



Episode 324- The Real North Korea Interview

Guest: Michael Malice

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WOODS: Let's talk first of all about the movie. It's a little bit late; it's not as in the news anymore, but I'm interested in your analysis of the whole—first of all, the whole controversy surrounding the movie, *The Interview*, and then your view of the movie. I saw a headline of an article you wrote in which you said that the movie more or less got major things right about the nature of the regime. First of all, set the stage here. What was your opinion about the real culprit in the whole Sony leak issue?

MALICE: Oh, okay, there's a lot to cover here. Let me do it as concisely as possible. I've had good sources tell me that there's no way that it was possible that it was North Korea, and I have had good sources tell me that it absolutely, certainly was North Korea. So I can't really answer that. What I can answer is this: we know—and the U.S. government has said this—that we have been hacked by China. We know that we have been hacked by Russia. And both of them have gone after military stuff, not some stoner comedy, and those weren't really a problem. But when North Korea, let's suppose this really happened, hacked Sony, you had Newt Gingrich on the air calling for war. I think what that speaks to is it's a lot easier to yell at the weird fat kid, being North Korea, than it is to yell at the jock on steroids, which is Putin or China. I think that's kind of emblematic of American foreign policy, and that's something that people should keep in mind.

That said, I am going to disagree slightly with something that you just said. You said that *The Interview*, it's kind of fading from public consciousness, and that's true. However, that movie is very important vis-à-vis North Korea. I'm shocked that I'm saying this because when I saw the preview of the film, I was very concerned that it was doing the same thing that everything gets wrong vis-à-vis North Korea, which is that the leaders are these fat, wacky goofballs who don't really know what they are doing, and aren't they silly, and that denies them moral culpability of orchestrating the worst country in the world, using food to fuel political obedience, and sending people to concentration camps to this day, sending entire families.

So in the preview for the movie, there's that one point where Kim Jong-un turns to James Franco and vis-à-vis Katy Perry. He's like, oh, I have never heard this before. And I am like, this

movie is going to be completely terrible. But I met a refugee last week, and she said, no, you really should watch it. You're not giving it fair credit. Like, okay, she knows what she's talking about. So I am going to watch it. And that scene in the preview when Kim Jong-un says, "I have never listened to Katy Perry. That's him just trying to play cool," to James Franco, in the movie really makes him out to be purely an evil comic villain. And I was shocked, which is very hard to do in a comedy that he's portrayed in this way. That's something that I've done with my book, *Dear Reader*, is to use comedy as an excuse to explain North Korea and how it got to be this way. And there's several points in the film where they take the North Korean regime to task, . My one favorite moment is when James Franco is talking to Seth Rogan's character, and James Franco says Kim Jong-un is not a bad guy; he's just been put in a difficult situation. Seth Rogan, and I know this is a family show, so I'll censor him—just looks at him and goes, you're effin ignorant and you're effin stupid.

And that really is him kind of him giving the finger to so many in the public who really think North Korea is this carnival, whereas it should be the greatest source of horror possible. Frequently when I do radio interviews, they'll start off talking with ha, ha, ha, Kim Jong-il had a perfect golf score. And I have it down to about 45 seconds before the people are almost in tears, as I explain the layers of hell that people have to live in in North Korea. And these radio hosts go from that to being like what did I ever think was funny about this place. But this is why that movie is still important. It shows Kim Jong-un as a laughing stock. And what my refugee friend pointed out is people in North Korea believe that we are in fear of Kim Jong-un, that we quiver in our boots. And the fact that this movie shows us being willing to look at him as a loser and as a joke is something unfathomable to them. And the thing with a house of cards, once you pull one away, the entire edifice falls. So, yes, it's made for public consciousness in America, but people are going to be increasingly aware of it in North Korea, and once they are aware that this is how we look at Kim Jong-un, they are going to start thinking some very uncomfortable questions for the regime.

WOODS: I wonder, by the way, how people in North Korea thought about what happened in eastern Europe in the late 1980s, or if they were allowed to see it. I was looking at a documentary the other day about Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania, who more or less was able to stand aloof a little bit, at least for a little while, from the mass demonstrations going on throughout eastern Europe. But eventually, they got a hold of him, and they killed him. This is a guy who just two weeks earlier had been standing up before the government and was getting the usual cheers and standing ovations, and two weeks later he's got a bullet in his head. I wonder if anybody living in an oppressive regime would be inspired by something like that. Do you have any sense of how they viewed this? Or were they able to view it?

MALICE: I go through this extensively in my book. But let's talk about this as a great example for fans of liberty. Ceausescu was by far regarded as worst of the communist dictators in eastern Europe. In fact, in '89 when Poland and all these other countries are falling away from Soviet influence, and Gorbachev refusing to send in the tanks, he was the one berating Gorbachev—

insisting you've got to put these people down, and Gorbachev said no. Ceausescu was the worst because he had gone to North Korea, saw what the great leader, Kim Il-sung, had done in North Korea and said: I am going to import this to eastern Europe. So Romania was the worst because Ceausescu very much followed the North Korean model.

Now, what did that mean for North Korea? Well, in North Korea on the regime level, Kim Jong-il took that footage of Ceausescu being killed, and he played it for everyone at the top leadership positions. Literally, every day he made them watch the videotape, and he says: this is what will happen to you if the masses ever get out of control. He told them explicitly you will get personally killed just like Ceausescu if we lose our grip on power. So when people say that North Korea needs to liberalize, the people at the very top understand perfectly well that they themselves will be killed. Look at Gaddafi. Look at Egypt, Slobodan Milosevic. There is a huge incentive for these people in the power structure not just from selfish power hunger reasons, but for self-preservation reasons. That's number one.

Number two is, North Koreans are regarded as crazy here, but they're actually brilliant with their propaganda, and one of the things they say is, this is why it's important that Kim Jong-il followed Kim Il-sung. Because if you have a bad leader follow a good one like Khrushchev following Stalin or Gorbachev being the worst, the entire revolution collapses. And rather than eastern Europe being something to inspire the masses, this was proof that the yellow toxic winds of capitalism will destroy your country, and they are very, very proud that they are the ones left standing while the rest of the Soviet bloc fell apart.

WOODS: All right, that's very interesting. It's almost like we canned this—that question—because that's such an interesting answer. And you're saying, if I can jump back to something you said a few moments ago, you seem to be suggesting that the general public of North Korea: if they get wind of the fact that their leader, who is portrayed as this colossus bestriding the earth and of whom everyone shivers in fear is, in fact, a figure of ridicule—that even just a shift like that in the public consciousness could be enough to delegitimize the regime to a dangerous degree?

MALICE: Absolutely. This reminds me—I can speak to this being born in the Soviet Union. One of the big things that delegitimized the Soviet Union were trashy 80s soap operas like *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, where one didn't have to be some kind of political sophisticate or philosophy major to see how the people are dressed and wonder why am I wiping my butt with newspaper? You know? So it was just like, why are we waiting in lines to get milk when poor people have more gallons of milk than they could handle? So the power of bad television—we mock it because it's drivel, and it's meant for the masses, but at the same time, it's very telling. So when they see how things are portrayed, that says a lot more than any flyers or press releases or propaganda. It's like, wait a minute. If they are in empowered to—there's a scene where Kim Jong-un is making out with James Franco while they are both drunk, right? Now, it's unthinkable—I mean, Kim Jong-un is deified. So the idea that you have some kind of—even in the West like Mary and Joseph making out in a movie, people would be very taken aback, and

often rightly so. But for him to be making out with a man in a country where homosexuality is unknown, while drunk, will completely blow people's minds. And, again, they don't need to see it. They need to know just through whispering this is really what they think of him, and then a lot of other questions start following pretty quickly.

WOODS: Michael, when you were preparing your book, *Dear Reader*, you spent some time in North Korea. Does the regime just allow you just free access to the country to go anywhere you want and see anything you want to see?

MALICE: (laughs) Does the American regime? No. When you go there, and I am writing an article right now about why everyone should visit, you are there as there guest. You are taken on a guided tour. That said, people think that's so ominous, but it's not unusual for any country when you go to visit to have a tour guide. Tour guides are not some kind of government spies. They speak English perfectly, whatever language it might be, and they do take you to certain places, but the idea that everything is fake is also untrue. You're taken to their capital city. You're surrounded by the populace. And in the capital city, they take themselves very seriously, and they have this point of pride living in Pyongyang. You have to have a high social background so you can step foot in that city. If you're disabled or unattractive, they banish you from the city and send you to the countryside. That's how insane it is. But it's very fascinating, because they don't really have electricity. So they can't really put on this show of how wonderful it is because you can't not notice that every chair is going to have a scratch on it or the lights aren't on and things like that.

WOODS: What do you make of the relationship between the United States and North Korea over the past—well, even just the past several years, but you'll recall that North Korea was listed among the axis of evil. It seemed a little bit—nobody denies it's an evil regime, but it seemed anomalous and a bit out of place in the context of Islamic radicalism for Bush to suddenly bring it up.

MALICE: But the whole thing is that's not anomalous, and I thought it was anomalous at the time. Of course, in the book, Kim Jong-il rails, and he's not, of course, in any kind of cahoots with Iran and Iraq, but in the '80s—North Korea regards Korea as one country split into two by the U.S. imperialists. So whenever they write North or South Korea, the N or S are lower case because these are two regions of one indivisible nation. And in the '80s, neither country is recognized by the U.N. And Seoul was granted the Olympics. Kim Jong-il contacted the people in Seoul, and he said, hey, why don't we share the Olympics with Pyongyang, and it will be a great message to the world that Korea is indivisible, and he neither understood nor seemed to care that the Olympics are granted to a city and not a country, and it's not transferable like a check. You can't just say, the International Olympics Committee granted it to me, but I am going to share it with my buddy over here.

So Seoul refused. So what did Kim Jong-il do? He sent two of his agents on a plane, and they placed a bomb on the plane. They stepped off the plane when they made a transfer. The bomb

blew up and killed everyone on board, and the two were apprehended, the two agents, pretending to be a husband and wife. The man and the woman both had preloaded cigarettes with cyanide capsules like James Bond. They started smoking them. He died, and she didn't. And they later broke her. She was pretending to be a Japanese agent, but having grown up in North Korea, they were asking her questions like, what street did you grow up on? What was your favorite candy growing up? And she would say that she had no idea. She had never known Japanese streets, never seen Japanese candy, and she confessed. And what's insane is that the president of South Korea granted a pardon—a full pardon. She's walking around Seoul right now because the blame went to Kim Jong-il and Kim Il-sung.

So there is a reason why they were on that axis of evil, and not only that. That's why Madeleine Albright went to visit North Korea, because when you are on this—I forgot what the official status a nation that harbors terrorism list—that has economic consequences. So that was his attempt to get his strike against his record revoked, and again, this is only a few months before Bush was inaugurated. So there is some justification for him putting North Korea in that axis of evil. Although, as an axis, it doesn't make sense in a mathematical sense.

WOODS: What is your opinion of the wisdom, or otherwise, of the U.S. presence over in Korea in terms of having U.S. forces stationed there?

MALICE: It's just probably the same as yours or forces stationed anywhere. It makes absolutely no sense. South Korea can handle North Korea pretty well, and North Korea is not suicidal. One of the big arguments people say is they are crazy, they are suicidal. If they are suicidal, how is it they are the last ones standing? A suicidal person would be the first one to go. The example I always use—you might remember last April there were these photographs of Kim Jong-un threatening to nuke Austin and Los Angeles. He had the map behind him. Friends of mine were contacting me: this guy is crazy! I said, if you are going to nuke somebody, why would you warn them—that nukes are coming to Austin, number one? And number two, the way to look at them is like a bank robber. There's two types of bank robber. There are the bank robbers that go in the bank and start shooting at the ceiling, and they say, give me all your money. You give them the money. They leave. It's fine. Then there's the bank robber that comes in and starts shooting people. Now, the first one might be an evil person, but it's not completely crazy. He knows if he starts taking hostages and killing people, the consequences will be much more severe than just if some money is taken, and that's what North Korea has been doing. When they fired their missile, they fired it into the Sea of Japan. They didn't fire it into Tokyo. They didn't fire into Seoul. So what America needs to understand is so much of their propaganda is for external purposes. We laugh at the North Korean populace unfairly for buying into the propaganda, but everyone in the West buys into it hook, line, and sinker with a straight face.

WOODS: All right, let's switch gears away from this. I want to ask you something I didn't ask you when we talked about your book, which is: you have read—and this was something that you put in the Kickstarter video at the very beginning of this project, that you were going to be reading books in North Korea that basically no Westerner has read, and this was going to give

you a unique—your book is already unique, being an unauthorized autobiography. It's a very interesting model that you have. But the fact that you read things that basically nobody else has read: what kind of insights do you have that, well, frankly nobody else has that are important for people to know about?

MALICE: I read 60 books to craft *Dear Reader* because I wanted to get everything possible about North Korea in there. I wanted someone who's interested in the subject to read this and have a full understanding and to make North Korea comprehensible to the layman. But you read these communist books, and it's very hard to describe how monotonous they are and also how achronological. In these books it will be like Kim Jong Il went to a factory, there's a problem with the factory, he suggests the solution, no one had ever conceived of such a solution, the solution works. And then the next chapter there's another factory and there's another problem. Gee, I wonder what happens here. So this is very telling in terms of how the communists and the totalitarian regime breaks down people's critical thinking; these stories don't ever have anyone's names other than Kim Jong-il or his father, Kim Il-sung. It will say "an official" or a "factory worker." They won't have times. They won't have dates.

There's one story that just began with President Kim Il-sung went to a European country one year for the funeral of their leader, and when you take away facts like data points and time and other people, it creates this sense of unreality, which is this most extreme version of political propaganda, which is facts are completely irrelevant. All that matters is the narrative and the story. It really creates this kind of disconnect between the reader and reality when they are believing in all these fairy tales that have no place in history, and they start to look at, I guess, all history in the same kind of vein. It's very, very chilling when you read between the lines, and I do not envy—of all the torture that happens in North Korea, having to memorize these awful, awful stories. They have no point and no payoff. It's just brutal.

And there's something else that I could speak to about this. I met a refugee last week, and she was telling me how all the classrooms in North Korea—they raise rabbits. They raise them for their fur, and for their meat—fine. It's a great little project for the class. They all had to spend Saturday nights in the school, I think it was 7:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m., to make sure that the American spies didn't come and steal these rabbits. Now, I don't know why the American spies are only working on Saturdays. I certainly don't know why they have to cross an ocean to get these rabbits, and I don't know why the entire class had to be there instead of two people, but at an early age, you were forced to do such things over and over. By the time you're an adult, you're going to be pretty obedient with regard to the most absurd questions and tests forced on you. So they get them very young, and it's very pervasive and pernicious, and I don't think we as Americans can really appreciate what that's like.

WOODS: I think a lot of times, libertarians are inclined to think that we have only so much energy, only so many resources, so I'm going to focus my attention on the enormities of my own government. I'm going to focus my attention on what the U.S. government is up to. And that's how I incline, just because that's the only country where I have any expertise anyway. So

that's where I focus my attention. Why does it matter what's going on in North Korea? This is a long way away. We don't know anybody over there. It's very unfortunate, but we don't live in a regime like that. We're not going to live in a regime like that. So from a purely selfish point of view, why does it even matter?

MALICE: Well, from a—

WOODS: In other words, why should Western libertarians care about this? I want you to make your pitch for that.

MALICE: I can go into the whole value—I hate it when people say this is important or that's important. If it's not important to you, there's very little you can do, and that's fine, but what I felt was important was if people care about liberty, and if people—and this does not just apply just to libertarians. I think everyone in the West vis-à-vis North Korea, there's a complete consensus that they need more liberty no matter where you are in the political spectrum. But I thought if people care about concentration camps and children starving in the street, but they don't know what's really going on, just like John Galt in *Atlas Shrugged*, I am going to do something about this. All I can do is write books, and you know what? If I am a libertarian, or if I am a layman, and I want to understand North Korea, I don't have that option, and okay, I am going to do something about it. I wrote this book to give people that option. And the more people that read and the more I now am in a position to give interviews and talk about it, the more people are understanding how pernicious it is, just how evil it is, and yeah, maybe they can't—but it also gives you a lot of perspective. Once I had been there, me being Jewish, being born in the Soviet Union—those chances for me to be in a concentration camp, and when you go there and you visit, and you hear the children in the schools and the best of the best, and how they cough knowing they are never going to have warm clothes or medicine, it really gives you perspective in terms of if I'm a little cold walking to the train I am not going to be complaining.

So and I think it's just also very important to understand this is what totalitarianism actually means. It's not just people having some wacky perspectives on their leader and going to school and skipping down the street. It means every aspect of your life being completely taken over. So I think people who are interested in any sense of human rights or humanity or ideas, this is where the ideas of evil are being put into practice thoroughly and fully, and they have been for 70 years. Hopefully, it won't be a teaching tool for much longer.

WOODS: Well, that's where we're going to leave it. Of course, we'd love to be able to make a prediction here on this show about how long the regime is going to last, but do you think there's a reasonable chance in our lifetimes? You and I are young-ish.

MALICE: I wouldn't have said this a month ago, but I am saying it now. I think this is the beginning of the end. Because, again, this is what it felt like before the USSR fell apart. The healthiest thing to take down totalitarianism is cynicism, and that is what's starting to creep in. It's very easy to convince an isolated population that they have it great. It's impossible to

convince an isolated population that you have more food on your plate this year than last year, or that it's a good thing that you children are hungry. And when it comes down to an animalistic thing of I want my kid to have food, all the books in the world and all the brainwashing aren't going to make that much of a difference, and you're going to be hungry for a different perspective.

WOODS: Am I allowed to ask you, by the way, what project you're working on now?

MALICE: Oh, yes, I worked with comedian D.L. Hughley on his first book—it was called *I Want You to Shut the F-up*—and now we're working on the sequel.

WOODS: Are you allowed to tell us the title of that one?

MALICE: Yes, it's about Obama—the Obama administration—and it's called *Black Man, White House*.

WOODS: Okay, you told me about this. Yeah, I remember our conversation. I remember the first line. I think you told me the first line of the book.

MALICE: But I can't repeat that on this show.

WOODS: You can't repeat that. No, that's right, and I got the joke, and I think that impressed you with my intelligence level.

MALICE: You did.

WOODS: Yeah, that's right. I got the joke. Well, great. Well, listen, Michael, thanks for this conversation. I hope people will check out *Dear Reader*. We're, of course, going to link to it at TomWoods.com/324, and of course, we'll have you on some other time—maybe next time we'll try and argue about something. That's always fun.

MALICE: Yeah, Jefferson, huh?

WOODS: Maybe we'll talk about Jefferson. Although, for that I would be inclined to bring Kevin Gutzman on—let the three of us—well, I'll be an impartial arbiter, and you can guys can go at it. It'll be a lot of fun.

MALICE: I love it.

WOODS: Thanks so much, Michael.

MALICE: Thanks, Tom.