



An Information Based Strategy to Reduce North Korea's Increasing Threat: Recommendations for ROK & U.S. Policy Makers

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About the Author

Commander Vincenzo is an active duty U.S. Naval Officer with more than 23 years of service. This report was a personal research project to develop an alternative strategy for the Korean peninsula based on more than twelve years of direct experience on the Korean Peninsula and several more from other angles.

The views expressed in this report are the author's alone. Any views expressed are personal and do not reflect the opinions of the Department of Defense or U.S. government. Assessments made in this study do not necessarily represent the position of the US intelligence community or any US government organization.

The Korea Discussion Group (KDG) was a one-day unclassified conference that brought together 25 Korea experts **to formulate an information-based strategy to de-escalate a crisis before it gets out of control or to significantly reduce the costs if one does.** The participants agreed the current trajectory of a nuclear-armed North Korea could lead to miscalculation. The participants greatly assisted the author in refining this strategy, but this paper is the sole responsibility of the author as are any errors in fact, analysis, or omission.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Deterrence works, until it doesn't.”—Sir Lawrence Freedman

The United States' current approach to North Korea does not fundamentally resolve the risks of its belligerent behavior nor halt the development of its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. As these capabilities are improved, there is greater potential that Kim Jong-un, the leader of North Korea—confident he can deter a regime-threatening reaction—will attempt a violent provocation to achieve political objectives but in doing so miscalculates and instead sparks a crisis which escalates disastrously. While the United States has contingency plans for a wide range of conflict scenarios, executing them would be extraordinarily costly—the military capabilities Pyongyang has now amassed would inflict catastrophic damage.

James Clapper, the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, has repeatedly warned that Pyongyang is “committed to developing a long-range, nuclear-armed missile that is capable of posing a direct threat to the United States...” and that “North Korea has already taken initial steps toward fielding this system...”¹ With such a capability, Kim is attempting force the international community to accommodate him to avoid conflict. However, he could underestimate U.S. resolve, which in turn would ignite conflict. If the Kim regime falls, a nuclear-armed, fragmented military could strike the United States.

To avert this, the United States should work with South Korea ***to develop an information campaign designed to reduce the risks of conflict or regime collapse by convincing regime elites that their best options in these circumstances would be to support ROK-U.S. Alliance efforts.*** This would require five key elements:

- Enhance our ability to de-escalate a crisis by ensuring that the regime's elites fully understand the consequences of a war by continually demonstrating the U.S.-ROK Alliance's advanced military capabilities.
- Reduce the potential for violence by formulating policies that provide credible assurances of amnesty to regime elites and, if they act in ways which support alliance efforts, a beneficial role after the Kim regime collapses or a conflict is resolved on Alliance terms.
- Reduce the humanitarian costs by formulating policies that inform ordinary North Koreans what to expect in a contingency and how to act.
- Reduce civil and military resistance by formulating policies that guarantee North Koreans full rights as citizens of South Korea.

- Mitigate collapse of the civil infrastructure by incentivizing bureaucrats, technicians, and local commanders to protect and maintain critical facilities.

Reducing the wartime damage the North could inflict and lessening the potential chaos of collapse would provide renewed leverage for the U.S.-ROK Alliance to de-escalate a crisis before it erupts. However, if crisis does occur, this strategy would enable a more favorable and less costly conclusion.

REGIONAL STAKEHOLDER CONSIDERATIONS

Any change in U.S. strategy for the Korean Peninsula will involve regional stakeholders. Some considerations for each of these are listed here.

Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea): The ROK government is likely to have already considered an influenced-based strategy, yet may be wary of taking the lead on this approach because of domestic political concerns. Based on the discussions in Seoul regarding the creation of a “blacklist” for human rights advisors, their interpretation of the uses of influence may be different from ours.² However, the ROK government may be persuaded to work with the United States to implement this strategy as part of a larger coordinated effort to reduce the potential costs of a contingency.

China: China will likely oppose this strategy because it may interpret it as a threat to the status quo. For China, any significant change could lead to more serious problems—collapse of the Kim regime, conflict with the United States, disruption of its economy—and ultimately a unified, pro-U.S. Korea on its border. While China would prefer that Kim behave, it continues to be North Korea’s chief enabler because it perceives the Kim regime as a preferable alternative to risking direct involvement in resolving a conflict on the Korean Peninsula. In the event of a crisis, China will act in its own interests and may significantly complicate U.S.-ROK Alliance efforts regardless of how they are engaged. The better prepared the United States can be, the more likely it is to shape conditions that do not merit Chinese action.

Russia: Russia will seek to preserve and enhance its influence in the region. It is likely to support some U.S.-ROK Alliance efforts while playing the spoiler in other areas. As the United States implements this strategy in conjunction with the ROK, the Russian reaction will likely not be as challenging as the reaction that might come from China.

North Korea: The Kim regime will not like this strategy and may take countermeasures that could include:

- *Crackdown on information penetration and on those caught with foreign material.* However, the regime’s previous efforts have not been particularly successful; there is no reason to think a severe North Korean crackdown would be effective for long.³ The growth of a private economy and self-interest will work against any regime effort to clamp down. Further, innovative technology, such as Google’s Project Loon⁴ and other increasingly

mobile and accessible technologies will make it easier for North Koreans to access information via radio, the Internet, and other media sources.

- *Selective purges and harsh punishment.* However, given the growing disaffection North Koreans have with the Kim regime—although they are powerless to do anything about it—Kim will only push elites and ordinary North Koreans further away by cracking down harshly.
- *Provocations.* It is possible that the Kim regime could continue lethal provocations to roll back this strategy, but until the regime can put U.S. cities at risk, provocations are likely to fall short of war. Waiting until he can strike the U.S. homeland is ultimately the greater risk. Nevertheless, a strong Kim reaction to this strategy would clearly signal success because it would mean he sees alliance efforts as a threat to his own strategy.

The risks of implementation have to be balanced with the risks the United States could face once North Korea perfects a mobile nuclear missile that could hit U.S. cities—leverage that could be used to place the United States in an unenviable position. The general consensus of the KDG discussants was that once Kim can credibly threaten U.S. cities with capabilities that are not easily countered, the risks of the current strategy far exceed the risks of the strategy in this report.

Korean Reunification: A strategy of calibrated communication to the many actors in the North Korean state will allow the United States to drive an unacceptable situation towards a conclusion with acceptable costs. It does not advocate for regime change outright, but if this strategy is having a visible effect, the likely outcome would be the end of the Kim regime. Should that occur, this strategy best positions the U.S.-ROK Alliance to achieve Korean reunification in line with the 2009 Joint Vision by Presidents Lee and Obama—and reaffirmed by Presidents Park and Obama in 2013 and 2015 which states:

“Through our alliance we aim to build a better future for all people on the Korean Peninsula, establishing a durable peace on the Peninsula and leading to peaceful reunification on the principles of free democracy and a market economy. We will work together to achieve the complete and verifiable elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, as well as ballistic missile programs, and to promote respect for the fundamental human rights of the North Korean people.”⁵

AN INFLUENCE-BASED STRATEGY

Why do we need a strategy to supplement our existing efforts?

The situation on the Korean peninsula is dangerous—the North's military forces, poised near Seoul, a city of more than 25 million people, could inflict significant damage in a moment's notice. Given the size of Northeast Asia's regional economy, the shock to the global economy would be incalculable. The threat has gradually increased over the past decade, particularly since Kim Jong-un came to power. Nuclear weapons— even if only used to deter retaliation after North Korean provocations— significantly add to the threat.

Although Kim may have stabilized his rule for now, ongoing challenges—including diplomatic isolation, increasing information penetration, and marketization—may force him to take greater measures to ensure his long-term survival. It is possible Kim could use the threat of nuclear weapons to attempt to force the United States to sign a peace treaty on North Korea's terms.⁶ This would eventually lead to the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the peninsula and would critically undermine the credibility of U.S. security architecture in Northeast Asia. There are four underlying factors to consider that would drive events toward escalation and miscalculation:

1. Internal changes could undermine the regime's ability to maintain control and could eventually compel Kim to act more aggressively.

For many, the private economy has largely replaced the government's distribution system as the main source of livelihoods, which has fueled self-interested behavior.⁷ The penetration of external information challenges the narratives the regime uses to justify its actions, as a result its citizens are becoming increasingly cynical. Kim must deal with these increasing internal pressures. Within the tenure of the next U.S. presidency, Kim is likely to possess the capabilities to threaten the U.S. homeland with nuclear weapons. Kim could use this threat to achieve political objectives by forcing the United States to make hard choices—such as signing a peace treaty on North Korea's terms. North Korea has long sought to divide the U.S.-ROK Alliance. Such a peace treaty would leave the U.S.-ROK Alliance vulnerable to ROK domestic political pressure, which could result in the withdrawal of U.S. forces. Kim hinted at this during the 7th Party congress which took place in May:

“...the Workers Party of Korea advanced the strategic line ...building of nuclear force and worked hard for its implementation. Thanks to the dynamic struggle waged by the army and people of the DPRK to carry out the strategic line of the party, a sure guarantee was provided for finally concluding the confrontation with the imperialists and the U.S. and accelerating the final victory of our cause.”⁸

2. The strategic environment is changing; the current strategy puts the United States at increasing risk.

The strength of the U.S.-ROK Alliance has prevented North Korea from taking actions beyond provocations. Diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions have punished the regime and the international community's tolerance of North Korea's behavior has decreased, leading to greater enforcement of sanctions and South Korea's closing the Kaesong Industrial Complex. These actions can constrain the Kim regime's freedom, but have fallen short of changing its behavior. The regime continues to rapidly develop nuclear and missile capabilities and has not been shy about aggressively threatening the United States.

While China might prefer that North Korea curtail its nuclear ambitions, it fears instability and conflict more. The international community cannot rely on China to pressure Kim to change his behavior. China is not likely to meaningfully assist the United States with actions that might threaten the North's stability—such as fully enforcing sanctions—or that would result in a reunified, pro-U.S. Korean peninsula. Appearing to sincerely cooperate with UN sanctions without actually doing so is a tried and tested Chinese approach—allowing it to appear responsible while maintaining the status quo.⁹ Finally, countering Chinese attempts to expand its regional sphere of influence is a growing foreign policy challenge, but telling China that North Korea is its responsibility is also telling Beijing that it has the right, or even the obligation, to control countries along their border.

3. The changes Kim has made to consolidate his rule have undermined his ability to make informed decisions during a crisis, which will increase the likelihood of miscalculation and escalation.

This will impair his ability to read U.S.-ROK Alliance efforts to de-escalate a conflict. Kim has focused his efforts at consolidating control through the Organization and Guidance Department (OGD) to more easily identify internal threats. The OGD provides oversight of the regime's most important leadership structures—the party's Executive Policy Bureau, the Central Military Committee, and the Politburo.¹⁰ He has surrounded himself almost exclusively with loyalists and has few military combat arms personnel advising him.¹¹ The large number of purges—allegedly for disloyalty—make it unlikely that remaining leaders will offer dissenting advice. This will increase the likelihood of the regime being incapable of responding quickly or precisely enough to prevent escalation.

4. North Korea continues to enhance its conventional and asymmetric capabilities (nuclear, missile, and cyber technology) to ensure it remains a credible, relevant threat.

Improvements of other capabilities, such as long-range artillery,¹² increase the lethality of North Korea's conventional force, which, even though they could not win a war, are still highly capable tools for coercive political and military provocations. Nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles will soon provide the regime with a credible deterrent and will enable the regime to conduct further and more powerful provocations.

Having long sought these capabilities, it is highly unlikely that North Korea will negotiate them away—the legitimacy of the Kim regime is now too tied to having them and it needs these weapons to force a deal.¹³ Kim's father, Kim Jong-il, solidified the primacy of the military above all other aspects of North Korean life by implementing *Songun*, military-first politics. This included the advancement of weapons technologies and capabilities.¹⁴ Despite two successive progressive ROK presidents whose Sunshine and Peace & Prosperity policies offered significant incentives for the North to come in from the cold, the slow development of these weapons has been relentless.

An attempt of North Korean nuclear coercion could lead to a miscalculation—one likely to result in conflict or regime collapse—because Kim may think the United States and South Korea are more risk averse than they present themselves to be.¹⁵ In addition to lethal provocations in 2010, Kim has been able to accelerate his nuclear and missile programs without being punished harshly enough to alter his calculations. A road-mobile missile capable of striking U.S. targets with nuclear weapons is likely to make him think the United States will be even more risk averse in future. As the world's superpower, the United States cannot acquiesce to North Korean nuclear coercion. It is necessary to maintain our security arrangements in Northeast Asia as well as our credibility as a security partner.

A Dangerous Scenario

It is August of 2020. Claiming U.S.-ROK “pre-emptive war exercises” threaten to unleash a nuclear war, North Korea successfully tests an intercontinental road-mobile missile. The international response is strong, with sanctions enforcement quickly reaching an all-time high. Even China temporarily ramps up its enforcement. By October, market prices skyrocket. Local authorities face crowds demanding they release emergency food stockpiles. Confident in his nuclear deterrent, Kim attacks the Northwest Islands, killing hundreds of ROK Marines along with a dozen civilians. The Kim regime demands the “blockade” be lifted or more strikes will follow. South Korea responds with artillery against coastal North Korean bases. Under heavy popular pressure, Seoul prepares a stronger response to include strikes against deeper military headquarters. Pyongyang declares it has deployed its arsenal of road-mobile missiles and will defend its sovereignty should it be attacked again. Pyongyang sends a warning to the United States and Japan, and names six U.S. cities as targets.

The National Security Council convenes an emergency meeting. After being briefed, the president summarizes: “On one hand, if we support the South Korean military strikes, we are risking a war that could result in a nuclear attack against our cities...and on the other, if we withhold support from our ally here, we could destroy America’s credibility and embolden Kim to escalate even more. Do I have any other options?”

This illustrative scenario highlights the potential for miscalculation in a situation where Kim Jong-un is intent on forcing the United States to make difficult choices to achieve his political objectives. There are many scenarios that could lead Kim to miscalculate. The Korea Discussion Group purposely avoided focusing on “the next step” that the U.S.-ROK Alliance might take in this particular scenario, and it did not address what choices the United States might make in any given scenario. Instead, this scenario illustrated the strategic dilemma we could be faced with, as a background for exploring an alternative strategy that could provide greater options with which to address it.

Scenario assumptions:

- i. ROK/U.S. political processes have not dramatically altered the alliance.
- ii. Kim remains in power and committed to the *Byung-jin* policy.
- iii. North Korea remains economically and politically isolated, reliant on China.
- iv. China’s enforcement of sanctions is not intended to force regime change.
- v. Wartime OPCON transfer has not yet occurred, but the ROK military has sufficient cruise/ballistic missiles and ISR to conduct deep strikes.
- vi. North Korea has developed, tested, and deployed road-mobile, nuclear-capable ICBMs capable of reaching the United States.

An influence-based strategy could significantly reduce the costs of a contingency

Increased North Korean access to information and a growing subculture of enterprise and self-interest have created opportunities for an influence-based strategy.¹⁶ Several KDG participants provided convincing evidence that elites who appear outwardly loyal are increasingly vulnerable to influence. Marketization and the severity of Kim’s rise to power have fueled both corruption and

cynicism.¹⁷ When expedient, North Koreans sometimes substitute corruption for loyalty. This is consistent with human nature and the increasingly corrupt *fearpolitik* of North Korea—you do what you need to do to survive.¹⁸

Recent high profile defections show that core elites are breaking with the regime when remaining loyal is no longer in their interest.¹⁹ Kim's purges have made the North Korean elite nervous. The secure class—core elites who are well educated and know the regime—are beginning to leave.²⁰ They have the money and connections to bring their families with them. North Koreans still have great respect for Kim Il-sung, and a reluctant respect for Kim Jong-il, but feel little for Kim Jong-un—except maybe fear.²¹ While careful to keep a low profile, many defectors maintain connections with friends, family, and colleagues who remain behind.²² The fact that elites from core revolutionary families are choosing to leave in the event of a regime-ending crisis, with their future suddenly very much in doubt, many, if not most, are likely to pursue what they feel is the best option to preserve the safety and security of themselves and their families.²³

An influence campaign is unlikely to bring about a “Pyongyang Spring.” The regime's harsh, pervasive security apparatus is too well entrenched. North Koreans are unlikely to risk their families as long the Kim regime remains viable. However, should something unexpected occur, such as an internal shock that unravels regime stability, or should a war suddenly appear imminent, the mindset of regime elites---those who will physically carry out Kim's orders to fire artillery or launch intercontinental ballistic missiles--- may quickly shift from loyalty to self-preservation as they assess their best possible options. Influencing regime elites to decide to act in our interests as a conflict erupts could significantly reduce the costs of a regime-ending contingency should one occur, but is unlikely to bring about regime change on its own.

The centerpiece of an influence-based strategy is to convince North Koreans, particularly the elites, that it is possible for them to have a beneficial future after the Kim regime

Should the regime collapse or a conflict erupt, North Korean elites need to believe that supporting U.S.-ROK Alliance objectives and taking steps to reduce violence will guarantee them a better future. The ROK and U.S. governments need to formulate and publicize post-unification policies that guarantee the rights of North Koreans as Korean citizens. This should be accompanied by a variety of indirect actions that lend credibility to these policies. One suggestion was for the ROK government to support the entertainment industry in producing a TV drama series that depicts in realistic but generally positive terms life for North Koreans in a post Kim regime reunified Korea.

The reunification of Germany provides a compelling example of regime elites who shifted allegiances because they believed it offered better options, which helped ensure a peaceful transition.²⁴ Although the situations are not identical, peace prevailed when the Berlin Wall came down in large part because once change started to occur, it was supported by the elites who saw supporting change as their best option. They believed Helmut Kohl's publically announced “10 Point Plan for German Unity,” which assured them that they would be respected as German citizens.²⁵ This and other credible evidence helped convince East German elites that peaceful unification offered better opportunities than remaining loyal to a dying regime. Some may claim North Koreans are more “brainwashed” and therefore resistant to change. However, this merely signals that the methods used to influence North Korean elites must be different.

The ongoing penetration of information and a growing subculture of personal enterprise and corruption have created previously unavailable opportunities for an influence-based strategy. Large numbers of North Koreans regularly view foreign information—and a significant portion share it within closed circles.²⁶ It is not about finding new ways to get information in—North Koreans are already listening. Rather, credible information carried through channels they already trust is likely to resonate and spread. The United States needs to provide information the North Korean elites want to listen to and the message will naturally get through. KDG discussants agreed that North Korean elites neither care for cheap propaganda—telling them their leader is fat or evil—nor for information that puts them at risk. KDG discussants strongly felt that information providing hope for North Korean elites' future regardless of regime change would be of great interest.

The trend over time shows that in addition to more North Koreans actively seeking outside information—often to support their commercial activities—they increasingly use a variety of technology to do so.²⁷ These upward trajectories have continued despite recent crackdowns.²⁸ Geography, political status, demographics, and income all impact the kinds of media that are accessible. Cell phone use is widespread on both the government-controlled system and Chinese networks.²⁹ While visual content is more compelling than radio among the younger generations, radio still reaches a consistent audience. South Korean dramas, movies, etc. are mass-consumed media via CDs, DVDs, USBs, and SD cards.³⁰ Those who use USBs to view something prohibited usually pass them on to others. The rate of file sharing declines outside trusted social circles, but the fact that there is a well-used pathway for information to be consumed and then shared horizontally is phenomenal and merits full consideration.³¹

Reducing the costs of a contingency would provide flexibility to both prevent one and bring one to a favorable conclusion

Influence could be used to enhance the United States' ability to de-escalate a crisis by shaping the thinking of the elites around Kim—these are primarily party loyalists who lack an understanding of military combat capabilities, particularly under crisis conditions.³² Publicizing U.S.-ROK Alliance strategic bomber overflight exercises—especially involving advanced or stealth aircraft—provides powerful signals to these elites that North Korea is hopelessly outmatched. Although already underway, enhancing these shows of superiority and tweaking the public messaging around them could influence the actions of regime elites and show them war is not in their interests.

The potential for prohibitively high costs prevents the United States from applying the pressure needed to force the Kim regime to change its behavior. An influence campaign could enable a “softer landing”, provide greater leverage in dealing with the Kim regime and enhance the ability of the United States and South Korea to de-escalate a possible conflict. The United States, working with our ROK allies, should formulate coordinated policies to achieve these key elements:

- *Reduce the potential for violence.*

Party and military officials need to be convinced that they will be looked after if they support U.S.-ROK Alliance objectives. It must be clear to the elites that once the point of no return has been crossed, they will be held personally accountable for use of weapons of mass destruction, murder of civilians, and other war crimes. Easily understood themes such as “*Stay in your garrisons and you will get paid*” should target the military rank and file. Leaders, such as division commanders, rocket force commanders, and WMD program personal need to be

incentivized separately to support alliance efforts with promises that “*You will be financially rewarded and your security guaranteed if you avoid combat.*” The objective is to get them to act independently when the time comes with the expectation that they will benefit later.

- *Reduce the humanitarian costs.*

It may be possible to reduce the severity of humanitarian problems simply by informing North Koreans what to expect from the U.S.-ROK Alliance. For example, a large refugee crisis might be avoided if they are told to stay in their homes because they will get to keep them and that the alliance will quickly bring food, medicine, and security.

- *Reduce civil and military resistance.*

After 60 years of regime propaganda, North Koreans are conditioned to resist the alliance as invaders. It is likely they expect to be treated poorly. Mounting a campaign now to positively reshape their expectations will reduce resistance and promote cooperation. There needs to be public promises that North Koreans will keep the land they live on and be treated as Korean citizens. As previously mentioned, the ROK entertainment industry could produce a high quality *apolitical* TV drama depicting a successful story of reunification to help North Koreans visualize the personal benefits that they will receive.

- *Mitigate collapse of civil infrastructure.*

It is important to protect the physical and human capital of North Koreans' infrastructure by providing financial incentives. Bureaucrats, technicians, and local commanders need to be incentivized to protect these facilities and remain in place to run them. This includes nuclear-related facilities—imagine the environmental disaster that could happen if the technicians left their posts.

Robert Collins, the author of *Pyongyang Republic*, articulates it best:

“Shaping the judgments of the senior North Korean leadership is challenging due to the insular nature of the political culture, which includes a *fearpolitik* environment that compels immediate self-survival responses/actions that outweigh concern for nation-state interests. Shaping tools that target North Korean leaders depend on an understanding of the target's area of advice to Kim Jong-un, their political-military position, and their personal characteristics. The intent of shaping should be to deter Kim Regime decision-making from provocative action, crisis escalation, initiation of war, and employment of weapons of mass destruction.”³³

CONCLUSION

“The era of procrastination, of half measures, of soothing and baffling expedience of delays, is coming to its close. In its place we are entering a period of consequences. We cannot avoid this period, we are in it now.”—Winston Churchill, November 12, 1936

Winston Churchill's chilling warning about the Nazi threat several years before the Second World War is a prescient reminder of urgency of the rapidly increasing threat posed by North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. Though it was less clear at the time, 80 years of historical reflection

leave no doubt as to where Europe was headed. What will history say about the North Korean nuclear threat? Do we want to be forced into a position where the U.S. president must choose between Seoul and Los Angeles or Washington D.C.? Although we may not be able to fully avoid or mitigate the possible consequences, supplementing our current approach with an influence-based strategy gives the U.S.-ROK Alliance a chance to de-escalate a crisis before it erupts. And if a crisis does erupt, this information-based strategy would enable the U.S.-ROK Alliance to drive events toward a more favorable and less costly conclusion with less cost in blood and treasure.

Appendix I: Korea Defense Group Participants

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**Markus Garlauskas is the National Intelligence Officer for North Korea. He participated with the authorization of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, highlighting publicly available intelligence community and academic analysis on North Korea. As a currently serving intelligence officer, he cannot take a position on the policy recommendations in this paper.*

Endnotes

Cover Image: Wikimedia Commons (J.A. de Roo)

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⁴ For information on Project Loon, see: <https://www.solveforx.com/loon/>.

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Quoting Kim Myong Chol—an ethnic Korean living in Japan and has visited North Korea more than 20 times to support the Kim regime.

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¹³ Leon Watson, "We ARE a nuclear power: North Korea's chilling claim in new constitution," DailyMail.com, May 31, 2012, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2152718/New-constitution-declares-North-Korea-nuclear-armed-nation-indomitable-military-power.html>.

¹⁴ Alexander V. Voronstov, "North Korea's Military-First Policy: A Curse or a Blessing," Brookings Institute, May 26, 2006, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/north-koreas-military-first-policy-a-curse-or-a-blessing/>.

¹⁵ There was strong consensus on this among the assembled experts for the KDG. August 4, 2016.

¹⁶ Andrei Lankov, "Why is North Korea so corrupt, and why that may be a good thing," Center For Security Studies Blog, November 16, 2015, <http://isnblog.ethz.ch/government/why-north-korea-is-so-corrupt-and-why-that-may-be-good>.

¹⁷ "A Changing North Korea," *Liberty in North Korea*, <http://www.libertyinnorthkorea.org/learn-a-changing-north-korea/>.

¹⁸ Lankov, "Why is North Korea so corrupt, and why that may be a good thing."

¹⁹ Anthony Faiola and Anna Fifield, "North Korea's deputy ambassador to Britain defects from London," *The Washington Post*, August 17, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/north-korean-diplomat-defects-from-london-embassy/2016/08/17/0e9ba354-6480-11e6-b4d8-33e931b5a26d_story.html.

²⁰ Anthony Faiola and Anna Fifield, "North Korea's deputy ambassador to Britain defects from London." Thae Yonh-ho's defection as well as other recent overseas defections indicate that North Koreans from trusted families—the only ones allowed overseas—are choosing to leave.

²¹ Elizabeth Shin, "Ordinary North Koreans have little respect for 'that kid' Kim Jong-un," *United Press International*, May 20, 2016, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2016/05/20/Activist-Ordinary-North-Koreans-have-little-respect-for-that-kid-Kim-Jong-Un/5661463768869/; and Jonathan Cheng, "North Korea's Deputy Ambassador to the U.K. Defects to South Korea," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 17, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/north-koreas-deputy-ambassador-to-the-u-k-defects-to-south-korea-1471436788>. A KDG participant gave a convincing presentation on the change in respect for North Korean leaders and cited the increasing overseas defections as evidence—defections of people from trusted families with good backgrounds, August 4, 2016.

²² Many reports, easily accessible online, document the networks defectors use to communicate and send money and other items to friends and family in North Korea. While living in Seoul over the past six years, the author had numerous conversations with defectors that confirmed the easy availability of these networks. Anyone with the desire can do the same by visiting churches that defectors attend and getting to know them.

²³ Strong consensus of the assembled experts at the KDG, August 4, 2016.

²⁴ Kang Dong-wan, "Visual Media in NK: Distribution Channels and Impact," *Unification Policy Studies (Korea Focus section)*, Korea Institute for National Unification, Vol. 2 (2011): Section IV paragraph 12.

²⁵ Helmut Kohl, "Ten point plan for German Unity," (German Bundestag, Berlin, November 28). Available at: <http://emerald.tufts.edu/~bmartin/10pt.html>.

²⁶ Kretchun and Kim, "A Quiet Opening," 16-17.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 3.

²⁹ Ibid., 54.

³⁰ Ibid., 53.

³¹ Ibid., 53.

³² Madden, "[Deciphering the 7th Party Congress: A Teaser for Greater Change?](#)"

³³ Robert Collins (Author of *Pyongyang Republic*) in discussion with author via Skype, August 2016.