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“STRENGTHENING MODELS FOR DENUCLEARIZATION IN
THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION”

North Korea: America's Moral Dilemma, China's Moral Disgrace

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As Dr. Preston Moon said in his powerful keynote address last month in Washington, as well as in his book, *The Korean Dream*, Korean reunification is fundamentally a moral issue. As he also said, denuclearization is linked to reunification, which makes that a moral issue as well. But the ultimate moral issue is the human rights situation in North Korea.

Earlier this year, Secretary Rex Tillerson's State Department issued its annual human rights report. Its critique of North Korea's record is a devastating indictment of one of the world's cruelest regimes. Its slave labor camps match the horrors of Nazi death camps and Soviet gulags in the last century. The disturbing details can be found in the reports of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, Amnesty International, and the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea.

In his speech before the South Korean National Assembly last week, President Trump quoted a person who escaped from the North: "When I think about it now, I was not a human being. I was more like an animal. Only after leaving North Korea did I realize what life was supposed to be."

The treatment of the North Korean people by three generations of the Kim regime can be fully expressed in one word: dehumanization. Yet, within a few weeks of the State Department's scathing human rights report, Secretary Tillerson told the United Nations Security Council: "Our goal is not regime change." In a subsequent press conference, the secretary expanded on the message he directed at both Pyongyang and Beijing: "We do not seek a regime change. We do not seek the collapse of the regime. We do not seek an accelerated reunification of the peninsula. We do not seek an excuse to send our military north of the 38th parallel. And we're trying to convey that to the North Koreans. We are not your enemy. We're not your threat."

Tillerson also said: "Since 1995, the U.S. has provided \$1.3 billion in aid to North Korea, and we look forward to resuming our contributions once [the country] dismantles its weapons programs."

What does this apparent contradiction mean? How can the United States condemn the North Korean regime as perhaps the worst humanitarian nightmare on earth, while at the same time pledging to keep it in power indefinitely and even provide further economic subsidies?

The answer lies in the last few words of Tillerson's offer of financial aid. Future contributions would come only after North Korea dismantles its nuclear programs. In other words, the government of the United States, the world's leading exponent of universal values and human rights, is saying that its first priority is denuclearization. It is willing to leave that horrendous regime in place, in order to avoid the alternative of another war on the Korean Peninsula.

That is not an immoral calculation when we consider that such a war, quite possibly involving nuclear weapons, would mean the deaths of hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of Koreans, North and South, and thousands of Americans. Faced with that painful dilemma, America and the world seem willing to condemn at least another generation of North Koreans to a living hell under Kim Jong Un's rule. Pyongyang sees its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles as guaranteeing its survival.

But some ask: since war on the Korean Peninsula and in the region would be so terrible, why is the Trump administration threatening war in order to eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons program? Why not just continue to live with the threat as previous administrations have done for the last three decades? Why not accept the freeze-for-freeze proposals put forward by China and Russia—North Korea stops building or testing nuclear weapons and missiles and South Korea and the United States end their joint military exercises? Wouldn't that avoid another Korean War, possibly with nuclear weapons?

The answer to that question has three parts. First, North Korea's nuclear and missile programs are completely illegal--blatant violations of international nonproliferation treaties and U.N. Security Council resolutions. U.S.-ROK exercises, on the other hand, are entirely legitimate activities conducted routinely by militaries around the world. It would be dangerously foolhardy to accept an ongoing North Korean nuclear and missile capability, even if "frozen," while surrendering a normal, legal international practice. The potential North Korean aggression would still be there, but the U.S.-ROK defensive capability would be diminished.

Second, given Pyongyang's consistent record of cheating on international commitments, it would be difficult at best to confirm its compliance with a freeze agreement—how would we know with any confidence what the baseline is? Rather than arguing about how many nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles North Korea had to begin with and whether any are being added over time, getting to zero and remaining there is far easier to understand and to verify.

As for the morality of risking war to get rid of North Korea's nuclear weapons, the policies of negotiations, sanctions, and relying on China to restrain its ally have all clearly failed. The threat from the Kim regime has grown exponentially—as has the risk of war itself. The nuclear canister can no longer be kicked down the road. As Secretary Tillerson and U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley have both said, there is no more road. The international community led by the United States, must act.

China must compel Pyongyang either to give up its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs or to give up power. And China has the economic and diplomatic clout to make that happen. We are often told, Kim Jong Un may be dangerous and erratic, but he is not suicidal. Then if he is faced a credible ultimatum from China along with security guarantees and economic aid, he would have to choose regime survival. The West must demand that Beijing present Pyongyang with an offer it cannot refuse.

Finally, considering North Korea's ongoing state of aggression against South Korea and its declared intention to reunify the Peninsula under Kim's totalitarian rule, the danger of an imminent outbreak of war is ever-present, even without any action by the West. In fact, many experts believe that Western restraint is seen by North Korean leaders as weakness which invites strategic miscalculation and military adventurism. It

would be better to lance that boil now and compel a roll-back of North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities before the danger becomes even greater.

Once peaceful denuclearization is accomplished, there will be opportunity for creative negotiations with Beijing and Pyongyang to accelerate the rehumanizing of the North Korean people that we should be pushing for simultaneously. Much of that can be achieved without total regime change, though not without some change in the regime's behavior. However, if Pyongyang precipitates actual conflict with the West by further provocations that cross the red lines of the United States, South Korea, and Japan, then the moral calculation changes.

There are three scenarios to consider. The first is the so-called surgical strike or preemption/prevention possibility. It would commit to Pyongyang and Beijing, as Secretary Tillerson has done, that we do not intend to overthrow the Kim regime or to occupy North Korea. If the Communist allies accept that assurance and there is no retaliation against Seoul, either by nuclear or conventional means, then there could be discussion of ending sanctions and resuming the flow of economic aid Tillerson mentioned. There would have to be verifiable assurances that the aid would be used to improve the lives of North Korean citizens and not to enrich the Kim regime, its elite supporters, or the military.

The second scenario would occur if Pyongyang does retaliate against South Korea or the United States, but China stays out of the conflict. That would mean war between North Korea and the West. In those circumstances, the Trump administration is unlikely to repeat the error of the Korean War and allow the aggressor regime to remain in power. Washington would have to work with Beijing to reunify the Korean Peninsula under a democratic government not hostile to either China or the West.

If China does intervene, which is the third and most catastrophic scenario, it would mean war between the United States and its allies against North Korea and China. It would be a replay of the first Korean War but with higher costs for all and devastating consequences for North Korea and China. It would be the merciful end of the Pyongyang regime and reunification under a democratic Korean government that would not soon forget Beijing's second aggression against South Korea. Such a war would destroy all the economic gains China has made over the past four decades and would endanger the very survivability of Communist Party rule in China. That is why it is the least likely scenario.

Let us hope that the Trump administration's approach can avoid all three conflict scenarios, but that will depend largely on China. Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, re-humanization of the North Korean people, reunification of all the Korean people—these are the moral imperatives that challenge our government today. Thank you.