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## **Let the North Koreans Open Their Eyes and Ears**

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A democratic regime should replace the present dictatorship in North Korea as soon as possible. Democracy will bring political freedom and economic prosperity to North Korea and contribute to a more peaceful world. Although one easily could agree with this American foreign policy goal, there arises much controversy about how to achieve it. It appears at the time of this writing that the Bush Administration may prefer a top-down approach by toppling the Kim Jung-Il regime as it did with Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003. There are three potentially dangerous elements to this approach.

First, how does the U.S. guarantee a democratic regime after Kim is gone? No one who is pro-democracy has been identified or recognized to replace Kim in the North and the situation regarding alternative leadership is even more unknown than in Iraq. The U.S. could try to appoint someone from outside. But he or she easily could be rejected by the new ruling factions as well as by ordinary North Koreans as an outsider. Further, as history repeats itself in most of Latin America, U.S. appointees could be a seed for disaster rather than part of a road map to sustainable democracy.

Second, let us assume that the U.S. somehow is able to engineer a new regime in the North. The crucial question is how to convince ordinary North Koreans of the value of American foreign policy goals. It is not good enough to emphasize that North Koreans have been brainwashed and disconnected from the outside world for more than a half century. Believe it or not, they are willing to sacrifice their life for their so-called dear leader, Kim Jung-Il. Unquestioned loyalty to the leader is a very much respected tradition in the North Korean culture. One may wonder how they could love the bizarre tyrant who has starved and killed millions of his own innocent people as well as driven the North toward the brink of a nuclear war. The answer is relatively simple and straightforward. North Koreans have little or no access to factual information on the Kim regime.

Third, how does the U.S. revitalize the North Korean economy with the establishment of a democratic regime? It is possible that the North's economy could become even worse at the beginning of a new experiment. Without a sustainable economy, democracy easily can fall back into autocracy. Historically, dictatorship returned in many new born democracies in Southern Europe and Latin America that became prey to economic hardship. Under a new democratic system, North Koreans would expect to see that liberal capitalism can bring prosperity. But is the U.S. really prepared to meet such economic expectations? I have witnessed deteriorating economic situations in Afghanistan and Iraq after the recent U.S. intervention, so my answer is pessimistic.

By now, the reader may wonder what the answer is to the North Korean predicament. I propose a bottom-up approach. Democratizing the North should start

with North Koreans as individual people. American foreign policy should provide them with as many opportunities for contact with the outside world as they can. Keep in mind that North Koreans have been innocently and ignorantly indoctrinated, but most of them also have become “true believers” in the Kim regime. If North Koreans become more knowledgeable about the outside world, they also would become more capable of building a democratic society through gradual change. In particular, if they could see or hear the outside world through mass media including the internet, they would be more enlightened. At this moment, sadly enough, there are no direct communications or media contacts between the North and the U.S. or even South Korea. Consider how helpful the communications or contacts that occurred between the West and East Germans were before their unification. It was priceless! It is argued that American-educated or trained South Koreans are, in general, more pro-American than any other group in South Korea. Then, why not North Koreans? It should also be noted that most North Korean refugees came from border areas near China or South Korea, which evidences the importance of opening their eyes and ears toward the outside world.

It could be a great investment if the U.S. provides educational and training opportunities to future generations of the North who possibly could become advocates for liberal democracy or capitalism. Think how many Chinese students have become pro-democratic and free market-oriented after having trained in the U.S. The U.S. has achieved great success with China for decades; then why not with North Korea? If the U.S. could invest in ordinary North Koreans now, they could turn out to be political and economic assets for sustainable democracy in the North in the future. American foreign

policy could become much more effective if the North Koreans people became more willing to cooperate with the U.S.

America's hostile foreign policy toward the Kim leadership (i.e., the top-down approach) has, so far, produced unproductive and unnecessary outcomes such as the nuclear crisis. Hypothetically speaking, if there existed anti-nuclear groups who had tasted the essence of American democracy such as liberty, freedom, justice, etc., then the U.S. could be in a much better position in dealing with Kim. In passing, economic sanctions against the North are an ineffective strategy simply because there are not enough economic ties between the North and U.S. Ironically, economic sanctions make ordinary North Koreans suffer, but not the Kim regime.

The U.S., the only superpower left in the world, should knock the closed door of North Korea by setting up a variety of exchange programs in U.S. academia and business for their younger generations. Keep in mind that the U.S. must be patient with the North for such programs to succeed. Yet, the bottom line is that the U.S. could give up on Kim, but she can not turn her back on ordinary North Koreans who are severely suffering under the repressive communist regime.

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