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North Korea, Dictatorial Greed

### **North Korea: A Distribution Disaster**

Ever since the signing of the armistice that ended the Korean War, North Korea has followed the doctrine of self-reliance, or Juche. This ideology, while beneficial for some more-developed nations, has proven ineffective for the people of North Korea. Many of today's struggles within the country can be traced back to the leader who introduced the policy, Kim Il-sung. His victories during the Korean War allowed his family to grab hold of the country's adoration while silently amassing more and more political power to the point where now even the thoughts of citizens are dictated by the regime. In the years since Il-sung's death, the basic systems of government along with the health of the population have been in steep decline. Normally, international aid organizations like the United Nations would have resolved this issue already, but North Korea's extreme isolationist and authoritarian policies have led to disastrous mismanagement of resources.

North Korea is a small country located on the Korean Peninsula in Eastern Asia. The country currently boasts a population of 24.1 million people with about 62% of the population living in urban areas (Statista). The government of North Korea is officially labeled as the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea, but it is an authoritarian dictatorship that uses the military and police to subjugate its citizens under the rule of the Workers' Party of Korea. Unfortunately for the drastically malnourished population, only 16.3% of the available land is arable, and the majority of the crops that are grown are either sent directly to the government or used to bolster the country's declining GDP (Kim, FFTC). The food that is grown on this land is funneled through the Public Distribution System or PDS for short. This system reallocates a percentage of farmers' food to urban areas, but the food distributed does not provide enough sustenance for the population. According to a 2016 report by the Yonhap News Agency, the PDS's daily food rations have dropped below the United Nation's limit of 600 grams per day down to 370 grams. Within recent months, the PDS has completely collapsed to the point where many regions of the country go months without receiving their rations (Nikkei). In North Korea, many of the farms are dedicated to rice and maize production. These farms are on average 1,151 acres, and their working conditions continue to deteriorate as malnutrition increases (Kim, FFTC). Because of the mountainous terrain, very little arable land is available, and much of the crops grown in the continental climate are exported to other countries. The small percentage of arable land coupled with the mismanagement of the PDS has led many countries to recognize North Korea's situation as a humanitarian crisis.

In the "Hermit Kingdom," the average family size is between 4-5 people with almost all households containing no more than two generations (Country Studies). North Koreans are reported to have a fairly common diet of stew, chicken, rice, noodles, and even tofu, but former residents of the country have painted a far grimmer picture. In a recent episode of the Joe Rogan Experience, former North Korean citizen and current political refugee Yeonmi Park stated that many of the citizens survive off of the

corpses that lie in the streets. This statement is corroborated by fellow defector Gim Gyu-min who recounted the time when he witnessed a woman eating her child during a famine in the 1990s (NYPost). While the government will not confirm these statements, it is clear that there is some form of cannibalism occurring in North Korea. Though these stories were from people that fled years ago, the country is currently undergoing another famine that could lead citizens to cannibalism due to the inefficiencies of the PDS. With all of these insecurities, one may wonder what North Koreans do for a living? In the People's Republic, all of the jobs are assigned by the government, and citizens are expected to work in these occupations until the government assigns them elsewhere. As of 2015, about 9 million North Koreans serve in the armed forces (CNN). This makes up a little over a third of the country's population. The best jobs in the country are related to manufacturing, but the workers only received about \$1000 per year for their labor (NPR). Besides these two sectors of the nation's economy, there are very few income statistics for the general population. With that said, the jobs in the industrial sector are considered to be much better than those who work in areas like collective farming. Education in North Korea is completely controlled by the government, and it is used to instill a reverence for the Kim family in young children. Though education is not sufficient for its citizens, it is universal and completely free for all citizens. Similar to education, healthcare is completely free, but this fact is disputed due to the untrustworthiness associated with official North Korean press releases. Amenities like running water and electricity are rare in North Korea, and the country is subject to rolling blackouts (RFA). With all of these problems that a typical North Korean face listed, the clear source for these issues is the organizational failures of the government.

As of 2021, the food shortages in North Korea have become critically high, and the government has had no response to alleviate these issues. During the last year, the COVID-19 pandemic along with increased temperatures has led to a drastic decrease in food within the country (Washington Post). In recent years, North Korea has relied heavily on China for imports of food and farming goods, but the pandemic has caused economic strain on both countries. Though they are experiencing these hardships, both President Xi Jinping and North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un have agreed to strengthen their agreement with one another (Kim, AP). Though this may sound like good news for North Korea, increased reliance on China means that Kim Jong Un has realized that his country cannot produce enough food to sustain itself. Sadly, it seems that the government's focus has been placed more on bolstering its army and allies without trying to enact any domestic reforms. Now that the North Korean government's role has been outlined, the part of the United Nations must be discussed. In 2016, the UN placed sanctions on exports to North Korea that included oil-based products for agriculture (BBC). As previously stated, the soil of North Korea is coarse, and there is little available arable land. With this reduction in agricultural products, crop yields decreased on North Korean farms and less food became available. In 2019, the UN requested \$120m from its member states, and some countries like South Korea, Russia, Switzerland, Sweden, and Canada have offered millions of dollars in aid (BBC). There are two inherent problems with the money entering North Korea. The first is that the government has had a long history of mismanagement due to questionable decisions made by the Supreme Leader. While much of the North Korean population has been starving for decades due to misappropriation of food by the PDS, Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un continues to gain weight. Though there is no definite number, reports state that Kim Jong Un imports "vast quantities" of swiss cheese (DailyMail). These may be outlandish claims, but the fact remains that the Leader continues to gain weight while his population starves. The second, and much more pressing issue with the money

entering North Korea is that many of the donations are either one-time payments or decrease in size due to sanctions placed by the United States. During Donald Trump's first year in office, he implemented his "maximum pressure campaign," which sought to separate the United States from any countries or foreign businesses that participate in trade with North Korea (CFR). Previous presidents had recognized the atrocities that North Korea had committed, but none had made such a sweeping decision that further isolated the country from the world stage. The sanctions placed by both the United Nations and the United States have had devastating impacts on the rural and urban populations. One of the most shocking examples of this can be seen in the size difference between North and South Koreans. Seeing that both populations originate from similar geographic locations, the height difference cannot stem from long-term genetic differences but rather nutritional disparities. On average, North Koreans are anywhere from 3 to 8 cm shorter than South Koreans (Schwekendiek BBC). Compounding upon this fact, North Korea's emissions standards are completely out of control. While the country has a small impact on total greenhouse gas emissions, North Korea ranks third in the number of pollution-related deaths at 202 per 1000,000 people (Korea Herald). There are not enough metrics available to stress how little care that the government of North Korea has for both its citizens and lands, but what these studies tell us is that food shortages in the country have reached a point where a new strategy must be implemented.

Every aid program that has been implemented in North Korea has failed. Numerous countries and organizations have tried different methods of feeding the population, but the government has consistently redirected aid to other sectors like the military. While this statement cannot be entirely validated because of the lack of information coming out of North Korea, it is clear from the degree of starvation within its borders that the aid has not gone to the right place. Though these statements may sound like conjecture, many of the country's problems stem from this aggressive isolationism. To initiate a long-term solution for North Korea's struggles, a short-term plan must be implemented to bolster the health and morale of citizens. To put this plan in perspective, we must first look back at the situation that occurred in Germany after the Nazis were defeated in WWII. For 28 years, the capital of Germany, Berlin, was divided into two parts to prevent another uprising. On the western side, the economic principles of capitalism were put into place, and the economy flourished. This sector was controlled by the capitalist powers of the United States, France, and Great Britain. On the other hand, East Berlin was controlled by the Soviet Union. When adjusted for population differences, the per capita GDP of West Berlin was 75% greater than East Berlin with each producing €42,971 and €32,108 respectively (Gramlich, Pew Research). Since the fall of communism in East Berlin, Germany's per capita GDP has risen above the world powers that formerly controlled its regions (World Bank). Germany is currently a capitalist country with socialist policies like universal healthcare. The German government is intentionally structured this way because it would allow its reunification to be much smoother. Therefore, they created socialist systems like free healthcare that require insurance from the state or a private company so that an individual may receive these healthcare benefits (Internations). With this capitalist-socialist economic and government system in mind, we can apply a similar ideology to North Korea. According to a Stimson article, the most important issues to the North Korean government are the food shortages and low morale that have ravaged its population. For years, the nuclear threat of North Korea has led bodies like the United Nations and the United States to refrain from offering comprehensive aid by implementing crippling sanctions on the country. To solve this problem, negotiations must become commonplace with North Korea. These cannot be bellicose talks that focus only on nuclear proliferation, but rather a level-headed discussion that ends in a deal between

the United States, the United Nations, China, and North Korea. Currently, China is sending North Korea the bulk of its foreign aid, but it cannot help with the sanctions that have been placed on North Korea by other bodies. This deal, however, would require North Korea to allow the United Nations to establish food dispensaries funded by the United States throughout the country. In return for their cooperation, both the UN and the USA would drop their 2016 sanctions on oil-based raw materials and the 2017 sanctions on foreign trade with the country under certain circumstances, respectively. This would allow North Koreans to finally receive enough food while also telling the government that opposing countries are open to negotiations. Giving people food alone will not solve the problem, which is why the next phase of this plan is necessary for the further development of relations with both North Korea and China. In this stage, the United States would need to come to the Chinese government with a list of manufacturing companies like Boeing, CAT, and GM that could agree with the governments of North Korea, China, and the United States. These are some of the largest American manufacturing companies in China, and the USA would select them because they have proven their worth in the Asian market. The United States government would simply offer these companies subsidies that would allow them to recover from the pandemic for a certain amount of time. This will give these companies an advantage in the marketplace, but many other companies in the same sectors have been receiving the same kinds of subsidies throughout the pandemic. Now, the special circumstances regarding the 2017 sanctions placed on North Korea by the United States would be that the above-listed companies along with other possible organizations would be able to trade with North Korea and operate within the country, but only the Chinese branches of these companies would be able to operate in North Korea. With this industry now operating domestically in North Korea, they could emphasize technological advancements within these companies, and utilize the resources of South Korea. As of 2019, South Korea's largest export has been integrated circuits that are entering China (OEC). If these circuits were exported to North Korea, then the Chinese branches of these American companies could utilize them in the development of new technologies. By this point, relations between North Korea and the United States would be improved by the aid entering the country and the leniency granted to the American companies that would be operating in North Korea. The American companies would benefit from subsidies from the US government as well as the introduction into the North Korean market. Furthermore, China would see an increase in its GDP due to this trade while also lessening the amount of money that it diverts to aid North Korea. Now that the United Nations has food dispensaries that are separate from the government, they can slowly phase out the amount of food they are handing out as the economic prosperity of North Korea's citizens' increases. While this is a somewhat broad plan, I have devised a contingency plan that will safeguard against encroachments by the North Korean government as we have seen in the past. The only thing that this plan would require is transparency from the North Korean government. In the past, they have been unfriendly to nuclear auditors, but it seems that a more holistic approach could prevent this kind of hostility from the government. This contingency plan would require North Korea to divert a percentage of its revenue earned from the American companies entering its borders into its decrepit infrastructure. By 2006, only 3% of North Korea's roads were paved, and one can only assume what the roads look like today (BBC). If North Korea either chooses not to be transparent with its spending or decides not to invest in infrastructure, then the American companies would no longer receive the beneficial subsidies that gave them a temporary advantage over their competitors. Of course, this plan would be very risky because it would involve a deal between world powers that have been very hostile in recent years, but no one has ever proposed something like this before. Even the environmentalists would support this deal as both China and the United States have the money to implement the environmental protection technologies necessary to reduce the amount of

pollution-related deaths in North Korea. The North Korean government would still be allowed to operate its socialist policies, but we could see a similar economic situation take root as did in Berlin. All it would take is one diplomat to both explain how North Korea has no foreign companies within its borders, and draw a parallel between the recovery of Germany and the bolstering of North Korea's economy (NKEW). This plan is the only one of its kind because it requires prideful nations to swallow their pride.

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