

Strategy Research Project

Advancing United States Policies Toward Korean Reunification

by

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Abstract

The Korean Peninsula remains of strategic importance to the United States and to the security of its Northeast Asian regional allies and partners. Consequently, the United States must prepare strategic policies to provide optimal and viable solutions for long-term regional stability. As the U.S. containment policy toward North Korea is no longer effective, the United States must establish a new sustainable strategy to end North Korea's nuclear ambitions. This strategic research paper provides an overview of the strategic environment in Northeast Asia, assesses the perspectives of regional powers and their potential influence on the Korean Peninsula, and explores information-based strategies aimed at the Kim regime collapse. It then describes the U.S. role of preparing for and facilitating a peaceful, democratic reunification of the Korean peninsula. Finally, this paper recommends U.S. policies to achieve the desired end state of a democratic unified Korea.

Advancing United States Policies Toward Korean Reunification

For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.

—Sun Tzu¹

The Korean Peninsula remains of strategic importance to the United States (U.S.) and to the security of its Northeast Asian regional allies and partners; consequently, the United States must prepare strategic policies to provide optimal and viable solutions for long-term regional stability. In light of continued nuclear and missile threats by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea), the potential for intervention—militarily or diplomatically—by members of the international community is high. In fact, both South and North Koreans desire reunification. North Korea under the Kim regime² wants to reunite the peninsula under its authoritarian system of government while the Republic of Korea (South Korea) wants to reunite under the democratic government system of South Korea.³ Furthermore, one of the South Korean national defense objectives for 2016 is supporting a peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula.⁴

The U.S. containment policy toward North Korea via military deterrence, economic sanctions, and diplomatic means for the past six decades has prevented war; however, it has been ineffective in resolving the conflict. Despite receiving international economic support, three generations of the Kim regime have still worked on developing nuclear weapons. Specifically, North Korea's Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) launch on November 29, 2017 indicated that North Korea will be capable of successfully reaching an American target in the near future.⁵ To prevent North Korea from further

development of ICBM and nuclear capabilities, the United States must consider a new strategy that will employ a holistic approach utilizing all instruments of national power.

The military option to destroy the Kim regime to end North Korea's nuclear ambitions risks North Korean retaliation against South Korea, the United States, and their regional allies. In addition, the military option contradicts South Korea's national defense objective of a peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula. Furthermore, North Korean government collapse via military power would bring unintentional armed conflict with serious consequences for the whole Korean Peninsula.⁶ The negative consequences also include humanitarian disaster, potential breakout of a civil war, uncontrolled weapons of mass destruction, the impact on neighboring countries due to North Korean refugees, rampant criminal activity, and possible North Korean nuclear attacks against the United States.⁷ Thus, the United States and its allies must pursue a strategy that ends the threat from the Kim regime while avoiding war and its catastrophic consequences.

In the case of the Kim regime collapse, the United States then needs to play a delicate role in stabilizing the Korean Peninsula. The United States and South Korea must establish a bilateral strategy to develop a viable foundation for a unified Korea. For this strategy to be effective, the United States must not act as the major negotiator in the discussions; rather, the United States should support South Korea in taking the lead with strong U.S. assistance toward reunification. A unified Korea with a democratic political structure remains in the best interest of the United States and would enhance regional stability by removing the most serious source of regional tension. To facilitate this transition, the United States must maintain positive relations with South Korea while

preventing a humanitarian crisis in North Korea. In addition to its support for South Korea, the United States must continue to coordinate with major regional powers such as China, Russia, and Japan to formulate practical strategies to address mutual regional security concerns. Additionally, Russia and China must be convinced that this outcome will benefit them.

By offering a strategic environmental overview of Northeast Asia and the U.S. strategies and policies toward North Korea, past and present, and exploring information-based strategies aimed at preparing for the Kim regime implosion, the U.S. and South Korean leaders can then facilitate a peaceful, democratic reunification of the Korean peninsula following the Kim regime collapse. Based on an assessment of the North Korean regime, as well as the regional powers' perspectives (specifically China, Russia, and Japan) and their potential influence on the Korean Peninsula, this SRP recommends an information-based strategy to end the Kim Jong-Un regime and finally achieve the desired end state of a democratic unified Korea without risking a war with North Korea.⁸

Strategic Environment

Over the last decade, the strategic environment in Northeast Asia has changed significantly with the rise of China, North Korea's continued nuclear threat, Russia's expansion of Eurasian connectivity, and Japan's changing defense posture. The United States played a crucial role in stabilizing the region after World War II, and the regional countries have consequently enjoyed relative stability until the present. The United States must address many challenges in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous Northeast Asian strategic environment. The U.S. leaders first need to understand the

historical and evolving conditions and threats in order to establish effective security policies in coordination with the regional stakeholders.

Rise of China

China has enjoyed a peaceful rise to become a global economic power since Deng Xiaoping's reforms in 1978. In line with its goal of a peaceful rise, China has improved its international relations with countries throughout the world and has become a major power in the Northeast Asian region.⁹ The 2015 U.S. National Military Strategy acknowledged China's rise and noted that the United States has encouraged China "to become a partner for greater international security."¹⁰ A major U.S. objective is to ensure that China becomes a responsible regional stakeholder. China has used its soft power as an instrument to influence other countries and gain their cooperation in order to achieve its national interests. With its rapid economic growth coupled with its rising influence in the international system, China has simultaneously been investing in military modernization and expansion, while showcasing its military capabilities through land reclamation activities in the South China Sea. These activities pose real concerns for the United States and its regional allies and partners.

When dealing with the North Korean threat, the United States continues to rely on China's influence over North Korea. This has been the default policy since the United States normalized its relations with China. However, this policy does not recognize the long-seated mistrust North Korea has with China, nor its on-going efforts to resist China's influence. This factor could limit China's ability to influence North Korea.¹¹ The mistrust between China and North Korea began with an event that took place in the early 1930s when the Chinese communists almost executed Kim Il-Sung, the founder of North Korea, under the suspicion of his membership in a pro-Japanese group called

Minsaengdan.¹² In addition, although Chinese troops assisted North Korea in the Korean War, North Korean leaders have blamed China for failing to reunite the Korean Peninsula.¹³ These events led to the concept of *Juche*, or self-reliance, to minimize China's influence on North Korea. The relationship between China and North Korea has been volatile, with ongoing clashes between the two governments. Although China borders North Korea and shares a similar ideology, the mistrust further escalated when China recognized South Korea in 1992.¹⁴ Despite the historically turbulent relationship between China and North Korea, they rely on each other to achieve their national interests. China uses North Korea as a buffer against the United States, and North Korea relies on China to sustain its economy under the heavy sanctions imposed by the United Nations and the United States. As a result, China continues to have some leverage to pressure North Korea. The United States must recognize China's growing political, economic, and military influence in the region, while still effectively coordinating with China on efforts to eliminate the North Korean nuclear threat.

North Korean Threat

North Korea recently announced that "it has mastered its nuclear strike capability and become a full-fledged nuclear state."¹⁵ North Korea also sponsors cyber-attacks, terrorism, and gross violations of human rights. While the United States continues to employ economic and diplomatic pressure on the North Korean government through sanctions to deter its nuclear ambitions, North Korea is undeterred and continues its nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missile developments. Kim Jong-Un sees a nuclear North Korean state as the key to regime survival. Harvard University Professor Joseph Nye, Jr. offers three factors for understanding the North Korean threat: first, Kim Jong-Un is not irrational in dealing with the United States and has successfully

countered the United States in preserving his regime; second, North Korea has had nuclear weapons for more than a decade and can deliver the nuclear weapons to the United States by non-missile means such as a cargo ship; and third, North Korea's adjacent proximity allows the presence of thousands of artillery pieces across the border aimed at South Korea to respond in case of a U.S. pre-emptive strike on North Korea.¹⁶ The North Korean government depicts Kim Jong-Un as a divine leader and has effectively shielded its people from contact with the outside world. If the United States pre-emptively strikes North Korea to destroy its nuclear capabilities, North Korean soldiers will not hesitate to execute their leader's order to release retaliatory artillery strikes on South Korea. As a result, a pre-emptive or preventive strike on North Korea could lead to unacceptable escalation. Given these facts, in order to counter the North Korean threat, the United States must formulate a strategy that will not only preserve and demonstrate the U.S. national purpose, but also bring an enduring peace to the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia without triggering a destructive war.

Russia's Eurasian Connectivity

Russia and China entered into a strategic partnership in 2001 with a Treaty of Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation to resolve long-standing hostilities on the border between the two countries, to cooperate in international affairs advocating a world of multi-polarity, and to strengthen international stability.¹⁷ The relationship between Russia and China has improved significantly since the initiation of this strategic partnership; in fact, on August 5, 2017, the Russia-China strategic partnership played a crucial role shaping the language of the United Nations (U.N.) Security Council's final decision to sanction North Korea. The U.S. proposal promoted very harsh economic sanctions on North Korea, including a freeze on Kim Jong-Un's assets, a travel ban,

and a strong oil embargo. However, the two countries made it clear that they will only accept language that provides a peaceful resolution minimizing harm to the North Korean people. They have clearly stated their priorities regarding North Korea as “stability in Pyongyang, no regime change, no drastic alteration of the geopolitical chessboard, [and] no massive refugee crisis.” They asserted any action beyond sanctions would be detrimental to the North Korean people. In addition, they have proposed 5+1 (North Korea, China, Russia, Japan and South Korea, plus the United States) talks to address the North Korean problem.¹⁸

Russia’s long-term expansion plans in the Far East included a trilateral trade agreement with South Korea that will connect the entire Korean Peninsula, including North Korea and the Russian Far East.¹⁹ In addition, while the global outcry toward North Korea’s nuclear weapons program strained the relationship between China and North Korea, Russia strengthened its ties with North Korea. Russia forgave an \$11 billion North Korean debt from the Soviet era in 2014, opened a new ferry service with North Korea operating six times a month in May 2017, and indicated that it will provide oil supplies if China cuts off oil exports to North Korea.²⁰ Russia’s renewed strategic partnership with North Korea could pose challenges to U.S. interests in the region because Russia fears a unified Korea with pro-U.S. policies. Most important, in addition to provoking South Korea and Japan, the Russia-North Korea strategic partnership could provide North Korea with mutual defense if there is a conflict.

Japan’s Changing Defense Posture

The Japanese pacifist Constitution has prevented the country from exercising the right of collective self-defense, which is preserved in Article 51 of the 1945 U.N. Charter, because doing so would go beyond the minimum necessary for national defense.²¹ On

July 1, 2014, the Japanese Cabinet approved a reinterpretation of the Japanese Constitution to move toward exercising collective self-defense and implemented the concept into a law. Japan focuses on playing a greater role in the alliance with the United States; nevertheless, Japan fears a U.S. failure to honor its security commitment to Japan as reflected in the increasing U.S. economic ties with China.²² In light of the North Korean nuclear weapon and missile development and rising Chinese power, the Japanese people now support a credible defense. Meanwhile, South Korea and China have criticized Japan's collective self-defense policy because they fear that Japan will once again become a militarist state and abandon its post-war pacifism, thus threatening regional stability. The view is that a re-armed Japan could wage war against them again.²³

U.S. Strategies and Policies toward North Korea

Since the signing of the Armistice ending the Korean War in 1953, the U.S. strategy has been one of deterrence by maintaining a large U.S. military presence in South Korea. Additionally, the United States has employed economic and diplomatic policies in cooperation with regional allies and partners to counter North Korea's steadily accelerating nuclear ambitions. This deterrence has worked to some degree and has provided South Korea with six decades of relative peace and prosperity. Yet, North Korea's intensified ambitions to become a nuclear state with successful ballistic missile launches in recent years has forced U.S. policy makers to revisit their past strategies. Indeed, they must now consider new strategies to counter North Korea's nuclear ambitions and bring enduring peace and freedom to the Korean peninsula.

United Nations Treaty of Nuclear Nonproliferation

In 1968, the United Nations initiated a treaty regarding non-proliferation of nuclear weapons to “prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament.”²⁴ North Korea entered into the nuclear non-proliferation treaty in 1985 with the condition that the United States had to withdraw its nuclear weapons from South Korea. The United States withdrew all nuclear weapons from South Korea in 1991, while the U.N. inspectors found that North Korea had not complied with the treaty and still continued with its nuclear program. Amid North Korea’s threat to withdraw from the treaty, the dictator Kim Il-Sung died in 1994. With the new leader Kim Jong-Il in power, the United States and North Korea signed an “Agreed Framework” for North Korea to freeze and eliminate all nuclear facilities. In exchange, the United States agreed to provide two nuclear-proliferation-resistant light-water reactors and heavy fuel oil shipments with a progressive movement toward normalization of economic and diplomatic relations with North Korea. Moreover, during the Clinton Administration, the United States conducted seven direct talk sessions with North Korea through November 2000. During that time, the United States imposed sanctions on numerous occasions due to North Korea’s repeated missile tests and the further development of their nuclear program.²⁵

Bush Administration

When the Bush Administration assumed power in 2001, it pushed for a “robust engagement policy,” demanding that North Korea change its behavior on nuclear development.²⁶ However, this policy resulted in little success in denuclearizing North Korea. After the September 11, 2001 terror attack, President George W. Bush declared

North Korea as part of an “Axis of Evil” during his 2002 State of the Union Address ending further engagement with North Korea. In 2002 the United States suspended the heavy-fuel oil deliveries and the construction of the light-water nuclear reactors when North Korea violated the Agreed Framework by clandestinely pursuing a uranium enrichment program.²⁷ On January 11, 2003, North Korea announced its withdrawal from the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and resumed its nuclear and missile program.²⁸

In an effort to reopen the dialogue, China entered trilateral talks with the United States and North Korea for the first time in April 2003. Shortly after, the first Six Party Talks were held in Beijing on August 27, 2003, which included the United States, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Russia, and China with the objective of ending the North Korean nuclear program.²⁹ The Six Party Pact was signed in September 2005, and North Korea agreed to abandon its nuclear program in exchange for food and energy assistance. However, in October 2006 North Korea conducted its first underground nuclear test.³⁰ The Six Party Talks took place on and off through the end of the Bush Administration in 2008 with little progress in denuclearizing North Korea.³¹ In October 2008, North Korea stated that it would allow the U.S. inspectors access to its plutonium production sites for verification. In exchange, it requested that the State Department remove North Korea from its terrorist list. However, the Six Party discussion failed to reach an agreement because North Korea refused to agree in writing to its previous verbal agreement. The State Department stated that it would discontinue the energy assistance program with the mutual understanding among the parties that “fuel oil shipments will not go forward absent progress.”³² On the contrary, Russia and China disagreed with the State Department and indicated they “intend to complete their share

of the energy assistance program.”³³ It became obvious that Russia and China had a different agenda in handling North Korea even during the Six Party Talks.

Obama Administration

Beginning in 2009, the Obama Administration employed a policy of “strategic patience” whereby it waited for North Korea to come back to the negotiation table with changed behavior while continuing to impose sanctions.³⁴ In the wake of the strengthened U.N. sanctions in response to their long-range ballistic missile test, North Korea withdrew from the Six Party Talks and the nuclear nonproliferation treaty in April 2009.³⁵ Subsequently, North Korea continued to provoke the rest of the world by firing a torpedo to sink the South Korean ship *Cheonan* off the coast near the border of South and North Korea on March 26, 2010, killing 46 soldiers.³⁶ Again in November 23, 2010, North Korea fired 200 artillery rounds at the South Korean island of *Yeonpyeong* killing two soldiers and injuring civilians.³⁷ China called for the Six Party Talks to address these incidents but the United States rejected the request. Subsequently on December 17, 2011, Kim Jong-Il died and his son, then 28-year old Kim Jong-Un became the new leader of North Korea.³⁸

Through the end of the Obama Administration, the Kim Jong-Un regime continued to deceive the United States while receiving continued food aid, stating that it was ready to participate in bilateral or multilateral talks while continually testing missiles. To counter North Korea’s continued ballistic missile tests, in July 2016 the United States announced that it would deploy a Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system to South Korea. Then Director of the U.S. National Intelligence James Clapper stated, “the notion of getting the North Koreans to denuclearize is probably a lost cause” and that nuclear weapons are North Korea’s “ticket to survival.”³⁹ Obviously the Obama

Administration's policy of strategic patience was not effective in deterring North Korea's nuclear ambitions, and the repeated economic sanctions had little impact on Kim Jong-Un's behavior. Instead, the policy emboldened Kim Jong-Un to continue the ballistic missile and nuclear programs.

Trump Administration

The Trump Administration's policy on North Korea is a strategy of accountability, which replaced the Obama Administration's policy of strategic patience that had allowed the Kim regime to expedite their nuclear development.⁴⁰ In August 2017, President Trump engaged in harsh rhetoric with North Korea on two occasions, stating that North Korea will be met with "fire and fury" if it makes threats against the United States. Additionally, he stated, "[A]ll options are on the table," including a potential preemptive strike on North Korea.⁴¹ Kim Jong-Un remained undeterred by these statements and responded in turn with similar harsh rhetoric aimed at President Trump while continuing missile and nuclear tests.

In the wake of North Korea's intensified ICBM tests and verbal threats about striking the United States directly, Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson published an article in the *Wall Street Journal* on August 13, 2017 stating that the United States and the international community are united in the pursuit of a denuclearized Korean Peninsula. The United States continues to employ economic and diplomatic pressures on North Korea and seeks an engagement for opening a dialogue. The secretaries stated, "The object of our peaceful pressure campaign is the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The U.S. has no interest in regime change or accelerated reunification of Korea." They additionally stated, "We have no desire to inflict harm on the long-suffering North Korean people, who are distinct from the hostile

regime in Pyongyang.”⁴² Furthermore, the secretaries called upon all in the international community to enforce the U.N. sanctions against North Korea and isolate the regime.⁴³ Moreover, President Trump met with South Korean President Moon Jae-In during his Asian Summit trip and issued a joint statement on November 8, 2017 emphasizing cooperation to “counter the threat posed by North Korea and call on China to use its leverage to achieve a diplomatic solution.”⁴⁴

The current U.S. policy of deterrence and containment through economic sanctions and diplomatic appeasement proved neither effective nor sufficient to halt North Korea’s nuclear ambitions. Moreover, it did not change three generations of the Kim regime’s behavior and inflicted further suffering on the North Korean people. Furthermore, China condones the Kim Regime’s behavior by continuing to trade with North Korea. Consequently, the United States cannot rely on China to be the solution to the North Korean crisis.

Talks between South and North Korea following North Korean participation in the 2018 Pyeongchang South Korea Winter Olympics raises hopes for a diplomatic resolution of the long-standing North Korean nuclear problem, but past experience does not support optimism. Recent trends further indicate that North Korea will become a nuclear state with ICBM capabilities in the near term and poses a major security threat for the United States and the Northeast Asian region. The United States and the international community have affirmed that North Korea must be blocked from reaching the final step of becoming a nuclear state.

Information-based Strategies for Regime Collapse

With North Korea on the brink of becoming a nuclear state with ICBM capabilities, the U.S. strategy must not only complement the current policy to end Kim

Jong-Un's nuclear ambitions, but also bring enduring peace and freedom to the Korean peninsula. The United States has reflected deterrence policies through economic sanctions, diplomatic pressures, and forward military bases in the region for the past six decades, but it has met with little success. In response to North Korea's ballistic missile launches, President Trump stated, "[A]ll options are on the table," including direct military action. However, the military option threatens a North Korean retaliation and catastrophic damage to South Korea. Therefore, in addition to the current policy, the United States should consider an information-based approach to instigate the removal of the Kim Jong-Un regime. In fact, Thae Yong-Ho, North Korea's second highest-ranking diplomat in London who defected to South Korea in 2016 and is the most senior defector from North Korea, has stated that the North Korean system is collapsing and its "attempts to control outside information are not working because of corruption and discontent." Additionally, his defection is viewed as "disillusionment among North Korean elites".⁴⁵ The South Korean government has also acknowledged in its 2016 defense white paper that defection of North Korean senior-level officials has increased since April 2016.⁴⁶

Likewise, U.S. Navy Commander Frederick Vincenzo with twelve years of direct experience on the Korean peninsula has warned that Kim Jong-Un could miscalculate the likelihood of his provocations triggering a crisis. The United States maintains several contingency plans for a variety of scenarios, but Kim Jong-Un could underestimate U.S. resolve and ignite a conflict. Furthermore, even if the Kim regime collapses, its fragmented military leadership could still attempt to strike the United States. To avoid

this risk, Commander Vincenzo proposes an information campaign that will convince the regime elites to support the U.S.-South Korea efforts.⁴⁷

Most notably, the North Korean government tightly controls the flow of outside information to isolate its people and hide details of its internal human rights abuses from the outside world. Since Kim Jong-Un came to power in 2011, the regime intensified the restriction of mobile phone use and access to the World Wide Web. North Koreans who live overseas (mainly China) secretly send phones and SIM cards to their families in North Korea to connect with them. This effort comes with a high cost and greater risk. For example, soldiers at border checkpoints illegally charge up to USD \$500 to pass the phones through. In addition, while North Korea permits cell phone usage, it prohibits using communication devices from other countries. Anyone caught making an international call using a Chinese mobile phone to connect with their families abroad will be sent to a reform facility or a political prison camp. Hence, North Koreans often give bribes to government officials in order to avoid prison.⁴⁸

Prof. Andrew Yeo of Catholic University of America stated in his research article “Evaluating the Scope of People-to-People Engagement in North Korea, 1995-2012,” that “[t]he regime has incentives to limit communication and the flow of information from foreign actors that might threaten the regime’s control over society.”⁴⁹ Since 1995 outside groups—Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGO)—have steadily increased humanitarian relief, business development, professional training, and educational assistance to North Koreans in spite of political challenges. These humanitarian relief activities represented sixty percent of all external engagement activities within North Korea through 2012.⁵⁰ Indeed,

the foreign NGO workers, business experts, and academics working inside North Korea engage with the North Korean people on a daily basis. Even during the long periods of economic sanctions, this type of foreign assistance continued, because the sanctions excluded humanitarian assistance.⁵¹ Particularly, from 1995 through 2012, the U.S. and South Korean humanitarian organizations represented twenty-seven (27) percent of all foreign organizations and twenty-eight (28) percent of all engagement activities in North Korea.⁵² Furthermore, Prof. Yeo's research discovered that a key to long-term sustainment under the strictly rules-based regime is to establish good working relationships with North Korean counterparts through mutual trust. In addition, organizations with a long-term vision for peace and reunification for the two Koreas tend to be more successful at overcoming obstacles associated with their engagement work in North Korea.⁵³ In comparison, Prof. Yeo found no direct relationship between the security environment and engagement activities within the prohibitive atmosphere. Consequently, the levels of assistance between 2009 and 2011 did not significantly decrease during the North Korea's missile and nuclear tests, the sinking of the South Korean ship, *Cheonan*, and the shelling of *Yeongpyong* Island.⁵⁴

Finally, a November 2016 survey by a Washington think tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), questioned selected North Korean citizens from diverse backgrounds—20 men and 16 women between the ages of 28 and 80—about their leader, Kim Jong-Un. Despite the extreme penalties for expressing anything other than praise for the regime, an overwhelming majority of thirty-five of the thirty-six respondents said “their family, friends or neighbors complained or made jokes about the regime in private.”⁵⁵ This candid response demonstrates North Koreans' discontent with

their leader and arguably the totalitarian nature of the repressive state, where freedom of thought and expression are prohibited. Furthermore, these survey findings confirmed defector testimony in another survey conducted by Seoul National University of 30,000 North Korean defectors living in South Korea since 2008. North Korean defectors consistently criticized the Kim regime.⁵⁶

Ultimately, these findings suggest a potential path by which the United States and South Korea can utilize an information-based strategy to work through the North Korean people. This could achieve the desired end state of a North Korea without the Kim regime and overall peace on the Korean peninsula. The time is ripe for a new strategy, and the United States and South Korea could harness the influence of existing NGOs—and support new and continued NGO engagements—to spread the U.S. and South Korean messages to the beleaguered people of North Korea.

Implementing the Information Strategy

In order to implement an informational approach within North Korea, the U.S. leaders must understand the North Korean social system and its vulnerabilities. The U.N.'s February 7, 2014 report of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in North Korea revealed not only the severity of North Korea human rights violations but also the policy of indoctrinating its citizens at an early age. This policy inevitably instills loyalty and commitment toward the Supreme Leader and deep hatred toward the United States, Japan, and South Korea.⁵⁷ Additionally, practicing the Christian religion is prohibited in North Korea, as it challenges North Korea's official personality cult and potentially detracts from the official worship of the Supreme and Dear Leaders, who have no higher authority.⁵⁸ Furthermore, North Korea enforces a state-directed caste system, *songbun*, based on hereditary classes determined by loyalty to the regime. This

system shapes every facet of North Korean life—residence, occupation, university, food allowance, movement, and even marriage.⁵⁹ The *songbun* is classified into three groups: core, wavering, and hostile. This core class represents North Korean elites and is about twenty-five percent of the North Korean population or 4.4 million adults per the North Korean 2008 census.⁶⁰ Due to the social caste system, a targeted information campaign should be applied to the elite class very differently from that aimed at the ordinary citizen group.

North Korean Elites

North Korean elites—people with connections to the dictator, political party cadres, high ranking military officers, and business leaders—live privileged lives and are insulated from North Korea’s economic hardships.⁶¹ As a result, the elites are vested in supporting the Kim regime survival to maintain their privileged existence and are unlikely to want the removal of Kim Jong-Un, or a move to reunification. The information strategy for the elites should be to convince them that reunification of the Korean peninsula is their best long-term option leading to the overthrow of Kim Jong-Un. To fulfill this objective, the United States and South Korea should foster information and ideas to North Korean elites guaranteeing their safety after the removal of Kim Jong-Un. For the same reason, Commander Vincenzo offered five key elements of information campaign policy to “enhance [the] ability to de-escalate a crisis, reduce the potential for violence, reduce the humanitarian costs, reduce civil and military resistance, [and] mitigate collapse of the civil infrastructure.” Ultimately, the information campaign should convince regime elites to support the U.S.-South Korea efforts.⁶²

Furthermore, Bruce Bennet, a North Korea expert, presented five required conditions for the South Korean government to convince North Korean elites to support

a peaceful unification of Korea. First, ensure North Korean elites' individual safety and security by establishing an appropriate transitional justice system to provide amnesty for senior elites' crimes. Second, assure their sociopolitical and economic positions remain during and after reunification. Third, avoid any aggressive tax policy to confiscate the wealth of the elites; rather, ensure that they can retain their wealth. Fourth, ensure the elites' family safety and position by explaining the fair systems practiced in South Korea. The North Korean elites and their families as part of the core *songbun* class enjoy enormous privileges. However, the North Korean system persecutes the entire family if a senior elite is imprisoned or executed. Because of this, the South Korean government must inform the elites regarding the South Korean criminal justice system that applies only to an individual but not to his or her family. And finally, provide opportunities for the elites to use their potential and meaningful humanitarian work within North Korea through assisting their fellow citizens to adapt during the unification process.⁶³

Research performed by InterMedia revealed that North Korean elite youth enjoy an unprecedented access to media—sharing South Korean music and dramas on USBs and MP3s—based on their families' elite social standing. Even though they are still subject to punishment when caught, elite youth dare to break law to obtain the outside information, challenging the behavior expected of them.⁶⁴ This provides an opportunity for the United States and South Korea to work through the vulnerable and immature elite youth to disseminate the truth about the Kim regime and change their minds.

North Korean Ordinary People

Unlike the North Korean elites with some access to information, the ordinary people cannot legally access foreign information.⁶⁵ Brookings Institute Scholar Kyong-

Dong Oh Hassig has pointed out that the average North Korean person has little knowledge about the outside world since only a small amount of information comes through the Chinese borders or relatives living in Japan. In addition, they are “convinced that they must support the Kim regime to preserve their lives and livelihood. Others may wish to defect but lack the opportunity....They are a fertile field for communication.”⁶⁶ Additionally, National Public Radio (NPR) reported that North Koreans watch foreign movies and South Korean dramas illegally in secret in spite of severe punishment when caught. Notwithstanding the Kim regime’s intensified surveillance, the North Korean people remain undeterred, continue to watch foreign movies in secret, and continue to question what they hear from their government.⁶⁷

The North Korean Ministry of People’s Security (MPS) conducts investigations, carries out surveillance, and monitors China-North Korean border security. With MPS officers embedded at every level of North Korean society, if arrested, North Koreans are not only denied the presumption of innocence but also their entire family is punished under the guilt-by-association rule. Additionally, the people of the lower *songbun* classes get harsher sentencing.⁶⁸ The North Korean government has a restrictive surveillance program to control information coming from the external community, especially from South Korea. Understandably, the South Korean government sends propaganda leaflets into North Korea to spread its way of life. Likewise, North Korean defectors in South Korea take aggressive actions to influence North Koreans’ minds through radio broadcasts and by sending propaganda balloons carrying various media material and messages.⁶⁹ These activities are designed to demonstrate the Kim regime’s lies and motivate North Koreans to internally overturn the Kim regime.

However, these efforts come with a risk. In November 2015, North Korea executed three women after they were caught circulating a South Korean drama about a defector.⁷⁰ Despite the Kim regime's extreme surveillance against the in-flow of outside information, the North Korean people have become more aware of the outside world and hunger for more information. Naturally, the North Korean appetite for foreign media presents an opportunity for the U.S. and South Korean governments to launch an effective information campaign to win the hearts and minds of the ordinary North Korean people.

On the whole, empowering North Koreans through information campaigns provides a less controversial, low-risk, and cost-effective strategy to instigate the removal of Kim Jong-Un as North Korea's leader.⁷¹ However, the North Korean people's Confucian loyalty to their leader challenges the effectiveness of this communication since Confucian family loyalty provides a sense of "strong motivation not to protest against the regime."⁷² In addition, the successful removal of Kim Jong-Un would present a leadership vacuum in North Korea. Furthermore, a new leader, if not selected by the United States and South Korea, may persist with the nuclear program under a still authoritarian government system. Therefore, the United States and South Korea must make adequate preparations to reduce any unintended consequences in the event of the Kim regime collapse.

Aftermath of the Kim Regime Collapse

In the event of the Kim regime collapse, the U.S.-South Korean alliance must intervene quickly into North Korea to initiate peaceful reunification before other neighboring countries attempt to intervene.⁷³ In this process, South Korea should lead the intervention with the financial and military support of the United States. As North

Koreans are indoctrinated to hate Americans, they would more likely accept an intervention by South Koreans with whom they share the same heritage, history, and common language rather than by Americans whom they perceive as enemies. Additionally, the Chinese have historically signaled their aversion to any presence of U.S. forces on their border and would surely react negatively if the United States were to lead the effort. Most importantly, South Korean national pride would be affected if reunification were to be conducted by a foreign power. South Korean leadership of the effort would be consistent with the southern vision of their nation's proper role in reunification and post-reunification recovery.

In preparation for this event, South Korea's 2016 Defense White Paper established a foundation for peaceful reunification. Particularly, by developing inter-Korean relations through a trust-building process, South Korea will achieve movement toward a sustainable peace on the Korean peninsula. The trust-building process involves the two Koreas, neighboring countries, and the international community.⁷⁴ For the same reason, the U.S.-South Korea alliance must work concurrently with regional powers to avoid potential conflicts prior to, during, and after the Kim regime collapse to achieve security and stability for the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia.

Regional Powers and their Influence

The U.S.-South Korean effort to reunite the two Koreas will face challenges from regional powers such as China, Russia, and Japan. The former two are potential obstructionists to a unified Korea aligned with U.S. interests, while Japan is a reluctant partner in fear of a military outmatched by a strong, unified Korea with which it has a historically contentious relationship.

China

Whether China would cooperate with a U.S.-South Korea strategy for reunification remains uncertain. If the outcome were to be a South Korean-led democratic Korean peninsula, then China may prefer to maintain its status quo position regarding North Korea. Although the China-North Korea relationship has deteriorated in recent years due to North Korea's nuclear provocation, China uses North Korea as a buffer for its own security interests. Consequently, China may not support a U.S.-South Korea strategy that could impact its own economy and result in the presence of a pro-U.S. neighbor on its border. China would also reject the idea of U.S. forces stationed on or near its border with Korea.

China shares its history, border, and communist ideology with North Korea; however, the deep-seated North Korean mistrust of China dates back to the North Korean state establishment.⁷⁵ Some researchers argue this is the reason North Korea emphasizes "*Juche*" or self-reliance rather than reliance on China.⁷⁶ Although China serves as North Korea's closest ally, the United States could leverage North Korea's mistrust of China to ultimately bring China closer to the United States.

In addition, the South Korea-China relationship has continued to improve since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992. Beginning in 2013, South Korea and China have established a strategic communication channel to promote cooperation on security issues within the Korean peninsula and the Northeast Asian region. With the continuation of defense exchanges, the two countries embrace a strategic cooperative partnership for peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia.⁷⁷ Taking advantage of this positive relationship between the two countries, the U.S.-South Korea alliance should work to convince China that a unified South Korean-led Korea

provides for China's best interests in the long term. China must also recognize that a nuclear-capable North Korea on its border is a significant security threat.

Russia

In the event of the Kim regime collapse, Russia's support for a South Korean-led reunification on the Korean peninsula remains uncertain. Russia asserted that its priority in Pyongyang is stability not a regime change, despite the potential North Korean nuclear threat.⁷⁸ With the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, North Korea and Russia's positive political and economic ties deteriorated due to Russia's declining economy and internal political strife.⁷⁹ However, as the China-North Korean relationship has deteriorated in recent years due to the North Korean nuclear program, Russia has seen opportunities to renew its relationship with North Korea, including an effort to fill China's place by opening a new ferry service to transport oil and forgiving North Korea's massive debt from the Soviet era.⁸⁰ Russia also established diplomatic relations with South Korea in 1990, and has maintained a strategic cooperative partnership since 2008 by strengthening their cooperation and defense exchanges to resolve the North Korean nuclear threat.⁸¹

Although Russia strategically positions itself as a Northeast Asian regional major power, its priority remains focused toward Europe and the former Soviet Union states and its efforts to increase its influence and power over them. Furthermore, while Russia maintains a strong relationship with South Korea, it opposes a pro-U.S. unified Korea on its border. Therefore, Russia will likely provide limited support to the U.S.-South Korean efforts at reunification of the Korean peninsula.

Japan

Japan remains a major U.S. ally in the region and shares the same concerns as the United States regarding the ongoing North Korean nuclear provocation. Japan has identified its security strategy as strengthening its defense capabilities, cooperating with the United States, and collaborating closely with regional countries, specifically South Korea. Additionally, Japan considers South Korea as an important future strategic partner in maintaining stability in Asia.⁸²

The Japanese and South Korean relationship has been contentious throughout the post-World War II era due to the Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula from 1910 through 1945. While cooperative relationship and reconciliation efforts between the two countries have been ongoing since the 1965 Japan-Republic of Korea Normalization Treaty, the Korean people's deep-seated enmity toward the Japanese still exists, especially with the older generation. The major diplomatic disputes between the two countries are the unresolved issue of Japan's war time use of Korean women as sex slaves, so called "comfort women", and a territorial dispute regarding Dokdo Island, located mid-way between the two countries and called Takeshima Island by the Japanese.⁸³

In spite of the troubled history and these on-going diplomatic disputes between Japan and South Korea, the two countries share mutual and deep concerns over the North Korean nuclear and missile development program. To better prepare for potential North Korean responses, South Korea and Japan entered into a General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) on November 23, 2016 to protect military secrets shared between the two countries. Through GSOMIA, South Korea can

effectively respond to North Korean nuclear and missile threats using Japanese intelligence capabilities.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, Japan's concern of a potential security threat from a unified Korea exists. Additionally, Japan may not welcome a stronger economic competitor to its own economy. These concerns can yet be mitigated, however, by assuring Japan of the potential benefits it could receive from a unified Korea. Bruce Klingner from the Heritage Foundation explains that, first, a reduced U.S. military presence in Japan equates to Japan's overall defense cost reductions as overall costs for defending South Korea will decrease. Second, a unified Korea could resolve Japan's abductee issue within North Korea. Third, Japanese businesses could participate in the reconstruction efforts of North Korea, expanding its Korean export market. Finally, a stronger unified Korea could help the regional balance against the growing Chinese power in Northeast Asia."⁸⁵ As such, Japan will likely support the U.S.-South Korean efforts for a reunification of the Korean peninsula.

Conclusion

Diplomatically isolated North Korea with its nuclear and missile ambitions remains a major security threat to the United States and its Northeast Asian allies and partners. The ineffective U.S. policy of deterrence and containment toward North Korea contributed to Kim Jong-Un's escalating erratic behavior through his nuclear programs. The United States must formulate a revised strategy taking a holistic approach utilizing all elements of national power to counter the Kim Jong-Un regime's nuclear threat. Conceptually, the United States should continue strict economic sanctions, while seeking opportunities to open a diplomatic dialogue, and continue to maintain a U.S. military presence in South Korea augmented by a strong missile defense system. Most

importantly, the United States and South Korea should employ a strong information-based campaign to encourage a North Korean uprising leading to a Kim regime and North Korean government collapse. As noted, North Koreans continue to smuggle outside media into North Korea even with the Kim regime's intensified surveillance and intimidation. This phenomenon presents a perfect opportunity for the United States and South Korea to launch an effective information-based campaign. Additionally, because of the caste system in North Korea, the U.S.-South Korea alliance should conduct a unique information campaign for elites separately from one aimed at the ordinary citizens to win the hearts and minds of all North Koreans with the goal of victory by replacing the Kim regime without military conflict.

Overall, the collapse of the Kim regime would bring many challenges and benefits to the United States and South Korea. Reunification would result in major challenges, such as a massive financial burden for reconstruction of the North, securing the North's weapons of mass destruction, long term humanitarian relief assistance, preventing potential factional in-fighting, and controlling the flow of refugees to neighboring countries.⁸⁶ However, Columbia University Prof. Dr. Sue Mi Terry argues that the potential benefits to South Korea will outweigh the cost through long-term reduced defense spending, ending universal conscription, the availability of North Korean young and cheap labor, reuniting abundant natural resources, and restoring Northeast Asian regional stability.⁸⁷

Ultimately, in the event of the Kim regime collapse, the United States should encourage and support the South Korean government to lead a reconstructive intervention into North Korea. The United States and South Korea must synchronize

their approaches and policies to achieve a successful and peaceful reunification of the two Koreas. Moreover, the U.S.-South Korea alliance should concurrently work closely with regional powers to convince them that a unified Korea provides for the best interests of all states concerned and ensures long-term stability and peace in Northeast Asia. Although China and Russia remain as potential U.S. adversaries to this process, South Korea has maintained a sound relationship with these countries. Additionally, while some issues remain, South Korea and Japan are united and interdependent in countering North Korean threat. Therefore, the United States should leverage South Korea's strong relationships with all of the regional stakeholders to achieve a desired end state of a democratic unified Korea. As Sun Tzu stated, the United States and South Korea can reap a battle won without a conflict with North Korea by utilizing an effective information-based strategy coupled with the ongoing policies toward North Korea.

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