

## KOREA CHAIR PLATFORM

## A Free North Korea

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Following his father's death and state funeral, Kim Jong-un became the supreme leader of North Korea. This leadership change presents new issues, challenges, and opportunities. While Kim Jong-un is concerned with solidifying his power position within North Korea and upholding his family's name, the United States and South Korea must choose whether to continue the strategy of deterring and placating the Kim regime or to take actual steps to change the increasingly dangerous situation on the peninsula and bring freedom to the people of North Korea.

For many years, Kim Jong-il successfully maintained his family's regime thru a military first policy and by antagonizing, provoking, appeasing, and demanding concessions from South Korea and her allies. From continued ballistic missile and nuclear testing to the Cheonan sinking and the artillery attack on Yeonpyeong in 2010, Kim Jong-il demonstrated the continued will and ability to use provocations to strengthen the regime and convince the North Korean populace that his strategy was needed and beneficial to the country. Additionally, Kim Jong-il maintained a stranglehold on the will of the population by completely eliminating outside influences, free media, and dissenting opinions. This strategy was largely successful for Kim Jong-il, who acquired aid and international recognition in return for dissipation of tensions he had created. His main goal of regime survival was accomplished.

Without a new ROK-U.S. strategy North Korea will continue the past patterns of unrelenting development and proliferation of nuclear weapons and technology, improvement of ballistic missile and SOF capabilities, deterioration of human rights conditions for the general North

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Korean public, and a failed economy. This combination is very dangerous to the Korean peninsula and the free world. Given Kim Jong-un's upbringing and participation in past provocative attacks, it is very unlikely he will deviate from his father's practices. If the cycle is not stopped, North Korea will soon have the capability and need to strike very hard against South Korea and the United States and in the meanwhile, tens if not hundreds of thousands of North Korea citizens will have been killed in labor camps or died of starvation.

It is vital that South Korea and the U.S. reexamine our goals and objectives for North Korea and determine actions required to attain these goals. I believe that the main focus of this new strategy should start with a clear objective of a free North Korea.

China will never agree to regime threatening sanctions or cutting off aid to North Korea to force a change there. Attacking North Korea to force change is neither the desire nor in the best interests of South Korea or the United States. It is becoming increasingly clear that any real change must arise from within North Korea. However, the iron grip which is maintained over information mandates that this change must be precipitated by direct actions intent on educating the masses and creating a desire for true freedom and human rights. This spread of knowledge and desire for change ultimately rests on the ability of South Korea and her allies to override Kim Jong-un's isolationist policy by injecting information and opinions into the common North Korean citizen's daily lives. As people are exposed to the possibilities created by freedom they will become increasingly dissatisfied with the situation and take direct actions to change the power structure and policies within North Korea.

First and most importantly, South Korea and the United States must develop a Strategic Communications Plan designed to inform the North Korean populace. The plan must focus on educating those most likely to influence change, primarily the young and middle aged population. Influence must also be exerted on the military, which the Kim regime relies on as a deterrent to dissenting opinions and actions. South Korea and the U.S. must be willing to take overt actions to promote education and the spread of knowledge within North Korea. There are many ways to do this. Some examples include: conditioning aid donations with a way to get information into the North, supporting ROK leaflet and propaganda operations, agreeing to and paying for family exchanges (but only at the homes of each family and not at a staged hotel in North Korea), offering military exercise observation and external educational opportunities, and increasing distribution of radios, DVD's, TV broadcasts and other media designed to educate the public. Again, these are but a few of the examples of how we can get the truth into North Korea. The hardest part is truly deciding that this is the goal for both the United States and the ROK and being willing to take overt actions to make it happen. Ultimately, taking these actions will make a more fundamental and lasting change in North Korea than an agreement to denuclearize (which is absolutely necessary, but not sufficient to establish a free North Korea).

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Second, North Korea and its leadership must be held accountable in the eyes of the world. The lack of popular outrage and the degree to which the Kim government has successfully maintained its grip on power is a testament to the lack of accountability that has plagued prior dealings with the regime. Not only must bombings and nuclear tests be headlines, but also the constant threats and rhetoric should be reported by the international news outlets. Humanitarian violations, the gap between the ruling party and the people, and the dangerous weapons capabilities must be widely publicized, creating outrage and demand for change from all corners of the world. Estimates of over 200,000 North Koreans currently in Labor Camps with a quarter of them dying each year is not known and is far worse than the atrocities of governments that are falling today as a result of the Arab Spring. How to deal with North Korea should be a key presidential campaign issue for both the U.S. and the ROK. The situation in North Korea ultimately affects the entire globe and cannot be put on the backburner any longer.

Third, international organizations such as the United Nations must make it clear that they will hold Kim Jong-un accountable for UN Security Council Resolution violations, provocative declarations, and human rights violations. The pattern of appeasing North Korea through concessions and lack of real action in the U.N. must cease and make it evident to Kim Jong-un that the status quo has changed and he can no longer use confrontational actions and inhumane rule of its people to maintain his regime.

Fourth, every possible avenue to strengthen the ROK-U.S. alliance should be utilized. On the military side, United States service member tours should be normalized to three years with their families. Additional stationed, rotational, and exercise troops should be considered. Plans must continue to be modified and exercised to prepare for instability in North Korea. A ROK-U.S. Military Free Trade Agreement (MFTA), promoting easier exchange and procurement of technology and equipment, should be developed and approved by both countries. Future responses to North Korean provocations must be swift and strong enough (well beyond a tit for tat response) to cause Kim to not consider any further provocations. On the diplomatic side we must continue to make sure North Korea is never able to drive a wedge between the U.S. and the ROK. All actions required to reach a free North Korea must be coordinated and executed as an Alliance. All of these actions would show North Korea that South Korea and the United States are in it for the long haul and that the ROK-U.S. alliance will not be undermined or mitigated.

Finally, in order to be prepared for eventual changes, South Korea, the United States, and ideally China must begin a dialogue about what a free North Korea would look like. These issues include but are not limited to: initial government organization, reconstruction costs, U.S. troop posturing, how to assist and control refugees, and rights of the population (property, fate of military, justice system). Working together we can ensure the vital national interests of the ROK, the U.S., and even China are accounted for and enhanced.

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These are but a few of the steps towards a free North Korea. Ultimately, the United States and Republic of Korea must recognize the North Korean regime will not change on its own and that we must help force and support the change that is needed. If we are not willing to say that we want a free North Korea and initiate actions to educate and support the people of North Korea, the North Korean people will never have the strength or tools to force a real change. It is up to our countries to lead the path towards a free North Korea and the time is now.

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