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The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North), Factor 18

### **North Korea: Alliance with Mongolia to Secure Aid**

The 2013 International Index of Economic Freedom (IEF), ranked the Democratic People's Republic of Korea 177<sup>th</sup> out of 177 nations ("2013 Index of Economic Freedom") in their ranking of countries based on civilian economic autonomy and security. North Korea was ranked dead last, behind such corruption-ridden countries as Congo, Bangladesh, and Nigeria. The first sentence of the IEF's portraiture of the country describes North Korea as "*an unreformed and essentially closed dictatorial state*". This small fragment perfectly encapsulates the reasons why a U.N. assessment in March found that of the country's estimated 28 million people, 16 million are chronically deprived of food; why Korean children have been found to be about 3 to 4 centimeters shorter than their South Korean counterparts; and why nearly 28% of North Korean children suffer from stunting. It also provides clues as to why Western countries have found it so difficult to aid the North Korean people. Though the Korean government recognizes that their people are starving, and that they have no way of producing enough food to feed their shrinking population, their pride and insecurity prevents them from readily accepting help from western nations. Efforts by western countries have so far been met with hostility, yet the United States is equally unwilling to forgo their pride to aid the starving Korean citizens. Both sides make demands, and both sides have been unwilling to compromise on these demands, opting instead to abandon peace talks entirely. When this happens, not only does the entire world risk nuclear fallout, but 16 million people in North Korea continue to starve, resorting to eating bark, twigs, and insects to stay alive. North Korea has few allies, these being the only countries from which North Korea readily accepts aid. Even as hazy reports of cannibalism emerge from the country, the North Koreans remain alone and largely unaided by the international community (Fisher). In order to save the people of Korea, it will be necessary for Western nations to forget their pride, put military affairs aside, and align with a Korean ally.

Though North Korea is officially a democracy, there is virtually no power given to Korean citizens. The country has long been considered a communist state, though it makes feeble gestures of democracy to placate the international community. Take, for example, the democratic elections held in North Korea each year. While government elections are supposed to be a symbol of democracy and freedom, North Korean elections are the opposite. There is only one candidate on the ballot, and any citizen who writes in another candidate will be arrested and sent to a forced labor camp (Harden). Not only that, but the citizen's entire family, as well as the next three generations born to that family, will be forced to live in a state of semi-starvation behind an electric fence for the rest of their lives. No citizen is allowed to exit the country, and all must obtain a government pass to travel between provinces. No internet is allowed within the country, nor is any citizen permitted to send or receive mail outside the country.

Kim Il-Sung was originally a member of the Chinese Communist Party and after the schism of North and South Korea in 1945, Il-Sung became the communist leader of North Korea. Korea is self-described as a Juche, meaning a self-reliant, totally independent state (Cummings). Ruled by Kim Il-Sung for decades, Korea grew more secretive as their economy began to crumble. Following his death in 1994, Kim Il-Sung was not immediately replaced, but hailed as the "Eternal President" North Korea maintains a close watch on all information released to the press. Because of this, the outside world can only speculate as to how the North Korean government is actually run. While it is known that North Korea is a communist regime, virtually nothing about the inner workings of the governmental elite has been released. As is characteristic of communism, the regime demands total obedience and submission by all citizens. In order to help secure this blind faith, the communist dictatorship often uses brainwashing and indoctrination to infiltrate the minds of its people. For example, Kim Il-Sung is referred to as "The Heavenly Leader" and his son,

Kim Jong-Il as “Savior”. The leaders of the communist party are portrayed in propaganda as perfect, godlike figures. Though the majority of North Koreans are far too poor for television, radios, or movies, citizens are taught from a young age to praise their leaders and abhor the West. Korean schools teach of the “evil” America, depicted as violent and oppressive to its citizens. Though the majority of people in North Korea are starving, they are trained to believe that their government is working tirelessly to protect them from the West’s agenda of destruction. Communist societies rely on brainwashing and ignorance to maintain their power. The majority of intellectuals and highly educated people of North Korea have been placed in internment camps or executed in order for the Communist regime to better keep control of the nation. A functioning modern judicial system does not exist.

The North Korean government has been able to maintain this level of control over its citizens through one thing: food. Food is used as a weapon by the regime against its people. Beginning in the late 1980’s, North Korea has struggled to produce enough food to feed its roughly 28 million people. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, North Korea relied heavily on them for trade. Geographically, North Korea has rocky soils and mountainous terrain, making it poor for farming. To combat this, the Korean government relied on the food bought from the Soviet Union. After the Soviet Union fell, Korea fell into an intense famine. At first, the Korean government tried to solve the crisis internally by instilling labor requirements for all citizens and launching a nationwide “Eat Two Meals a Day” campaign. However, these measures were not enough to reverse the mounting famine. China stepped in, taking the place of the Soviet Union in supplying North Korea with a staggering 77% of its food supply. When in 1993 China itself faced food shortages, it cut off all aid to North Korea, leaving the Korean people helpless. The North Korean government saw the famine not as a crisis within their country, but as a means of controlling the people. The regime designed the Public Distribution System (PDS) as a way to reward those who proved themselves loyal to the state. The system held several different levels, which each level being allotted a different amount of food each day. A citizen was placed in a level both by their occupation and by their personal record of loyalty to the state. Children were allotted 200 grams of food per day, and most adult laborers received 700 grams per day (Jin Dong Hyuk). The food given to citizens mainly consisted of milled corn, cabbage, and grain cereal. Because North Korea has outlawed all forms of trade, there is no way for a typical Korean citizen to obtain more food legally. Within cities, food production also proves difficult due to a lack of electricity, gas stoves, or refrigeration. Meat is scarce in North Korea, and protein in the Korean diet usually comes in the form of rats, frogs, and insects caught and sold illegally. Rice was and still is considered to be a luxury in North Korea. The World Food Program estimates the 600 grams of a similar diet per day is considered to be a “survival ration”, and is unhealthy to rely solely on this for extended periods of time (Brooke). Within months of the program’s implementation, increased food shortages lowered the amount of food in every level (with the exception of Kim and his inner circle, who ate lavish meals imported from China and South Korea). Food shortages were compounded by extreme flooding in the late 1990’s, which both washed away crops and destroyed power plants needed to package and ship food (Schwekendiek 596-608). While 62% percent of the Korean population was dependent of PDS by 1997, the system only had the resources necessary to feed 6% of the state. In 2009, the North Korean government exchanged its old currency for a new one worth just 1% of its original value. It immediately wiped out people's savings and triggered chaos as prices for food became unreachable.

The last employment statistics obtained from North Korea came in January of 2010, and showed that nearly a quarter of the North Korean population is unemployed. This number is difficult to understand due to the unknown percentage of North Koreans imprisoned in state labor camps, where they are classified as “laborers”, rather than employees. North Korea has no healthcare system, leaving those sick to fend for themselves. Family ties are weak within the state, with children often abandoned on the streets because their parents have no way of caring for them. Much like the familial structure of concentration camps during the Holocaust, North Koreans quickly learn to trust no one, and to rely on only themselves (Harden). The people of North Korea are not only weak from malnourishment, but low in morale. For

Kim and his advisors, this is a way of keeping the citizens under control. The North Korean people are too busy searching for their next meal to stage a revolution. They are too weak from hunger to plan a coup d'état.

The outside world has found it difficult to aid the people of North Korea. South Korea, China, and the United States have all offered aid in order to help combat the widespread famine in North Korea. However, North Korean officials have demanded that all aid be left at the border, and no outsiders be allowed inside the country. Because of this, there is no way to know how the aid is being distributed within the country. Diplomats speculate that Kim and his inner circle take what they want of the aid, and then sell the rest of it to third party distributors, who charge exorbitant fees to citizens. Those who need the aid most are unable to afford it, effectively rendering it useless. Though North Korea is considered a socialist country, illicit capitalism is thriving in regards to the buying and selling of foreign food donations. The United States has tried several times to negotiate food aid in exchange for access into Pyongyang with no success. Countries providing aid could require entrance into the country to determine the distribution of aid, but relations with the North Korean government are already tedious. Many diplomats fear that pushing North Korea any further will result in a total embargo on any and all aid, or worse. North Korea is unstable in terms of its use of nuclear weaponry, and has been observed testing nuclear missiles several times over the past few years. Because so little is known about the intricacies of the regime and the tenuous relationship Korea has with the outside world, outside governments are fearful of retaliation. This is especially concerning for South Korea and China, with both countries in firing range of North Korean missiles. A careful balance must be struck between being intrusive enough to help those in need, but not so intrusive as to unnerve the regime, causing it to either completely sever ties with the outside world or launch a nuclear attack.

Some political advisors have promoted “basketball diplomacy” as the best way to soothe tensions between North Korea and the western world, while also providing aid to the trapped Korean citizens. The name “basketball diplomacy” was coined after a seemingly successful visit to made by eccentric former-NBA player Dennis Rodman. While in Pyongyang, Rodman was photographed laughing and enjoying a basketball game with Kim and his top advisors. After his return to the United States, Rodman received flack for referring to Kim Jong-un as an “awesome guy” and “friend for life” (Yan, and Jethro Mullen ). Though Rodman’s remarks may have been poorly worded, western political analysts began to question if this sort of casual, non-political diplomacy may be the best way for the United States to gain access into Korea. Could the gradual introduction of non-threatening Americans be the way into Pyongyang? This optimism was short lived, however. In the week following Rodman’s visit, North Korea invalidated a long held armistice with South Korea and made verbal threats of violence toward both South Korea and the United States. While this sort of erratic behavior has become typical of the North Korean regime, it also showed the insecurity of Kim and his officials. Though it is impossible to know for sure, political pundits speculate that Rodman’s visit showed the starving Korea people a glimpse of the outside world that went against their indoctrinated beliefs. The Korean public had been taught all their lives that America’s sole purpose was the destruction of the North Korean regime and the annihilation of the North Korean people. After Dennis Rodman’s visit, the Korean people saw a seemingly “friendly” American and began to question their teachings. Not anticipating this reaction, the Korean government tightened control over its people to stop any revolutions before they started. Because food has been one of the biggest weapons the Korean government has used against its people, it can only be assumed that the regime has further restricted access of food to a country already in a state of famine. It is impossible to know the exact numbers, but a report by the Japanese Asia Press agency in January 2013 claimed that in the North and South Hwanghae provinces of North Korea more than 10,000 people had died of famine (Japanese Asia Press).

The aftermath of Dennis Rodman’s Pyongyang visit showed that the direct United States involvement with North Korea is not the most effective way to aid citizens. The North Korean regime is too insecure

and too unpredictable. If the regime feels threatened by the United States, or any Western nation, it will respond by further tightening control, making it even harder to get aid to those who need it. Throughout food aid negotiations, the United States has demanded that North Korea halt nuclear production and stop militaristic development in exchange for aid. The United States feels that if North Korea becomes a legitimate nuclear power, the regime's instability puts the entire world at risk for nuclear war. This concern is valid, yet it is destroying any chance of relief for North Korea citizens, and the Korean government continues to advance its nuclear program anyway. The best way to transfer aid to the people of Korea may be through a "middleman", or neutral country.

While North Korea is allied with China, China is a communist state, and its relations to the United States and the western world have been tense at best. North Korea's only democratic ally is Mongolia. Mongolia and North Korea have kept a positive relationship since 1948 after Mongolia became the second country to officially recognize North Korea as an independent nation. In the past decade, North Korean officials have made several trips to the Mongolian capital of Ulan Bator with the intention of studying the economic reforms that have made Mongolia prosperous in the new millennium. Analysts speculate that because Mongolia recognized North Korea so quickly after the Korean war, and because Mongolia does not have strong ties to any Western nations, Kim and his advisors feel that Mongolia is a "safe" democracy to befriend. Mongolia has also maintained strong diplomatic ties with the United States in the past decade, with former vice president Joe Biden making a successful diplomatic trip there in 2011. Mongolia's positive relationship with both the United States and North Korea makes it a perfect "third party" by which to siphon food aid into North Korea effectively. There is virtually no chance of North Korea allowing American officials into the country in order to oversee aid distribution. However, as North Korea becomes more desperate for aid, they will be more likely to allow Mongolian officials into the country. This method would require all foreign aid to first be shipped to Mongolia. The trading city of Choybalsan would act as an excellent site to organize and prepare aid for shipment. This medium sized city sits on the Siberia-Chinese trading route and is home to a major electric power plant ("Choybalsan"). Should China prove reluctant to allow North Korean aid across its borders, a direct railway from Moscow to Pyongyang exists, with stops in Mongolia. The Russian government has remained relatively indifferent to the events in North Korea, and will most likely allow aid to travel through Russia. Using these railways, aid could be transported to either the Chinese-Korean or Russian-Korean border, where it will undoubtedly be inspected by North Korean officials. Most aid being shipped to North Korea today consists of food rations. While food is desperately needed, it is also important to equip the North Korean people with the knowledge and resources to produce their own food. By sending seeds, farming equipment, and livestock into the country, the Koreans will hopefully become less dependent of foreign aid alone. Because the agricultural conditions of North Korea are poor, hardy crops such as radishes and potatoes will be most successful, while goats and sheep will be easiest to breed. Fuel, predominantly petroleum and coal, is also needed for cooking, industry, and heat during the harsh Korean winters. Instead of simply turning over these donations at the border, selected Mongolian representatives will travel with the aid into North Korea. Once inside Pyongyang, the Mongols will meet with Korean officials to discuss how the aid is to be distributed, and travel to other Korean cities to ensure that the aid is reaching those who need it. By placing Mongols aligned with both the United States and North Korea inside the country, the United States will be better able to ensure that aid is going to where it is most needed. This method also shifts the focus from politics to people. The North Korean government knows that foreign aid is required to sustain the dwindling Korean population. With this solution, North Korea gets the aid it needs in a non-threatening, non-intrusive manner. No more is politics part of the discussion, because the United States is not dealing directly with North Korea, only Mongolia. This solution calls for the United States to swallow its pride, to put trust in the Mongolians to effectively distribute aid within North Korea.

The people of North Korea are helpless. North Koreans are unable to help themselves due to a number of factors, the most prevalent being their corrupt and unjust government. Through no fault of their own, the

people of North Korea have had their food security taken from them. Their own government has used food as a weapon, as a way of controlling the population. In order for the citizens to be able to help themselves, we must provide them with not only grain and cereal, but the tools needed to restore industry. As the adage goes “Give a man a fish, he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish, he eats for a lifetime”. By equipping Koreans with machinery, seeds, fertilizers, and livestock, they feasibly will be able to sustain themselves until their political situation improves. North Korean people have remained largely unaided by the Western world due to pride and stubbornness on both sides. People die every day in North Korea because the United States refused to see the situation in North Korea as anything but a political struggle. While this is a humanitarian problem, it is being treated as a political one. Ironically, the best solution may make use of the political relationship between Mongolia and Korea. Only after they are fed will the North Korean people have the strength to reclaim their nation.

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