

US Media Spreads False Claims About Purging of North Korean Official

The episode exposes non-existent editorial standards on official enemies, writes Ben Norton.

By **Ben Norton**

Grayzone



The corporate media's editorial standards for reporting on official enemies of the U.S., especially North Korea, are as low as ever. Blatantly false stories are regularly circulated by leading news outlets without any kind of accountability.

In the latest example, virtually every major media outlet reported that a senior North Korean official named Kim Yong-chol was supposedly forced into a “labor camp,” as part of a larger deadly “purge.”

Two days later, that same official turned up alive at a public art performance, seated next to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

Bloomberg kicked off the frenzy on May 30 by publishing a report claiming, “North Korea executed its former top nuclear envoy to the U.S. and four other foreign ministry officials in March after a failed summit between Kim and Donald Trump.”

Bloomberg's source was South Korea's far-right newspaper Chosun Ilbo, which has a long history of fabricating stories about North Korea. *Chosun Ilbo's* story was based on a single unidentified source.

That is to say, the false report obediently echoed by the Western press corps was based entirely on the claims of one unnamed person.

This obvious lack of evidence did not stop credulous reporters from jumping on the sensationalist propaganda. The story was circulated by [The New York Times](#), [Reuters](#), [The Wall Street Journal](#), [The Hill](#), [The Daily Beast](#), [Fox News](#), [CNBC](#), [TIME](#), [ABC News](#), [The Financial Times](#), [The Telegraph](#), [VICE News](#), [Rolling Stone](#), [The Independent](#), [The Washington Times](#), [The New York Post](#), [HuffPost](#), [France 24](#), [The Japan Times](#), [Haaretz](#), [The Times of Israel](#), [Democracy Now](#), the U.S. government's [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#), and many more.

Twitter even went out of its way to create a shareable Moment based on the false report.

North Korea charged and executed multiple government officials involved in February's Trump-Kim summit, South Korean newspaper Chosun Ilbo reports.

<https://t.co/61QbQL0nk0>

– Twitter Moments (@TwitterMoments) [May 30, 2019](#)

Careful readers (only a [small percentage of total readers](#)) might have noticed that Bloomberg [quietly admitted](#) in its original report, “Previous South Korean media reports about senior North Korean officials being executed following the talks have proven false.” But this concession didn't stop the rest of the corporate media from running with the story.

On June 2, the commentariat's favorite fable fell apart: North Korea's nuclear negotiator Kim Yong-chol showed up on state media, sitting a few seats away from Kim Jong-un at a

musical performance.

The [Associated Press](#), [Reuters](#), [The New York Times](#), and [CNN](#) quickly published new reports making light of the news – but none of these contained mea culpas or official retractions.

As of June 3, the vast majority of blatantly false reports published in dozens of outlets remain uncorrected.

[Grayzone](#) [has documented](#) the long history of U.S. corporate media [printing cartoonish lies about North Korea](#) (officially known as the DPRK), especially in the form of execution stories that are quickly debunked. ([The New York Times](#) once even cited an obvious [parody Twitter account](#) as if it were the DPRK's real state media.)

A few actual experts on Korea did raise concerns about the latest hoax. Among them was veteran reporter Tim Shorrock, who has spent decades reporting on Korea, and who joined prominent peace activists [Christine Ahn](#) and [Simone Chun](#) in questioning the story.

Incredible that Bloomberg would run this story based on one source quoted by the completely irresponsible and rarely accurate Chosun Ilbo. I don't care if it is South Korea's largest newspaper, as the Post constantly refers to it. It has a history of false stories. <https://t.co/EU2BKYXi0a>

– Tim Shorrock (@TimothyS) [May 31, 2019](#)

[Shorrock cautioned](#) on May 31, “It’s important to keep tabs on this one, which if uncorroborated could turn out to be one of the biggest fiascos in journalism history.”

As usual, Shorrock was right – but he was an outlier whose

critical thinking was drowned out by a mob of mainstream pundits.

Below is a list of some of the top journalists in the U.S. corporate media and political class, including ostensible “progressives,” who spread this blatantly false story. Many of these self-styled progressives promoted the hoax in hopes of embarrassing President Donald Trump for embarking on a historic peace process with the DPRK.

Journalists and Activists Who Spread the Story

-Chris Hayes, a media celebrity and MSNBC host who used the fake news to get in a cheap joke about Trump

Good God. <https://t.co/BF1LIZwLXu>

– Chris Hayes (@chrishayes) [May 30, 2019](#)

Anxiously hoping the President doesn't tweet something about how the DPRK's envoy deserved what he got and Kim Jong Un is great.

– Chris Hayes (@chrishayes) [May 30, 2019](#)

-Julia Ioffe, a prominent journalist, *GQ Magazine* correspondent, and so-called Russia expert

"He speaks and his people sit up at attention. I want my people to do the same." Trump on Kim Jong Un <https://t.co/PUDNn8GveP>

– Julia Ioffe (@juliaioffe) [May 31, 2019](#)

-Yashar Ali, a contributor to *New York Magazine* and *The Huffington Post* and liberal mini-celebrity

NEW: Kim Hyok Chol, who led working-level negotiations for the summit between Kim Jong Un and President Trump, was executed with four other foreign ministry officials in March

Kim Jong Un's top aide Kim Yong Chol is reportedly undergoing hard labor <https://t.co/W7xKvbAczi>

– Yashar Ali ? (@yashar) [May 30, 2019](#)

-Peter Baker, chief White House correspondent for *The New York Times* and an analyst for MSNBC

North Korea executed its special envoy to the US by firing squad in March and put four other Foreign Ministry officials to death as part of a purge following the failure of Kim Jong-un's summit with Trump in Hanoi, South Korean paper reports. @choesanghun <https://t.co/eZalCusUo6>

– Peter Baker (@peterbakernyt) [May 31, 2019](#)

-Jon Cooper, the chairman of the Democratic Coalition Against Trump, which proudly boasts, “We help run #TheResistance”

OUCH: North Korea has reportedly executed its special envoy to the U.S. and four other Foreign Ministry officials after the February U.S.-North Korea summit in Hanoi didn't work out. <https://t.co/kzppQNkzKC>

– Jon Cooper (@joncoopertweets) [May 31, 2019](#)

-Katie Phang, a legal contributor for NBC and MSNBC

? Trump's bestie, Kim Jong Un, has “executed [his] former top nuclear envoy with the U.S. along with four other foreign ministry officials in March after a failed summit” with Donald Trump in Vietnam. <https://t.co/30e95ZUpkr>

– Katie Phang (@KatiePhang) [May 31, 2019](#)

-David Roberts, a reporter for Vox

"North Korea executed its former top nuclear envoy to the U.S. and four other foreign ministry officials in March after a failed summit between Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump, South Korea's Chosun Ilbo newspaper reported."

<https://t.co/bjUBz7AmDt>

– David Roberts (@drvox) [June 2, 2019](#)

-Caroline Orr, a neoliberal "Resistance" influencer who rose to prominence by pumping up the Russia-gate narrative

Holy crap. North Korean envoy Kim Hyok Chol was reportedly executed over the failed summit between Kim Jong Un & Trump. Four other NK foreign ministry officials were reportedly executed, too, and a top aide for Kim Jong Un was punished with hard labor. <https://t.co/4r8Xfu1RSf>

– Caroline Orr (@RVAwonk) [May 30, 2019](#)

-Oz Katerji, a rabid pro-military intervention regime-change activist dedicated to [harassing anti-imperialists online](#)

A North Korea official was executed in March over the Trump-Kim summit, Chosun Ibo newspaper reports <https://t.co/SFuTIKnBfL> via [@bpolitics](#)

– Oz Katerji (@OzKaterji) [May 30, 2019](#)

-Josh Smith, a Reuters senior correspondent covering North and South Korea

South Korean newspaper Chosun Ilbo reports that North Korea has executed several officials involved in working level talks before the Hanoi Trump-Kim summit, including Kim Hyok Chol the former ambassador to Spain who (briefly now it seems) served as Steve Biegun's counterpart

– Josh Smith (@joshjonsmith) [May 30, 2019](#)

-Vivian Salama, a White House reporter for *The Wall Street Journal*, who previously worked as AP's Baghdad bureau chief

???? North Korea executed Kim Hyok Chol, its special envoy to the United States, and foreign ministry officials who carried out working-level negotiations for the second US-North Korea summit in February, holding them responsible for its collapse. <https://t.co/4LAaQDJuME>

– Vivian Salama (@vmsalama) [May 30, 2019](#)

-Matt Bevan, the host and writer of ABC News Australia's "[Russia, If You're Listening](#)" podcast

Kim Jong-in executed the officials who organised his failed summit with Trump in Hanoi.

Interested to see what Trump says about his good friend Kim after this. <https://t.co/zTm74Jwdn6>

– Matt Bevan ? (@MatthewBevan) [May 30, 2019](#)

-Kaitlan Collins, a CNN White House reporter

"North Korea executed Kim Hyok Chol, its special envoy to the United States, and foreign ministry officials who carried out working-level negotiations for the second U.S.-North Korea summit, a South Korean newspaper reported on Friday." <https://t.co/NgsQaMnRyv>

– Kaitlan Collins (@kaitlancollins) [May 30, 2019](#)

-Geoff Bennett, a White House correspondent for NBC News

Bloomberg: North Korean envoy executed over failed Trump-Kim summit <https://t.co/ifXP2bFbk6>

– Geoff Bennett (@GeoffRBennett) [May 30, 2019](#)

-Andrew Desiderio, a political reporter at *Politico*

New reporting tonight – that North Korea’s top US envoy was executed after the Hanoi summit & Kim’s top aide is undergoing hard labor – comes as Trump continues to heap praise on Kim and excuse his recent sanctions violations.
<https://t.co/f86bMiMfvf>

– Andrew Desiderio (@desiderioDC) [May 31, 2019](#)

-David Nakamura, a *Washington Post* reporter

South Korean paper reports Kim Jong Un has executed top envoy in wake of Hanoi summit collapse. If true, another stark reminder of brutality of the North Korean leader Trump has sided with over Biden, US intel agencies, Bolton, Shinzo Abe and Warmbier. <https://t.co/ImcDC20khL>

– David Nakamura (@DavidNakamura) [May 30, 2019](#)

-Amy Siskind, a prominent liberal anti-Trump activist and former Wall Street executive

Trump buddy – and we knew this, Pompeo was asked about it weeks ago:
“Kim Hyok Chol, North Korea's special envoy to the U.S., was executed in March along with four other North Korean foreign ministry officials involved in the Hanoi, Vietnam, summit.” <https://t.co/GMUaJoJ3yU>

– Amy Siskind ???? (@Amy_Siskind) [May 30, 2019](#)

-Steve Silberman, longtime writer for *Wired* magazine

This is the monster whose ass Trump kisses to mock Joe Biden. If a Democratic president did this to mock a GOP opponent, [@FoxNews](#) pundits would be invoking the 2nd Amendment. <https://t.co/A7xjqhHWgV>

– Steve Silberman (@stevesilberman) [May 30, 2019](#)

Rare Exceptions

There were a few exceptions to the norm. Some reporters who specialize on Korea did raise concerns, pointing out South Korean media outlets have a long history of publishing false stories about the DPRK.

These warnings, however, were ignored.

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