

CIA's murky ties to North Korean leader's slain half-brother

Peter Symonds
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When Kim Jong-nam, the older half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, was murdered in broad daylight at Kuala Lumpur International Airport on 13 February 2017, the *World Socialist Web Site* cautioned that nothing could be ruled out.

More than two years on, a book on the North Korean leader by *Washington Post* reporter Anna Fifield has revealed the CIA had recruited Kim Jong-nam as an informant and had held a number of discussions with him about the North Korean regime.

The book itself, *The Great Successor*, was released this week, but the London-based *Times* broke the story last Friday. As well as noting that Kim Jong-nam was a CIA informant, Fifield wrote that just prior to his murder, “security camera footage showed him in a hotel elevator with an Asian-looking man who was reported to be an American intelligence agent.”

The murder itself was very public and the method used bizarre. Kim Jong-nam was accosted at the airport by two women, one of whom smeared a poison, said to be VX, across his face. He rapidly collapsed, was taken to hospital and died soon after. The two women, who have since been released, claimed they had been recruited to perform a stunt for a TV reality show.

The most likely explanation is that the assassination was organised by North Korean agents. Kim Jong-nam had been living abroad, mainly in Macau under China's protection, after falling out of favour with his father, Kim Jong-il. The former North Korean leader died in 2011 and was succeeded by Kim Jong-un.

Kim Jong-un may well have regarded his half-brother as a potential political threat, especially after tensions with China escalated over North Korea's continuing nuclear and missile tests, which heightened the danger of a US military intervention. Beijing may well have been cultivating Kim Jong-nam as a potential

replacement.

A feature on the murder in the Japanese newspaper, the *Asahi Shimbun*, in March this year, noted that a Malaysian investigation has discovered about \$US124,000 in cash in Kim Jong-nam's travel bag. A senior investigator told the newspaper that Kim had met secretly with an American believed to be a US intelligence agent, and that a USB memory stick had been inserted in Kim's laptop right before or after the meeting.

That Kim Jong-nam was a CIA informant received further confirmation this week in the *Wall Street Journal*. It published an article on Monday, based on a source, said to be “a person knowledgeable about the matter.”

The unnamed person said “there was a nexus” between the CIA and Kim, who met on several occasions with agency operatives. The article reported that Kim had gone to Malaysia in 2017 to meet his CIA contact. According to the newspaper's source, US intelligence agencies at first felt relief that the CIA's interaction with Kim was not exposed in the immediate aftermath of his death.

In other words, the *Wall Street Journal* article contained little of substance. Its main purpose appears to have been to play down the significance of Kim Jong-nam's role as a CIA informant. It cited several unnamed former US officials as saying that Kim had no power base in Pyongyang and little knowledge of the regime's inner workings. Moreover, American intelligence agencies believed him to be ill-suited to taking over as North Korean leader.

On Tuesday, US President Donald Trump told the press that he had just received “a beautiful letter” from Kim Jong-un and his relationship with the North Korean leader was going “very well.” Trump added

that he had seen the “information about the CIA in regard to his brother or half-brother, and I would tell him [Kim Jong-un] that would not happen under my auspices.”

On face value, Trump’s suggestion that he would prevent the CIA from exploiting a top-level North Korean contact is absurd. The revelation that the CIA had a number of meetings with Kim Jong-nam demonstrates, once again, just how extensive are its efforts to spy on, and intervene in, every country, not just North Korea. Even if Trump were to offer such an assurance to Kim Jong-un, it would not be believed.

Trump’s remark tends to suggest that more was going on between the CIA and Kim Jong-nam than a chat about the latest political gossip in Pyongyang, from which Kim was very removed in any case. One can only speculate about the content of the “several conversations,” but one must bear in mind the CIA’s long record, not just of spying, but political provocations, plots and coups.

In February 2017, Kim Jong-un was anything but “a friend” of Trump, who had just been inaugurated and had signaled an extremely hostile attitude to North Korea. The previous month, president-elect Trump had seized on a North Korean statement that “it is in the final stages of developing a nuclear weapon capable of reaching parts of the US” and flatly declared: “It won’t happen.”

Trump rapidly ramped up the confrontation with Kim Jong-un, whom he derisively branded as “rocket man.” In a fascistic tirade at the UN General Assembly in September 2017, the US president declared that he was “ready, willing and able” to “totally destroy” North Korea and its 25 million people.

It was only in June 2018 that Trump did an abrupt about-face and held his first summit with Kim Jong-un in Singapore. While Trump continues to brag that the meeting resulted in a halt to North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile testing, nothing is resolved. A second summit in March this year collapsed without results after North Korea insisted on concessions from the US in return for the dismantling of its nuclear arsenal, facilities and programs.

If North Korea did orchestrate the assassination of Kim Jong-nam in February 2017, in public, under the nose of his CIA contact, one purpose may well have been to send a rather blunt message to Washington that

it knew about the CIA’s scheming and was prepared to take drastic measures to stop it.



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