Carter persuaded Kim to freeze his program in return for an easing of international sanctions and talks with the United States about ending North Korea's international isolation. Kim died on the eve of these talks at age 82 on July 8, 1994, in Pyongyang, North Korea.