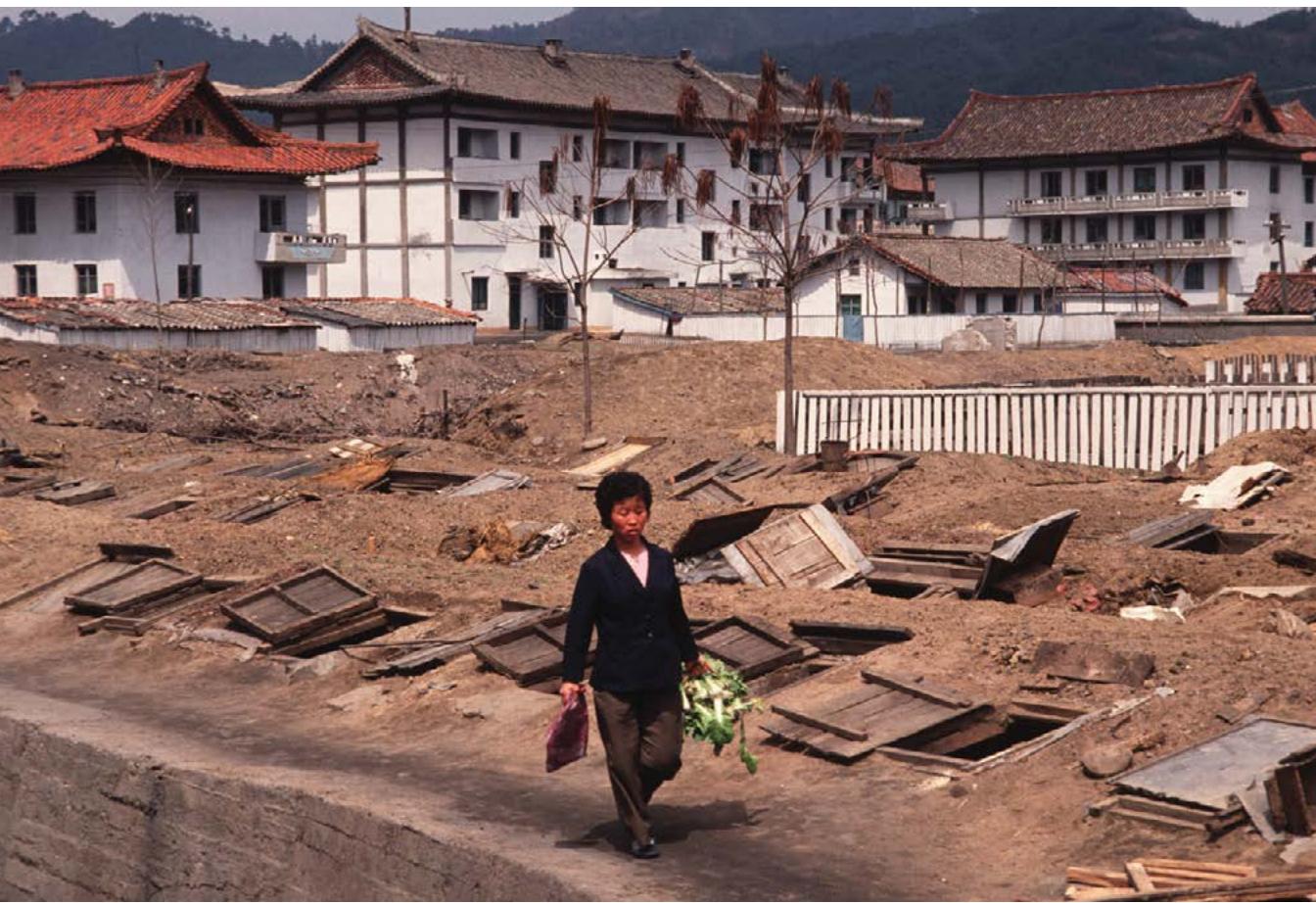


NORTH KOREA



HUMAN RIGHTS: CRITICAL TO DENUCLEARIZATION



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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE BUSH INSTITUTE



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FOCUS ON HUMAN RIGHTS ESSENTIAL TO MAKING PROGRESS WITH NORTH KOREA

by *Victor Cha*

Our recommendations:

- THE ADMINISTRATION AND CONGRESS SHOULD DEMAND HUMAN RIGHTS IMPROVEMENTS AS PART OF A DENUCLEARIZATION AGENDA
- THE ADMINISTRATION SHOULD APPOINT A SPECIAL ENVOY FOR NORTH KOREAN HUMAN RIGHTS
- THE ADMINISTRATION AND CONGRESS NEED TO VIEW HUMAN RIGHTS NOT AS A U.S.-NORTH KOREA ISSUE, BUT AS ONE SUPPORTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY
- THE U.S. GOVERNMENT SHOULD SUPPORT CHANGE INSIDE NORTH KOREA AND RECONSIDER HUMANITARIAN AID
- THE ADMINISTRATION NEEDS TO REOPEN PATHWAYS FOR NORTH KOREAN REFUGEES TO ENTER THE UNITED STATES

The United States has long been unwilling to weave human rights abuses into our national security policies and diplomatic strategies. The Singapore Summit between President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un discussed dismantling North Korea's nuclear weapons, but failed to address the fact that 41 percent of the population is undernourished, 28 percent of children under five have stunted growth, and slave labor and prison camps are "acceptable" forms of punishment.

North Korea is one of the worst human rights abusers in modern history, and their practices extend beyond those in horrific prisons and labor camps. It has been documented that revenues from slave labor camps fund Kim Jong-un's nuclear program. Denuclearization can neither be successfully pursued nor attained without addressing the human rights abuses.

While media outlets and the Administration justifiably draw attention to North Korea's nuclear weapons, they neglect to give a voice to the voiceless.

To successfully remove the threat North Korea poses to the region and world, Congress and the Administration must address the atrocious human rights abuses. The federal government will be well-served to consider the following recommendations.

THE ADMINISTRATION AND CONGRESS SHOULD DEMAND HUMAN RIGHTS IMPROVEMENTS AS PART OF A DENUCLEARIZATION AGENDA

Improvements to North Korea's human rights record could be seen as a metric of the regime's overall commitment to reform. In this sense, demanding such improvements is consistent with a denuclearization agenda and may make Pyongyang's verified commitment to denuclearization more credible.

North Korean human rights abuses, including the export of slave labor and trading companies engaged in such abuses, are documented to fund nuclear proliferation activities. In addition, well-established North Korean practices with regard to food distribution, mass labor mobilization, and prison camp labor all favor the regime and its proliferation practices over the rights of the citizens of the country. New and existing authorities for sanctions should target entities and individuals facilitating North Korea's exploitation of overseas labor and coal exports as sources of revenue that could be diverted to the nuclear and missile program.

THE ADMINISTRATION SHOULD APPOINT A SPECIAL ENVOY ON NORTH KOREAN HUMAN RIGHTS

Earlier this year Congress passed the North Korean Human Rights Reauthorization Act of 2017. The Special Envoy on North Korean Human Rights has yet to be nominated. This point person is the central figure for policy and would have direct access to the President in carrying out his or her job to address the atrocious human rights abuses in North Korea. The Trump Administration should nominate a candidate.

THE ADMINISTRATION AND CONGRESS NEED TO VIEW HUMAN RIGHTS NOT AS A U.S.-NORTH KOREA ISSUE, BUT AS ONE SUPPORTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The international community's galvanized attention on human rights abuses has permanently changed the playing field for future U.S. diplomatic action with the North, making accountability for human rights abuses a requisite element of any new U.S. strategy. UN member states must continue to hold North Korea accountable in General Assembly and UN Security Council resolutions.

THE U.S. GOVERNMENT SHOULD SUPPORT CHANGE INSIDE NORTH KOREA AND RECONSIDER HUMANITARIAN AID

For change to occur, the Administration should increase the flow of information to the North Korean people — as a basic human right. North Koreans need to understand their government's propaganda is a gross misrepresentation of the country's standing in the world.

We should also remain open to incorporating humanitarian assistance that helps North Korea's most vulnerable citizens. The current Administration's blanket refusal to approve any visas for humanitarian activities, including health care, should be reconsidered. As Ambassador Bob King, the previous Administration's Special Envoy on North Korean Human Rights, wrote in a Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) commentary: "One important benefit of humanitarian assistance is that North Koreans — from senior government officials to individual aid recipients in remote villages — have contact with U.S. citizens and with citizens of other countries. This helps increase the flow of information about the outside world in one of the world's most isolated places."

THE ADMINISTRATION NEEDS TO REOPEN PATHWAYS FOR NORTH KOREAN REFUGEES TO ENTER THE UNITED STATES

The Administration should consider this a two-pronged approach:

1. Pressure China to meet its obligations to allow the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) access to border areas to determine the refugee status of migrating North Koreans. Discourage Chinese practices of refoulement (forcible return of refugees or asylum seekers to a country where they are liable to be subjected to persecution), which has contributed to a secular decline in the number of North Koreans attempting to escape persecution in the country.
2. Help North Korean refugees resettle and adapt in the United States. In addition to South Korea, the United States is one of the few countries to have a resettlement program for North Korean escapees. The Administration should, under current laws, do more to publicize the program and promote qualified individuals for entry to the United States. The George W. Bush Institute's North Korea scholarship program is an example of such a program and has given numerous escapees the opportunity to attend universities and community colleges.

Over the last five years, the ground has shifted on the North Korean human rights issue. UN member states must continue to keep the welfare of the North Korean people on the Security Council's agenda and hold the leadership accountable for violations. The Administration's decision to engage in high-level summit diplomacy provides opportunities to raise the human rights agenda directly with North Korean leadership. The set of recommendations offered above shouldn't be seen as complicating the denuclearization negotiations, but should be seen as a necessary element of any larger political agreement aimed at normalizing relations between these two adversaries and promoting the credibility of any denuclearization agreement.

Victor Cha serves as a Fellow of the Human Freedom Initiative at the George W. Bush Institute



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Cover: A woman in a village near Mount Myohyang, North Korea where they keep livestock in cellars, April 1, 1992. Photos depicting life in North Korea are rare due to the state's control of media. (Gerhard Joren / LightRocket via Getty Images)