Policy Forum 02-26A: Reinventing North Korea

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Recommended Citation

"Policy Forum 02-26A: Reinventing North Korea", NAPSNet Policy Forum, December 20, 2002, https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/nautilus-institute-policy-forum-online-reinenting-north-korea/

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PFO 02-25A: December 20, 2002

Reinventing North Korea

by Will B. Weaver

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I. Introduction

The essay below by Will Weaver makes the case that North Korea is undergoing a profound transformation that the rest of the world is unaware of. Consequently, North Korea must be given the chance to nurture its economic and political development through the support of the US and other nations. North Korea has nothing to lose. Therefore, the world must offer them something to gain. Will Weaver presently resides in China and has visited North Korea three times.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Nautilus Institute. Readers should note that Nautilus seeks a diversity of views and opinions on contentious topics in order to identify common ground.

II. Essay by Will B. Weaver

"Reinventing North Korea"
by Will B. Weaver

1. North Korea is completely involved in their own new economic developments and do not know that the rest of the world is unaware of their profound transformation. These changes are unprecedented in scope and are taking everyone to unknown levels of hopes for their country and personal developments.

2. Concurrently, North Korea is unaware of how at odds they are with the rest of the world. North Korea feels they have made it clear that they have chosen a new, different road for the future. Therefore, they find that the US is the sole obstruction to their own economic development and recent foreign political advancements.

3. North Korea believes that they have done their best to provide evidence to the US (and the rest of the world) that they are sincere in complete reformation. All they want is strong reassurance that they will be allowed to survive (as a country and not have to face Iraq's fate), that they will be allowed the opportunity to economically develop and establish diplomatic relations with the rest of the world, as they began to do in September. I feel sure North Korea is willing to be flexible, so long as there are assurances that they will be able to continue on this road. I am not so sure that they will find a way to initiate a new round of negotiations.

4. North Korea is less concerned about the continuance of HFO shipments, and more concerned over the last 100m clearance of the DMZ. The latest US interference about the permits caused their hearts to drop completely. This goes right to the core of their historical feeling of being victimized and could lead them to emotional decision-making. This issue can still be resolved, otherwise, it may bring everything to a grinding halt.

5. North Korea underestimates the damage their fierce rhetoric causes. While they accept this as a problem, there remains much room for future improvement.

6. North Korea is aware, that they do not know much about international politics, that they do not have enough understanding about international legal issues, or the workings of the international media. Worse yet, North Korea has no idea how to rectify this quickly. They do have a strong understanding for the importance of education. North Korea sends out many young people to Western countries that they have established relationships (Sweden and Germany).

7. The North Korean people are working hard under the new economic policies and are suddenly finding themselves extremely hopeful for a better future.

Education and environmental protection, energy, transportation and communication are at the core of the new developments. Similar to China the economic development started in the countryside, with the government only partially and indirectly subsidizing the main staple foods. Since this only started in July, there has not been much time for the main planting. But the new system is already in place (even for the last autumn harvest) and works accordingly - and apparently not too badly, in spite of the very short period that it has been in place. Many people from various backgrounds are trying out new business enterprises. With kiosks and food stalls appearing everywhere, the capital has a whole new lively look.

8. These new economic policies are very young and fragile and will only succeed with the support of the rest of the world.

In conclusion, it seems that the world is completely unaware that North Korea is trying to reinvent itself. At the same time North Korea is equally unaware that the rest of the world is also ignorant of their domestic transformation.

Right now, the international community should take advantage of this extraordinary moment to try and assist North Korea in a peaceful transformation. But there is no genuine sign from the United States that they are embracing these changes. In North Korean terms, all they are asking for is the reassurance that in case they disarm, they will be allowed to continue existing and opening up to the rest of the world.

In fact this is the best solution altogether.

Even if, as some hardliners propose, the government was to be taken out or the country left to fall apart, what would one be accomplish with such a completely devastated country? South Korea could not and would not inherit such a politically and economically beleaguered country. No other country would be interested in such a challenge of unknown uncertainty.

But we presently have a situation where North Korea is actually willing to take charge of it's own fate and development. Why not let them do it? North Korea has always been unpredictable, as they have had nothing to lose but pride. It remains, they have nothing to lose now, unless we give them the chance to gain something.

North Korea does want change. But there is no need for outside coercion. All the latest initiatives to press them are in fact unnecessary. They are already pressed to the extreme and they do already want the change. They desire to trade disarmament for economic development. But they want to be assured. Now is the time to reinvent North Korea.

III. Nautilus Invites Your Responses

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Please send responses to: napsnet-reply@nautilus.org . Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author's name, affiliation, and explicit consent.

Produced by The Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development
Northeast Asia Peace and Security Project (napsnet-reply@nautilus.org)
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