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North Korean Intentions and the American Response

Jake Bates, Editor

News stations across the world reported on December 17, 2011 about the death of a man referred to as Guiding Sun Ray, Glorious General Who Descended from Heaven, Highest Incarnation of the Revolutionary Comradely Love, and Savior. Better known as Kim Jong-Il, he had been recognized as Supreme Leader by North Korea's constitution since July 1994. Headlines internationally speculated that his death may cause a dramatic shift in the policies and nature of the North Korean government.¹ Following the state funeral for Kim Jong-Il on December 29, the deceased's youngest son, Kim Jong-Un, became Supreme Leader. The United States Assistant Secretary of State, Kurt Campbell, greeted the news with willingness to discuss giving aid to North Korea in exchange for their disarming nuclear weapons—a discussion deserted by North Korea in 2009 under its former leadership. As the top U.S. diplomat to East Asia, he declared readiness to begin a new chapter in relations between the two countries, but said “it is too early to discern the intent of the country's new leadership.”² Analyzing both past and present actions of the North Korean government will illustrate that three generations of dictators have established intolerable practices and that American attempts at cooperation are likely to be as futile as ever.

It should be noted that almost all negative information regarding North Korea has been reported by emigrants, whose truthfulness is repeatedly denied by the North Korean government. The reader may judge for themselves whether to trust the numerous cited articles detailing the atrocities or the accused government. Among the North Korean government's established practices is the use of labor camps. These labor camps are divided into six “political prison camps”³ and between fifteen and twenty

1 FoxNews.com alone hosted three videos on December 20 titled “The Future of North Korea,” “Changes for North Korea,” and “World Braces for Transitions in North Korea.”

2 “U.S. Seeks ‘New Chapter’ in Relations with North Korea,” FoxNews.com, 19 January 2012.

3 “North Korea's Hard Labor Camps,” Washington Post, 20 July 2009.

ty “reeducation camps.”⁴ The crimes which warrant placement in each type of camp vary, but several will be detailed shortly.

In 1950, under the rule of Kim Il-Sung, every church in North Korea was destroyed, and most priests and monks were sent to prison camps to face their death. Since 1988, North Korea has erected four “churches” in Pyongyang with foreign donations. It is evident that these are used solely to propagate an illusion of religious freedom to foreigners,⁵ as a Christian missionary was publicly executed on June 16, 2009 for distributing Bibles while her husband and son were exiled to a political prison camp.⁶ An estimated 50,000 to 70,000 Christians are currently in prison camps.⁷

Citizens have faced similar punishments for travelling both domestically and abroad. A political elite is the sole group given the freedom to purchase automobiles and live in the capital city, where conditions are reported as superior to the rest of the country. Forced resettlement is reported as “routine,” exemplified by physically and mentally disabled citizens being exiled from their homes in the capital city. North Koreans who are not a part of the political elite have been tortured and executed for leaving the country. Absconding citizens who have associated with religious and non-government organizations are often punished even more severely.⁸

In addition to forced exile, the physically and mentally disabled have been sent to prison camps,⁹ and disabled babies have been killed immediately upon birth.¹⁰ Women as young as 14 have been drafted by the state to provide “kippūmjo” services (which include massaging and cabaret

4 “The Hidden Gulag – Exposing North Korea’s Prison Camps: Prisoners’ Testimonies and Satellite Photographs,” David Hawk, The U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 11 November 2010.

5 “Bongsu Church in Pyongyang a Fraud, Only for False Propagation of Freedom of Religion,” Shin Ju Hyun, Daily NK, 2 August 2005.

6 “North Korea Executes Woman for Giving Out Bibles,” New York Post, 24 July 2009.

7 “Death of Kim Jong-Il May Not Change Much for North Korean Christians,” Open Doors UK, December 2011.

8 “Quandary on the Yalu: International Law, Politics, and China’s North Korean Refugee Crisis,” Benjamin Neaderland, Stanford Journal of International Law, 2004.

9 “Nation Under a Nuclear Cloud: ‘Racially Not Impure’ Children Killed,” Michael Sheridan, The Times Online (London), 15 October 2006.

10 “U.N.: North Korea puts Disabled in Camps,” Disabled People’s International, 10 November 2006.

dancing at the least, but potentially even prostitution) and subsequently ordered to marry national heroes at age 25.¹¹ Immigration to North Korea is now virtually nonexistent, but between 1955 and 1980, many Japanese (typically wives of North Koreans) moved to the country. Immigrants who do not play a role in the state's government are monitored by the government and are forbidden to enter certain locations and immigrants who have not fulfilled the expectation of assimilation into society have been sentenced to prison camps.¹²

Compounding upon these barbarities, the state controls every facet of media and education within its borders. Kim Jong-Il and Kim Il-Sung are the focus of all media and education efforts. North Korean novels, plays, and films are expected to praise the two past leaders, and their history lessons continue to explain North Korea's misfortunes such as the Korean War as a result of aggression on the part of the United States and Japan.¹³ Radios and televisions are configured so that non-North Korean broadcasts cannot be received, and manipulating them to do so is a criminal offense.¹⁴ North Koreans have also reportedly been sent to labor camps for watching South Korean films.¹⁵

Through these happenings, North Korea has received unprecedented amounts of foreign aid. The government has explained that simple economic hardship has brought malnutrition to an extreme. In reality, an entirely state-controlled economy, with the help of flooding in the 1990s, has brought famine and poverty to millions as the government has limited food rations while raising prices, dictated where and how workers are to sow the land, and caused the deaths of millions of its citizens.¹⁶ The United States has been one among many countries and non-government organizations to assist North Korea with aid. President George W. Bush signed into law the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004, pledging help to North Koreans by providing "humanitarian assistance," increased infor-

11 "Intervention Agenda Item 12: Elimination of Violence Against Women," Ji Sun Jeong, UN Commission on Human Rights, April 2004.

12 "North Korea, Where Minds Keep Visitors In Check," Damien McElroy, *The Daily Telegraph* (London), 6 April 2002.

13 "Worst Obstacle to Reunification of Korea," *Korea Today*, 16 January 2006.

14 "North Korea – Annual Report," *Reporters without Borders*, January 25 2006.

15 "N. Korea Human Rights 'Abysmal,'" *British Broadcasting Corporation*. 23 October 2009.

16 "North Korea Cuts Rations, Raises Taxes," *The Command Post*, 26 January 2006.

mation, and grants to private organizations in the country which promote human rights, democracy, and a market economy.¹⁷ Predictably, the North Korean government has done its best to continue the squelching of these. The World Food Program has set goals of providing North Koreans with \$200 million worth, or 6 million tons, of food. At the same time as it cut rations and raised prices, the North Korean government ordered incoming food shipments to cease.¹⁸ In fact, amidst economic turmoil, the government declared strengthening military forces to be its primary concern.¹⁹

This military build-up has been of increasing concern in international relations. As the United States' interests have seldom aligned with North Korea's, the United States has attempted several negotiations in hopes of limiting North Korea's nuclear weapon development. In 1994, an agreement was reached that North Korea would freeze and dismantle its nuclear weapons program while the United States assisted in building two nuclear reactors to generate power. By 2002, Kim Jong-Il admitted to having produced nuclear weapons, thereby breaking the treaty.²⁰ Again in 2005, North Korea agreed to denuclearize in exchange for aid as a part of a deal involving six countries including the United States. North Korea then announced having successfully conducted an underground nuclear test on October 9, 2006. This six country discussion proposing denuclearization in exchange for aid is the same that continued through 2009 until North Korea withdrew its input and again tested nuclear weapons.

Now, the world waits for Kim Jong-Un to make his intentions clear. Yet, he undoubtedly has. Citizens who did not sufficiently mourn the loss of Kim Jong-Il have become the latest group admitted to reeducation camps. Those who did not publicly mourn, those who did not cry at a public mourning, and those who did not "seem genuine" at a public mourning are being sentenced to *at least* six months in the labor camps. North Koreans who criticized the regime outright are also being banished with

17 "Public Law 108-333, North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004," 108th Congress of the United States, 18 October 2004.

18 "North Korea's Grain Production Up 5.3pc in 2005," *The Financial Express*, 26 January 2006.

19 "North Korea's Military Strategy," *Parameters*, U.S. Army War College Quarterly, 2003.

20 "History of the 'Agreed Framework' and how it was Broken," U.S. Government Info/Resources, 12 March 2007.

their families to prison camps and rural areas.²¹ Citizens caught using cell phones for any purpose during the 100 day-long mourning period likewise are being exiled to labor camps.²²

Militarily, North Korea has proceeded in its normal fashion. A short-range missile was fired mere hours after the announcement of Kim Jong-Il's death, taken as coincidence by some, but taken as a deliberately sent, albeit unclear, message by others. Three more short-range missiles were tested on January 13, understood to be a routine test of the technology.²³ At the very least, the tests certainly indicate intentions to continue testing and improving destructive weapons. These new and improved weapons are scheduled to be prominently displayed in a "military parade" which was being planned before Kim Jong-Il's death.²⁴ The North Korean media also proudly defended their new leader's military knowledge, discarded by some as propaganda until a documentary (released by the government, admittedly) showed him present at the testing of a long-range missile prior to his political power in April 2009.²⁵

Kim Jong-Un has already used his short time as Supreme Leader to show that the North Korean government will not change. The priorities of North Korea indeed remain as they have for decades. While denying the most basic freedoms to any and every citizen, Kim is following in his predecessors' footsteps by asserting might as right. The North Korean government has made evident and undeniable the words of B.R. Myers: "Kim Jong-Un will not be advocating any significant reforms."²⁶

Still, after and in spite of these continued occurrences, many countries including the United States are intent on feigning alliances with North Korea. This simply cannot and should not be done. North Korea's past and present are plagued by events epitomizing the antithesis of American val-

21 "Report: Six Months in Labor Camp for N. Koreans who didn't Cry at Despot's Funeral," MSNBC.com, 13 January 2012.

22 "North Korean Government Labels Cell Phone Users As War Criminals," Dara Kerr, News.CNet.com, 26 January 2012.

23 "Official: North Korea Test-Fired Short-Range Missiles," FoxNews.com, 13 January 2012.

24 "North Korea 'Planning Big Military Parade,'" The Telegraph (UK), 30 January 2012.

25 "North Korea Credits New Leader Kim Jong-Un with Spearheading Nuclear Testing," FoxNews.com, 20 January 2012.

26 "Dynasty, North Korean-Style," B.R. Myers, New York Times, 7 January 2012.

ues. Each dictator has taken his turn in negating the life and liberty of the country's people, and each has meanwhile built up military power, now not only in an attempt to frighten their citizens, but the rest of the world as well. Diplomatic negotiation has failed in every instance, as their government has broken and continues to break agreements. North Korea's leaders have repeatedly shown that they do not wish to ally themselves with the United States or the values on which it was founded.

Expecting beneficial ends by resorting to compromise with such leaders is unrealistic. Individuals who act according to the opposite of their principles in order to befriend someone displaying such behavior are sure to find frustration instead of a sustainable relationship. Similarly, a country founded through the fight for individual rights cannot reasonably associate with a country actively scoffing at the idea. Rather than cooperating with those who do not wish to cooperate with us, we should properly take a stand in defending our greater values and share with North Korea the words of Abraham Lincoln: "Right is might."