



Episode 1,015: North Korea Update: Will the War of Words Become a Hot War?

Guest: Michael Malice

WOODS: I'm going to be seeing you in a few days at the Mises Institute event, but far more important of course was seeing you at the 1,000th episode event, and I cannot wait for the video of that to be available. I'm picking it up today. We'll get it all cleaned up and ready. But it was a tremendous time, was it not?

MALICE: I think it's funny how it sounds like you're hyping something when I think we outdid ourselves.

WOODS: Yeah, I think I under-hyped it, actually.

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: I understated this thing. yeah.

MALICE: And I feel bad for anyone who was on the fence about going thinking it wouldn't be that exciting when it was a hoot.

WOODS: Yeah, it was an incredible time. And we packed a lot of entertainment value into that free ticket that people got.

MALICE: And wait until they see my entrance.

WOODS: Yeah, your entrance was spectacular. Of course, it would have been fun to get on camera my entrance when I first walked into the ballroom, they had things set up, and I saw that they had laid out 560 seats. I said, "What the heck is the matter with you people? You don't start with 560."

MALICE: Right.

WOODS: "You start with 300 and you bring more chairs in. What the heck are you thinking?" But it turns out my event planner, Mark Cross, knew more about the situation than I did because he got it within 2% basically, because we had nearly 600 show up, which is very, very, very hard to do. Unless you've planned an event yourself, you don't realize how hard it is to get that many people to show up to something. Even a libertarian event, you get 150, 200 people. This was an amazing thing. The

attendance was great, the audience couldn't have been happier, and we just had a lot of great surprises for them. So it was fun.

MALICE: There was a lot of enthusiasm. They really came to have a good time instead of like with a chip on their shoulder.

WOODS: Right, yeah, exactly. And we delivered because as I said, we were not going to do a panel on the future of liberty. Again, just bludgeon me now. That is not happening. So we had fun.

MALICE: I think you got pretty bludgeoned when you were trying to take swipes at me on stage, Tom.

WOODS: [laughing] I know. It was unbelievable. I would say – Let's just say this. I don't think it would be a spoiler – It's not exactly a spoiler to say Michael just mopped the floor with me and I was helpless. You don't really think that's giving anything away, right?

MALICE: There's this video I saw online once of a chimpanzee throttling a duck. It was basically like that.

WOODS: [laughing] That is funny. Well, there you go. That is pretty much what happened.

MALICE: And you know what else is funny was how the audience were asking me to insult them.

WOODS: They felt like that was part of the experience. You can't just say, "Oh, hello, nice to meet you."

MALICE: But it was like I'm like the Don Rickles or the Bianca Del Rio of liberty now.

WOODS: Yeah. It really is true. SO now you've got to deliver. You've got to do a performance for everybody you meet at this point. People were asking you to write something insulting when you signed their books.

MALICE: Four people.

WOODS: [laughing] And some of them, by the way, took photos of that and posted them in my private group.

MALICE: Oh, did they really?

WOODS: Yeah. So everybody felt like they certainly got their money's worth, that's for sure.

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: But anyway, just great. And the tone was set. I mean, you'll enjoy seeing the video of the portion before you came out, because the tone was set by that opening video that we played with the testimonials from all these people from around the movement, and ending with Hans Hoppe urging us — his final words were, "Always smashing the enemy." And that got a big round of applause and cheers from the crowd, so it was just amazing. Just amazing.

MALICE: I can't wait to meet him.

WOODS: Yeah, that's going to be fun, absolutely.

Okay, let's talk about North Korea. And by the way, by the way, let's say something about *Dear Reader*, your book, which you can also get on audiobook as of not too terribly long ago, and if you've never gone to Audible before, you can get your first audiobook for free and Michael still gets a royalty, so everybody's happy. You can do that through TomWoodsAudio.com. But you sold out of every single copy you brought, and you could have sold a lot more. People wanted that book.

MALICE: I underestimated your crowd, and that's on me.

WOODS: *Dear Reader*, of course, is the book. And if anything, I overestimated my crowd. But by that, it turns out it meant that a lot of them already own all these titles that I brought. That was the funny thing. *Oh yeah, I already have all those.* All right, well, good on ya [laughing].

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: I'm glad you do. That was the right thing to do.

Okay, so I wanted to talk about North Korea because last week when I thought of the idea, bringing you back on for this, this really was one of the top headlines. Then all of a sudden, this horrible thing happened in Las Vegas. But two nuclear powers trading barbs I think is always a top story. Certainly around here it is. So let's start with this. There's some kind of a — I don't know what's going on. I don't know if this is just —

MALICE: Tom, I have to correct you. It's actually pronounced "nucular."

WOODS: [laughing] Ouch. I don't know what that could possibly be a reference to. Anyway, I want to start off with something I can't tell is just for public consumption or is genuine, but Rex Tillerson, Secretary of State, keeps saying things like — talking about the need for negotiations, and then Trump goes on Twitter and undermines him and says, "Save your energy, Rex. We'll do what has to be done," basically saying that it's pointless to negotiate. What did you make of that?

MALICE: Well, when you're dealing with North Korea — and this is something, even if you don't listen to me or like what I have to say, I would encourage people when they're looking at anyone talking about this issue, especially in the West, there's a lot of reading between the lines and a lot of deceit and dishonesty. The country boasts about how they are kind of conniving and crafty and how they're manipulative, so you

can't ever take anything at face value. I mean, again, this is a country when the UN criticized them for having concentration camps, their response was, *We don't use that term, so therefore we don't have any*. So they're not playing it straight in any sense, ever.

Now, there's two scenarios at least here that we're dealing with with Tillerson and Trump. The first is the commonly accepted scenario, which is Tillerson is a dignified, smart diplomat who's doing his best, and Trump is a flying-off-the-handle lunatic. That's one possibility. The other possibility – and I think that is unlikely because I don't think Trump would be – if he was going to be undermining Tillerson that much, he'd be firing him. He's had no problem firing people within days of hiring them. The other scenario, which I think is more likely, is that they're doing a good cop/bad cop situation, where Tillerson is the nice, sane one, and Trump's the foaming-at-the-mouth lunatic, and then North Korea has to cut a deal with Tillerson lest they get Trump.

And at the very least, whichever one of these it is or if it's a continuum, it's effective, because North Korea obviously has the most extremely centralized leadership of any country on earth. So when they have two leaders effectively saying opposite things from their opponent, they're going to be in a state of confusion, which is a very effective negotiating tactic.

WOODS: Hmm, okay. Well, that's definitely plausible. What do you make of Trump using disparaging language toward Kim Jong-un, like "rocket man," for example? I know we talked at one point about that movie *The Interview* –

MALICE: Yes.

WOODS: – and that this was significant because it undermines the regime's narrative whereby they are feared and respected throughout the world. Do you feel similarly about this kind of thing?

MALICE: Well, here's the other thing. It's like, let's suppose – I'm friends with you, but let's suppose you had someone on the show or someone who hates you in the press was calling you Tommy Boy. This is clearly condescending and derisive and overly familiar at the very least, even if the phrase itself is not inherently nasty. So for them, when you have to refer to a leader as an honorific – you can't just say, for example, Kim Il-sung. You have to say General Kim Il-sung or the Great Leader Kim Il-sung. When people visit North Korea and they just say Kim Il-sung, they are corrected. You have to use a term of respect. So to refer to him not by his name at all but by some colloquialism is very low class and condescending and dismissive, and that is something that the translator, first of all, is going to have an issue with, because he wants to use polite language if not deferential language referring to Kim Jong-un. So that is one thing.

So it also speaks to a level of contempt, that we are being "brazen" towards North Korea, and that is something that is useful. Now, we all remember – I think it was back in July or August. They were going to hit Guam. They said we have four missiles, we're going to hit Guam. We're just waiting for Marshall Kim Jong-un to tell us when to fire them. And President Trump gets on TV and says, "We will react with fire and fury the likes of which the world has never seen," and Chuck Schumer, who knows nothing

about North Korea – nor do I expect him to – says this reckless rhetoric isn't helpful. Well, non-reckless rhetoric wasn't helpful either dealing with these evil, evil people, and sure enough, the day came and went. Guam is still here. So we have to look at the data when you're looking at North Korea, and in fact, that data shows there were claims of an attack and those claims have been backed off.

WOODS: Can you go back to the 1990s, go through Clinton, Bush, and Obama – so the presidents before Trump – and talk about how they handled North Korea, what they got wrong and what they got right?

MALICE: I mean, this is – at the very least, everyone to some extent got it wrong because the regime is still here, right? I mean, the dream is for the regime to go away through nonviolent means, which is starting to happen through the black markets that are springing up throughout North Korea. The Clinton approach, working in conjunction with the South Korean government, what they had was called the Sunshine Policy, was basically, let's kind of give them oil and bribe them and they'll put a halt on the nuclear weapons program. And you know, North Korea was at that time on the state-sponsors of terrorism list. This was a path to opening diplomatic relations. Madeleine Albright visited at the very end of 2000. This was going to be a pathway towards diplomatic relations and recognition of North Korea as a country.

Then President Bush comes, puts them in the Axis of Evil, which was pretty much a kill list. After Iraq, we're going after Iran or North Korea. They said correctly, what do we have to do with Iran or Iraq? Pretty much nothing. And you're just putting us on here – And the Bush White House admitted it; they go, We didn't want just Middle Eastern countries on this list because we'd look racist, so they just threw in North Korea and kind of put them all together. But Bush toward the end of his presidency removed them from the state sponsors of terrorism list.

Then you had Obama, and I don't think Obama knew what to make of them one way or another. I mean, I don't think there was any kind of – it was pretty much a stalemate. I don't remember him talking about them at all. And now Trump coming in, being like, This regime's not going to outlast – well, he didn't put it in those terms, but, He's going to solve this problem, he says in his own words. This seems to me pretty explicitly to be a major goal of the Trump presidency.

WOODS: I read an article by – it might have been Perry. I think he was the former Defense Secretary. And he was arguing that, by 2006, he believed that the chance was fairly good for some kind of agreement with North Korea, the agreement along the lines of full diplomatic recognition in exchange for abandonment of the nuclear program, and he says, but the tough U.S. sanctions at that time just led North Korea to withdraw altogether from any talks and to just go ahead and push forward with their nuclear program. Do you think that's an accurate assessment of the situation?

MALICE: No. I mean, the U.S. and North Korea are separate countries. At the very best – like, look at the U.S. and China. At the very best, we're rivals. We're never going to be like the U.S. and Canada, right, because our systems are different, our spheres of influence are different. So of course there's going to be something that the U.S. does at any time that they're going to be able to use as an excuse to go on to do what they intended to do. Even if it wasn't sanctioned, it would be how they talk to us or the

disrespect. I mean, they will never have a shortage of things that they can point to do be like, *Well, it's the Americans' faults*. I mean, when the Japanese prime minister came to visit in the early 2000s, they were demanding money for reparations from the pre-World War II colonial period. So you will always find some excuse for someone who has wronged when you're a country like this just to shake them down. They're a gangster regime.

WOODS: What do you know about the prison camps over there, and how much of what we're hearing do you think is the truth and how much is lurid exaggeration?

MALICE: I mean, it would be hard to exaggerate just how horrific these camps are. And one of the things about these camps – you know, I get into it in my book in some detail. One of the things about these concentration camps is that people get freed. This is what people in the West don't often understand. It's not a life sentence. They'll send you in there, and then after – with your family. They take three generations. And then after a certain period – they don't tell you what the period is. You assume it's for life, and many people of course die or get horribly maimed – they'll be like, All right, you're free to go. And you basically have to sign like a nondisclosure agreement promising not to talk about them. So people have been in the camps and escaped. You can read in the book. The levels of depravity are so dark that it's just – and you can see them on Google Earth too, and there's an organization called Human Rights in North Korea, and they have a PDF about the camps, and they just go into great detail about the atrocities that are coming to bear. It's just mind-numbingly horrific.

WOODS: I think I've – I almost surely asked you this in the past, but what do you say to people who say what needs to happen here is we need to make better use of China in this situation, in reining in North Korea?

MALICE: Well, that's true. I mean, China's the one who doesn't want all those refugees swarming their borders. China doesn't want a U.S. ally on their border. It is in many ways China's problem. And I think China has started to turn around, and part of what's started to make China turn around and their kind of vision of themselves as being a kind of world dignitary is this whole Otto Warmbier situation, which is very, very, very weird. Because as I've gotten a bigger profile on this issue and I've started speaking on bigger platforms, the conversation has changed a little bit, which is very, very flattering and gratifying.

And I was doing Glenn Beck a week or two ago, and after – I did Glenn Beck the first time, and I made the comment that it was my belief that Otto Warmbier, that kid that they had held hostage, committed self-harm because apparently there were no marks of torture of any kind, and North Korea surprisingly treats their hostages well because if you have a hostage, you want to return them in one piece because you want the ransom. That Ling sister was treated well and some of these others too, they all said, They were careful with us. And he comes back mangled, and then the parents come out and they said he was gruesomely tortured, broken bones, deaf, blind. His teeth had been rearranged with pliers. And I'm like, Oh, geez, I got this completely wrong. And not only was I concerned that I was getting it wrong; I was like, Wait a minute. This is a change in North Korean behavior for the worse, because if there's a recklessness, that is a scary direction for them to go in.

And then as soon as the parents spoke out and said those things, the coroner said, That's not what we saw. His teeth were fine. There were no injuries. So I don't understand this discrepancy at all, so it's very, very – someone's not telling the truth, and I don't know why and I don't know how.

WOODS: Okay, I was equally confused, so if you're confused, then I feel like I'm more justified in being confused. What were to happen if – let's say something somehow happened to Kim Jong-un. It could be natural causes, –

MALICE: Sure.

WOODS: – or maybe the CIA gets something right at one point. In other words, they actually set out to do something and it actually happens instead of what they tried with Fidel Castro time after time. The point is, if he were out of the picture, what's the process for replacing him? Where does his replacement come from?

MALICE: Well, his grandfather, the Great Leader Kim Il-sung, was the founder of North Korea, and there was some meeting where someone said, Hey, what happens when the Great Leader's gone? And he got exiled to the countryside. So it's not like there's a Mike Pence waiting to take over the reins. The North Korean Ten Commandment says the revolution shall be continued through the generations until the end, meaning only a direct descendant of Kim Il-sung, who has the Mount Baektu Bloodline, can be the leader.

So if he went away somehow, first of all, the regime would clamp down immediately very hard. And they would find – I don't know – they would find someone to fill that gap somehow. It could be – you know who it would be probably? See, it might be Kim Jong-il's sister, Kim Jong-un's aunt, Kim Kyong-hui, but a female, it's a very patriarchal society, so I mean – but they'd be grasping at straws at that point.

WOODS: What is the policy on leaving the country, just moving out of North Korea?

MALICE: If you are allowed to leave at all, you have to have family members left behind as hostages to make sure you don't defect.

WOODS: Okay, so there's no permanent relocation except under –

MALICE: There's no temporary relocation unless you're very high up in the government. You are not allowed to leave the country.

WOODS: Presumably, some people must manage to – at least a trickle must manage to figure a way out. I mean, there must be North Koreans living somewhere in the world who can give testimonies about what's going on.

MALICE: Of course.

WOODS: Who are these sorts of people? Where do they go? Why do we not hear more from them telling us about what's really going on there?

MALICE: Oh, there's many of them. There are many books that they've written. I can think of five off the top of my head. Basically, the Tumen River between North Korea and China is very shallow, and at night they just sneak through. But the Chinese, if they catch them, send them back to North Korea. So if you're a North Korean, you're automatically a South Korean citizen, right? So your goal is to step foot on South Korean soil, whether it's an embassy or Seoul, and you're set. But it's a lot trickier than it sounds. They have these kinds of people who engage in human trafficking in the good sense, who get them from North Korea. Sometimes they go through Mongolia, sometimes through Laos and Cambodia. It's a very tricky route. Try to get on a plane without a passport, you know what I mean? And North Koreans stand out certainly in China because of their clothing, they're not going to be able to speak Chinese. So many do escape, but the thing is you've got to be careful. What happens sometimes, the families left behind are smart because they'll get punished, so they'll bribe the government and get death certificates for them.

WOODS: Oh, man. All right, you were saying earlier about black markets developing in North Korea. Where are we finding out about this and what does that amount to?

MALICE: Well, they're not really even secret. It's not a black market here, like let's oppose drug dealers or surreptitious. It's like you'll have these bazaars in these towns because the government is not capable of providing food anymore, and thankfully – like they have no choice, in a sense, but to say, All right, we're going to allow this creeping capitalism in – although they wouldn't use that term and they'll pretend it's still a function of the Juche idea. And the cops who monitor these towns, they get a bribe, which is basically just like a tax, and people can buy and sell food, especially, and other things. And what's interesting – you see this in several articles that are being pointed out – is that these black markets are being run heavily by women. And since they're dealing with hard currency as opposed to government-inflated, worthless currency, these women end up being much wealthier than their military husbands, which is a big problem for their cultural balances and how they see themselves.

WOODS: Think back to the collapse of the regimes behind the Iron Curtain. We saw on television absolutely massive demonstrations, where basically the regime had lost even the grudging consent of the public, and the regimes, with an exception like Romania, collapsed right before our eyes. Is there a reason that that couldn't happen in North Korea or that you expect if the regime were to fall that it would fall differently from that?

MALICE: There's no protesting. There's no conspiring in North Korea. It's a surveillance society, so everyone is always reporting on each other on a weekly basis. So you're not going to be able to have demonstrations, because also you don't have electricity so you're not communicating from town to town. There's no like Arab Spring, let's get on Facebook. People don't have computers. They don't have anything like that.

And again, even in these communist countries behind the Iron Curtain, they were never as brutal – or maybe they were back in the day, but certainly not by the '90s and '80s, they weren't as brutal as to punish an entire family for what one person did. I mean, after Khrushchev, they closed down the gulags. And North Korea points at him as this clown who ruined the Stalinist revolution. And they were trying to out Stalinist Stalin in their approach to – I mean, this is the kind of thing, the leaders are regarded

with such reverence that you have to wear the pin on your shirt with their picture all the time, and the newspaper has their picture every day and the newspaper has to be disposed of in a certain way because you can't just throw the leader's photo in the trash. So this is a whole other level than Gorbachev or Khrushchev or Brezhnev or any of these people.

WOODS: All right, one more thing. We get most of our news about what's going on in North Korea from non-Michael Malice sources, unfortunately. So you're just online, click through, read a few articles. What should I look for that the media is likely to get wrong in their North Korea reporting and analysis?

MALICE: The worst of these are these conservatives. There's this guy – can I use his name?

WOODS: Sure.

MALICE: My textbook example of just the worst of these Cretans is Todd Starnes, who's got a talk show on Fox. And he had written an article that said, "Donald Trump should rain hellfire on North Korea." And when I was doing Glenn Beck, before I went on the air, he had a little intro for me, and he said everything I was saying. He was like, *Look, these are 25 million hostages. They're slaves. This is who we should have some sympathy for.* So the idea that Kim Jong-un says insulting things about America and Trump and all this other stuff – which is not acceptable, not cool, and that's fair – the idea that our immediate response has to be killing millions of people is mind-bogglingly crazy and does not apply to any morality. I mean, war with them has to be an absolute last resort. It can't be just because – It's like, Tom, if you came up to me and shoved me, I'm not going to kill your family and burn down your house, but that's the equivalent here. So be very careful about all the people who are saber rattling, who are desperate for war, who relish it. It's a very, very common and dark trope and they don't know what they're talking about.

WOODS: All right, well, that is good. Is there anybody that you've read where you've said, *Finally, somebody in the mainstream gets it?*

MALICE: I've got to tell you – you wouldn't know their names because I didn't know their names, but a lot of the articles that are coming out from respectable sources, establishment sources – not this punditry, but like journalists – they are getting it exactly right. So frankly, I think the state of North Korea reporting is very good these days, because people are looking at it in a much more nuanced way, certainly much more than when I did my Kickstarter a few years back to do it five years ago. So I don't know if I've had a small part to play in it. I'll take credit for having a small part to play in it. But the fact that it's happened is a very wonderful development.

WOODS: That is indeed. All right, well, of course people should check out your book *Dear Reader*. And I'm so glad, I think what happened at the event was everybody knew they should be reading this book because they've heard it over and over and particularly emphasized on this show, and then they had this opportunity to get it immediately, not even having to click a mouse, and that pent-up demand, boom, in no time at all, no copies of that book left. Amazing.

MALICE: And some people had the eBook and they asked me to sign their laptop cover, which I gladly did.

WOODS: Yeah, there you go. See, I have a little experience with eBooks, so I've had that request made of me.

MALICE: Oh, have you?

WOODS: Yeah, how about that? Yeah, how about that? So where should people get the book? Of course you can get it at TomWoods.com/1015. There'll be a link there. Get it on Amazon. And do you want to send people to your particular site for the book?

MALICE: No, just go to Amazon. Or actually, honestly, if you want to go to Audible and listen to the beginning of the audiobook, it's chillingly wonderful.

WOODS: Yes, yes. Yes, indeed. And then you will say, "I would be crazy not to read or listen to this thing." So get that baby for free at TomWoodsAudio.com. Michael, thanks for your time, and can't wait to see you in New York.

MALICE: Thanks, Tom.