

Human Security in North Korea

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Abstract

North Korea allows its citizens no political participation, rule of law, freedom of expression, or non-discrimination. The economic insecurity of North Korea's people largely depend on their loyalty-based *songbun* social classification. Their food security is grim, with ongoing acute malnutrition. Health security is lacking due to the widespread infectious diseases. Environmental security has eroded largely due to the North Korean regime's irrational industrial and deforestation policies. Personal security and community security are severely challenged by the state's internal security agencies and the omnipresent surveillance. In order for a peaceful transition toward unification to occur, the North Korean government would need to introduce genuine checks and balances upon the powers of the Supreme Leader and the Workers' Party of Korea. In order to qualify for international assistance, the North Korean government would have to cease committing crimes against humanity, and ensure the closure of its political prison camps and safe resettlement of its released prisoners. Moreover, North Korea would have to reduce its astoundingly high military expenditure, accept international standards of project monitoring and evaluation, and allow international technical assistance in the process of collecting its national statistical data. Under the third generation of Kim, the regime is instinctively focused only on its top strategic objective—its own survival.

Keywords: North Korea, DPRK, Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea, South Korea, Korean unification, trustpolitik, UN, UN Commission of Inquiry, UN COI, human security, human rights, economic security, food security, environmental security, political security, community security, personal security, North Korean famine

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Introduction

This paper presents an overview of the human security situation in North Korea along the seven fundamental components identified in the UN Development Program's (UNDP) 1994 Human Development Report: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security.

Focused on its own survival and the "*byungjin* line" calling for the simultaneous development of the economy and nuclear weapons, Kim Jong-un's regime is unwilling to consider measures that could provide it access to significant bilateral and multilateral donors. Nevertheless, what North Korea truly needs to develop includes: an acceptance of increased transparency in the implementation of projects funded by foreign entities; the application of internationally acceptable standards of project monitoring; the collection of undistorted statistical data; and the dramatic reduction of its military spending. With a military expenditure rate of one third of its Gross Domestic Product, membership in the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, or even the China-led Asian Infrastructure Development Bank would be impossible.

Development assistance cannot be disbursed to North Korea as long as the most egregious of human rights violations, especially North Korea's political prison camps, exist. As one considers the steps North Korea needs to take in order to access vital sources of international development assistance, it is essential to remember the recommendations formulated by the UN Commission of Inquiry (UN COI) on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The UN COI determined that crimes against humanity have been, and continue to be committed in North Korea, and recommended that the North Korean case be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Beyond those critical recommendations, the UN COI report also provided a roadmap for the modernization and development of North Korea. Fundamentally, the UN COI report recommended that the North Korean government undertake profound political and institutional reforms without delay in order to introduce genuine checks and balances upon the powers of the Supreme Leader and the Workers' Party of Korea.

Korean reunification will surely provide the key to solving most of the critical issues facing the Korean Peninsula today, including North Korea's nuclear and missile developments, its crimes against humanity, and other grave human rights violations. Fueled by South Korean capital, technology, and managerial know-how, a 75-million strong

unified Republic of Korea would significantly enhance its role as a regional power. Railways and pipelines traversing the Korean Peninsula from south to north would enable Korea to further tap into the vast resources of the Russian Far East and to expand its links to overseas markets. A reunified, prosperous, and confident Korea would be a driver of stability and growth in Northeast Asia and beyond.

An ideal-case transition toward Korean reunification would involve coexistence of the two Koreas for a certain period of time. Such coexistence could only be conceivable if the Republic of Korea and North Korea were willing to adopt profound political and institutional reforms. Assuming a temporary coexistence scenario, a focus on enhancing the human security of North Koreans would constitute a critical stage in preparations for Korean reunification. A transitory, human security-focused approach would likely avoid widespread violence, bloodshed, or other catastrophic developments on the Korean Peninsula.

Human Security Theoretical Framework

A relatively new concept in international relations studies, human security is a bottom-up framework that analyzes people's conditions in the world in contrast to traditional security studies, which focus on states. The concept first arose in the UN Development Program's (UNDP) 1994 Human Development Report, which outlined seven main components of human security: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. Economic security is defined as a fear of losing one's job and a lack of economic mobility or opportunity, and is prevalent in both the developing and developed world. Food security entails having access to food at all times, and involves issues such as food access, availability, usage, and political stability. Various health concerns fall under health security, including the spread of infectious disease within and across borders as well as broader illnesses focused on individuals. Environmental security has direct effects on every other aspect of human security; poor environmental policy has vast negative effects on people's food security, health security, and economic security. Personal security involves the safety of each individual in his or her society. Community security examines the institutions and relationships established in society and their effects on the individuals within each community. Political security involves rights and freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of

election, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom to petition, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. Each form of security is distinct, yet also overlaps with the other components to create a broader approach to security focusing on people and communities, thus transcending traditional borders.

Concerned with human life and dignity, human security naturally coincides with human rights—the two are mutually reinforcing.¹ However, there is also a clear distinction. The concept of human rights is historically based on a universal framework that originated with the major powers in the UN, in the aftermath of the two great conflagrations and abysmal atrocities in the 20th century. The emergence of discourse on human security was the product of a convergence of factors at the end of the Cold War. The explosive rise in both the spread and demand for democratization and international human rights opened a space in which both “development” and concepts of “security” could be reconsidered. Human security developed organically from both the developed and developing world, promoting protection and empowerment. With nearly half the world population living below the poverty line, human conditions require vast improvement. Human security provides the framework for analyzing certain aspects of human conditions, while human rights offer the legal framework for the international community and states to abide by to protect individuals.

When examining each of the seven categories of human security, it becomes evident that certain states have failed to provide security for their citizens. North Korea is the one state that most blatantly fails at providing every aspect of security for its citizens. Human rights also “mutually reinforce” this failure by drawing attention to the failure of North Korea to abide by its international legal obligations to uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and other human rights instruments to which it has acceded. The various degrees of economic insecurity of North Korea’s people largely depend on their loyalty-based *songbun* social classification. Their food security is grim and they experience ongoing acute malnutrition. Health security is clearly lacking due to the widespread infectious and vector borne diseases affecting a significant portion of the population. Easily treatable diseases become lethal in North Korea due to the lack of medical resources. Environmental security has eroded largely due to decades of abuse by the North Korean

regime as well as irrational industrial and deforestation policies. The environmental disasters in North Korea, including floods and droughts, will continue to threaten the people's security. Personal security is severely challenged by the state's high homicide rate including extra-judicial killings, a vast gulag system of unlawful imprisonment, and an all-pervasive fear of the regime and its internal security agencies. Community security is not possible in North Korea due to its *songbun* social classification system as well as the distrust among its citizens, exacerbated by the all-pervasive surveillance centered on North Korea's *inminban* system of "neighborhood watch" units. Political security simply does not exist in North Korea. In short, every freedom and right is absent. The following sections will explore in further detail the deficiencies of human security in North Korea.

Economic Security

Economic security requires an assured basic income. However, only about a quarter of the world's population may presently be economically secure in this sense. People in poor nations are not the only ones who suffer from economic insecurity. People in rich nations today also feel insecure because jobs are increasingly difficult to find and keep. Economic security is deeply related to unemployment. In this sense, young people are particularly vulnerable to economic insecurity. As the 1994 Human Development Report noted, even in the United States in 1992, youth unemployment was at 14 percent. In the United Kingdom, Italy, and Spain, youth unemployment in the same year was 15, 33, and 34 percent respectively.² Whether a job is temporary or not is another important factor. Those with temporary jobs may feel insecure economically, since they can lose their job at any time. The situation in poorer countries is more serious, because those in poor conditions cannot survive even a short period of time without an income. Therefore, they accept any work they can find, however unproductive or poorly paid. Ultimately, economic security becomes an obstacle to the welfare of society as a whole, as increasing poverty has a direct negative impact on food and health security as well.

From an economic security point of view, North Korea is in a very precarious condition. With incomes low and insecure, the efforts of many North Koreans who would seek support from their government are often in vain. Allegedly a socialist state in the past, nowadays North Korea lacks even the most fundamental forms of social security. While

economic conditions began to deteriorate in the late 1980s, the collapse of the Soviet Union and China's demand for cash in its trade with North Korea caused North Korea's economy to shrink. In subsequent decades, North Korea's economy has never fully recovered. The situation was dramatically exacerbated by the North Korean regime's ideological rigidity and refusal to open up or reform. By the mid-1990s, the regime was unable to support its people. Famine claimed around 3-5 percent of the population (600,000 to 1 million people).³ In this economically difficult situation, North Koreans could hardly find jobs. Furthermore, discrimination based on one's *songbun* continued to determine access to economic opportunity. Here is one testimony on social class discrimination in the labor force:

Miss Ban, from Sinuiju, was a good student who wanted to be a doctor. But her good grades were not enough as she was turned down for medical school because she was from an ideologically 'unreliable' family. Her grandfather was a businessman who employed few dozen people. Officially, the grandfather was from the exploitation class and, through guilt by association, so was she. Her parents were assigned to work on a cooperative farm. After that she tried to join the Army but was denied that also. Miss Ban recalled, 'They said, 'We don't need a person who may betray us any moment and whom we can't trust.' They think that I want revenge for my grandfather.'⁴

For over six decades, *songbun* has been a tool for ensuring absolute loyalty to the regime by determining citizens' job and social status. Unlike citizens in most countries, North Koreans have no freedom to choose their job, and often can't even get a job due to their status. In a situation of economic insecurity, famine in the 1990s killed hundreds of thousands of people in North Korea. According to several authors, including Andrew Natsios, it was those of lower *songbun* who were intentionally sacrificed by a regime diverting precious resources to its military and elites in the midst of a catastrophic humanitarian crisis.

As determining factor of economic security, the energy situation of North Korea is dire. Fundamentally, the Korean Peninsula lacks domestic sources of energy. North Korea is richer in coal deposits than South Korea, but its deposits are still insufficient to power the country.

North Korea, like South Korea, historically has had a high-energy use economy. In the North's case, this was caused by its industrial portfolio, which was focused on heavy and chemical industries such as metals machinery, chemicals, mining, and power that were bequeathed it largely by the Japanese.⁵ For this reason, North Korea needs more energy sources. However, the North's isolation from the international system and its poor economic condition have made it much more difficult to import fossil energy sources such as oil. This energy insecurity, and the shortage of electricity in particular, is serious. Power outages affect even the capital city of Pyongyang. According to press articles based on in-country sources, there were frequent power outages right after the death of Kim Jong-il. Even diplomatic offices were blacked out.⁶ In a situation like this, North Korean industries cannot be maintained, and North Koreans suffer as a result from further economic insecurity.

Food Security

The concept of food security was first established in the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights. Following the Asian food crisis in the mid-1970s, the World Food Conference defined food security in terms of food supply, price stability, and availability of basic food nationally and internationally. In 1986, the World Bank Report on Poverty and Hunger delineated the difference between transitory food insecurity and chronic food insecurity. Transitory food insecurity was a result of natural disasters and economic collapse while chronic food insecurity was related to poverty and low incomes. Both transitory and chronic food insecurity are exemplified in North Korea's severe food security situation.

Marcus Noland notes that North Korea is the only "significantly industrialized country to experience a peacetime famine."⁷ The World Food Program's National Nutritional Report for 2012 reported that "global chronic malnutrition or stunting prevalence is 27.9% at the national level...It is estimated that 475,868 children are stunted in [North Korea]," while noting that stunting has an irreversible effect on a country's development.⁸

With the notable exception of the great North Korean famine during the 1990s, the nuclear proliferation issue has eclipsed the food security problem in North Korea. However, North Korea's food insecurity has major implications, where many of its citizens have suffered and continue to suffer from hunger and starvation. Since the mid-1990s,

North Korea has suffered from continued, widespread food shortages and famine that broke down its Public Distribution System (PDS). Between 1992 and 1993, the PDS rations were reduced by 20 percent.⁹ In 1997, the famine's peak year, the PDS could supply only 6 percent of the North Korean population, in comparison to PDS supplying 60 percent of the population pre-famine.¹⁰

Mountains and uplands make up 80% of North Korea's geography. From the total population of 24,488,861, children under five are 1,705,620 (6.96%)¹¹. Crops are mostly harvested from September to October and agricultural activities largely take place in the spring. The precarious food security situation in North Korea is strongly impacted by the ecological deterioration and degradation of its natural resources that directly affects the agriculture and food production.¹² North Korea's main food production includes soybeans, potatoes, maize, and rice. In 2011, North Korea's under-five mortality was 25.2 out of 1,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate was 18.5 out of 1,000 live births. From 2008 to 2010, the maternal mortality ratio decreased slightly from 85.1 out of 100,000 to 76 out of 100,000.¹³

Today, food security issues are still serious in North Korea. According to the World Food Program and the Food and Agriculture Organization, 2.8 million North Koreans, about 10 percent of the population, are undernourished and lack vital proteins and fats in their daily diet. North Korea's food security problem is a consequence of many factors. During the first half of 2012, the drought greatly affected soybean production. Other contributing factors include economic mismanagement and the North Korean regime's food policies that largely benefit the government, military leaders, and the core of the "core class." Jaime Koh points out that "in 1998, rations dropped from more than 300 grams per person per day to just 100 grams, less than half of the amount needed for survival (World Food Program, 2005b)."¹⁴

A March 2013 report titled "Democratic People's Republic of Korea Final Report of the National Nutrition Survey 2012 September 17th to October 17th 2012" found stunting to be a serious issue in North Korea. The data was a sample size of 423 children in the Pyongyang municipality and 812 children in all other provinces. This research was a collaborative effort with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Central Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF, World Health Organization (WHO), and World Food Program. The target population included North Korean children aged 0 to 59 months and their mothers aged 15 to 49

years. The survey found that the highest occurrence of stunting was in Ryanggang, while Pyongyang had less stunting occurrences.

About 28 percent of North Korean children suffer from chronic malnutrition and are stunted. Some provinces have higher stunting rates and 4 percent of the population suffers from acute malnutrition, including infants younger than 6 months of age. From September 17, 2012 to October 17, 2012, the survey estimated that 68,225 children were acutely malnourished and 10,234 were severely and acutely malnourished¹⁵. In the entire country, it is estimated that 475,868 children are stunted¹⁶. The survey results also found that there was no difference in stunting between the sexes. Based on the mid-upper arm circumferences (MUAC) method of measurement, Pyongyang has the lowest prevalence of acute malnutrition, and Ryanggang province the highest. Furthermore, MUAC indicates that there is a lower prevalence of acute malnutrition in children 36 months or older¹⁷.

Before the current report, the most recent national survey with nutrition indicators in North Korea took place in October 2009, revealing that 32.4 percent of the North Korean children under five years old were chronically malnourished and 5.2 percent were acutely malnourished.¹⁸ North Korean women's MUAC and anemia could negatively affect their pregnancies. The main causes of anemia are dietary iron deficiency, infectious disease, and key micronutrient deficiencies, such as folic acid. Iron deficiency is a major indication of high anemia prevalence. The March 2013 report states that anemia can result in a greater risk of dying during the perinatal period, an increased risk of maternal mortality, delayed or impaired mental and physical development in children, and reduced productivity¹⁹ in adult life. To address low food diversity among pregnant women, North Koreans must have access to longer periods of multi-micronutrient supplementation.²⁰

In North Korea, food security concerns must be addressed concurrently and comprehensively with other human security issues, namely health security and environmental security. The most critical time to prevent stunting in children is before they are 2 years old. Adequate breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices greatly affect their growth and learning capacity.²¹ To prevent anemia among mothers and their children as well as stunting early or even before pregnancy, more resources are necessary to provide comprehensive interventions that account for food security, agriculture, health, nutrition, water, sanitation, hygiene, and social protection. In addition, to prevent

infant mortality, breastfeeding needs to begin earlier in North Korea, and the continuation of breastfeeding should be promoted for children up to two years of age.²²

In October 2011, the Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) confirmed the ongoing need for food assistance to North Korea's vulnerable populations. The CFSAM recommended distributing super cereals and other nutritional supplements to the most vulnerable North Koreans in order to focus efforts on combating malnutrition and the lack of dietary diversity. According to the 2012 UNDP Human Development Index, the average North Korean's life expectancy is 69 years.²³

Food aid to address food security

North Korea has suffered from chronic, massive food shortages at least since the mid-1990s.²⁴ In 2008 and 2009, the U.S. agreed to provide 500,000 metric tons of food aid to North Korea. Five U.S. non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were to distribute 100,000 metric tons, while 400,000 metric tons were to be distributed through the World Food Program. Eventually, the North Korean government refused to conduct a nutritional survey included in the program terms of reference, asked the five NGOs to leave, and terminated the program. At the end of the day, only half of the 100,000 metric tons distributed by the NGO consortium led by Mercy Corps reached the rightful recipients. In 2011, North Korea once again requested large-scale food aid from the U.S., South Korea, and several other countries.

Food aid to North Korea is a challenging issue for the United States, since the North Korean government has refused to allow internationally acceptable standards of program monitoring, or to enable the equitable distribution of food among its citizens. Another major obstacle is the North Korean government's restrictive measures to prevent donating entities from operating and moving freely inside the country.²⁵ Much of the food assistance is allegedly diverted to the North Korean military and elites and often redirected to private markets instead of being disbursed to the most vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, although hampered by diversion and lack of transparency, according to humanitarian assistance groups on the ground, at least some of the food aid is likely to have fed millions of North Koreans during the famine in the mid to late 1990s.²⁶

If U.S. humanitarian aid to North Korea is ever resumed, it should involve collaborative, fully accessible, and verifiable work with the North Korean government and UN agencies to address the serious issues

of chronic and acute malnutrition in North Korea. Unfortunately, due to the North Korean government's ideological rigidity and refusal to abide by internationally accepted standards of program monitoring and evaluation, that prospect is ever more remote. More than twenty years after the "Arduous March" that killed hundreds of thousands, if not millions of North Koreans, donor fatigue makes the prospect of food aid look even grimmer.

According to WHO standards, North Korea's global chronic malnutrition and stunting prevalence affects 27.9 percent of its population and is seen as a "medium" public health concern. Stunting not only significantly impacts children's development, but also the country's development. As suggested by the survey, to prevent stunting, multi-sectoral interventions combining mother and child feeding and hygiene practices, health, water and sanitation for health (WASH), and agriculture must be targeted early on, beginning before pregnancy and continuing up to two years old. Furthermore, North Korean hospitals and communities should continue programs that manage acute malnutrition and detect more affected children earlier.²⁷

Health Security

There have been some encouraging improvements in health security in North Korea in recent years, most notably in vaccination rates, but there are still many serious obstacles to overcome. Furthermore, because of health security's connections to the other components of human security, failing to appropriately address issues such as the spread of drug-resistant tuberculosis or the lack of access to health facilities in rural areas will lead to further troubles. Insecurities in other areas, such as food shortages and economic troubles, also lead to health insecurity.

Linking health security to the broader concept of human security began with the UNDP's 1994 Human Development Report, which identified health as a distinctive feature of human security.²⁸ Since then, two different views of health security have emerged: a "statist" or national security one, focused on preventing the spread of diseases across borders or the destabilization of a country, and a "globalist" view, focused on the individual and looking at a much broader range of health threats.²⁹

At the most basic level, there is a general consensus on the types of health issues viewed as threats to health security: "the threat emanates either from the cross-border spread of infectious diseases, whether

naturally occurring, deliberate or accidental; or from the effect of major health crises on state stability and sovereignty.”³⁰ Globalists expanded this definition to include other threats such as water and sanitation issues, natural and man-made disasters, unemployment, and transportation safety issues.³¹

Health security is intimately linked with the other components of human security. Environmental degradation, for example, can threaten food security and cause starvation. A disease outbreak can shift government resources to health care at the expense of other issues, and economic insecurity can result in a lack of basic services, such as clean water and safe sanitation, which exacerbates health challenges.³²

North Korea’s isolation largely exempts it from the “statist” analyses of health security, although its porous border with China could lead to the spread of disease and the movement of severely malnourished people outside of the state. The globalist view of health security is more relevant to looking at health in North Korea due to the connections between the health of the people and their well-being in other regards. Threats to health security, of which many exist in North Korea, are largely reflective of other serious problems that need to be addressed by the government and the international community.

Many North Koreans are malnourished and susceptible to disease and other health problems. In 1995, more than two million children and half a million pregnant mothers were determined to be on the verge of starvation.³³ Food security has improved since the famine, due to the development of markets as a “coping mechanism,” but the lack of food is still evident. In 2008, half of the households surveyed by the UN said that they ate only two meals per day.³⁴ Desiree Jongsma, UN resident coordinator in North Korea, said in March of that year that more than two-thirds of the population were still “chronically food insecure.” These people remain dependent on foreign food aid to survive, but that food aid has been sporadic in recent years due to North Korea’s strained relationships with many other countries.³⁵ Furthermore, serious questions remain regarding the transparency of food aid distribution and the diversion of such aid.

The food security threat is exacerbated by *songbun*, North Korea’s socio-political classification system. Robert Collins found that the government set food distribution priorities based on *songbun*, which meant that regions with many people of a lower *songbun* faced a particularly tough time during the famine. These areas were

disproportionately rural and in the north of the country, and the people living there are still dealing with the health fallout today. According to Collins, “[a] consequence of individuals being classified with poor *songbun* a decade ago led to their descendants being disadvantaged in food distribution today. Those descendants not only suffer from greater malnutrition, but poorer health care as well.”³⁶

Chronic malnutrition has weakened the immune systems of many North Koreans, which makes these people more susceptible to disease. An iron-deficient diet is also common, especially in pregnant women. This has led to high rates of anemia among women and has heightened the risk of maternal death or pregnancy complications.³⁷ The high incidence of anemia is surely the result of poor food distribution, rather than availability, as seaweed is abundant off the shores of both Koreas and is one of the best natural sources of iron.

A second factor in assessing the health security of North Korea is the government’s ability to provide health care. Especially in a country that is still presumably “socialist,” such as North Korea, public health protection is a public good that must be provided by the government, but the government of North Korea is, in most respects, unable to do so.³⁸ A look at funding for health care demonstrates this point. Overseas development assistance (ODA) to North Korea has chronically been low. In 2007, for instance, ODA was just \$4.10 per person, with less than \$1.00 of that allocated for health aid. This low ODA, when coupled with the minimal investment of the North Korean government in health (less than \$0.30 per person annually), results in a low health system capacity and a population struggling with numerous health issues.³⁹ A 2012 study said that ODA is low because, when it comes to North Korea, “the boundaries between international cooperation, health security, and the practice of foreign policy remain unclear.”⁴⁰

There are also significant barriers to the access of health services for many people in North Korea. A lack of fuel and energy supplies means that hospitals and clinics often need to work without electricity. Shortages of medicine and blood supplies are also common, especially in rural areas, and have been reported to cause maternal deaths.⁴¹ A 2010 Amnesty International report noted a further difficulty in access to health care services. Although the government claims that there is universal and free health care, in reality, even basic health services are hard to obtain and doctors now often charge for their help. Those who cannot afford to pay are turned away.⁴²

The long-fought tuberculosis (TB) epidemic in North Korea is a notable example of the ways in which the country's threats to health security affect the health of the people. Treating tuberculosis requires expensive medicine and access to health care, both of which are hard to come by for many people. As a result, North Korea's TB infection rates have risen rapidly, and drug-resistant forms of the disease account for a quickly increasing portion of the cases.⁴³ The disease is thought to affect at least 5 percent of the population, with thousands of deaths each year.⁴⁴ The presence of many people susceptible to the disease, along with the inability to treat it, makes TB a problematic health threat that the North Korean government has yet to find a way to address.

Health security - possible solutions

Some of the recent successes in addressing health security threats have come in the form of international partnerships with the North Korean government and health system. This has been the case with vaccinations, especially for children.⁴⁵ Vaccination rates plummeted during the famine in the 1990s, but the vast majority of children now receive recommended vaccinations.⁴⁶ Following a measles outbreak in 2006, for example, the WHO helped to plan and carry out a measles vaccination program that ultimately protected the majority of the population from the disease. The North Korean government covered the operating costs of the vaccination drive, while the WHO covered the cost of supplies and preparations.⁴⁷ Other international programs have also had a positive impact on the state of health care in North Korea. A five-year WHO-South Korean designed program supplied equipment and training for county hospitals and thousands of community clinics across North Korea. This program aimed to increase health care access for people around the country, particularly for women and children.⁴⁸

Communicable disease is not limited to a particular *songbun* category, although those of similar *songbun* are likely to be grouped together. More people of low *songbun* live in some of North Korea's northern provinces, while the members of the core class are concentrated in urban areas, primarily in the capital city of Pyongyang. For that reason, the authorities are more likely to cooperate with international agencies and NGOs keen on vaccination campaigns. However, without adequate access to those who need assistance the most or to any health care facilities inside the country, effective, comprehensive programs addressing the health insecurity of North Koreans will not be possible.

Fully addressing the factors leading to health insecurity will also require addressing the other threats to human security. Addressing food insecurity, in particular, would make the population less susceptible to disease.

Environmental Security

J.C. Glenn and T.J. Gordon defined environmental security as the “environmental viability for life support with three sub-elements: preventing or repairing military damage to the environment, preventing or responding to environmentally caused conflicts, and protecting the environment due to its inherent moral value.”⁴⁹ Braden R. Allenby recognized the political aspects of this relatively new phenomenon, calling it “the integration of environmental issues and national security considerations at a national policy level.”⁵⁰ Environmental security places this responsibility on the government to ensure its viability in the wider realm of human security. The Korean Peninsula has undergone much environmental upheaval since the Korean War, accelerated by competition between the North and South to industrialize. The environmental crisis in North Korea traces its roots in the Korean War, when wildfires swept through forests in the 1950s. Development projects carried out to industrialize North Korea saw the regime neglect the environmental impact of those projects.

The droughts that brought on the widely publicized famine of 1994 and the devastating floods of 2011 and 2012 emphasized the importance of environmental security in North Korea. These instances also illustrate environmental security’s reach into the other aspects of human security. This section will examine the environmental security challenges of climate change, deforestation, and industrialization through the North Korean rust belt, while maintaining focus on North Korea and the Korean Peninsula as a whole.

Climate change

In the last few decades, climate change has become an accepted phenomenon in the international community as a considerable force and has ushered a shift in a focus toward taking measures to protect the environment. The Kyoto Protocol’s adoption in 1997 and ratification in 2005 denote an incremental step in broadcasting the international community’s awareness of this issue. To this end, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) outlined several hazards that

exacerbate climate change, including land degradation due to deforestation, change in precipitation rates, decreased crop yields from changes in local temperature, and extreme weather events.⁵¹ Each of these hazards has been identified in dictating North Korea's level of environmental security.

Severe climate disasters have affected North Korea since 1991. Weather events have proven costly for the North Korean people, dramatically reducing the food output for the already impoverished nation. The regime acknowledged climate change as the root cause of these events through the KCNA, the state-controlled news outlet. In 2002, KCNA announced, "The repeated natural disasters that hit North Korea are attributable to the abnormal weather caused by global warming. The speed of warming in Korea at present is three times the average speed of global warming."⁵² While this statement demonstrates a sense of urgency in addressing climate change, the aforementioned climate hazards should dictate North Korea's focus in regard to solving the environmental security dilemma on their half of the peninsula. While quick to blame external factors, the North Korean regime has yet to admit that its own irrational policies are the root cause of severe environmental insecurity in North Korea.

Deforestation: Short-term Gain with Long-term Consequences

A root cause of climate change involves more than just the trend of global temperature change. Many researchers and environmental scientists conclude that accelerated climate change has everything to do with heavy deforestation brought on by programs focused solely on economic development. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines deforestation as a process wherein the land is transformed for other uses through "human-induced" conversion (usually for agriculture or settlement uses) or natural disasters (i.e., volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and flooding).⁵³ As noted by Lester R. Brown, the world's forests are shrinking at a rate of 13 million acres per year as humankind pursues open land for agriculture, lumber, and other forestry byproducts.⁵⁴ In practical terms, manmade deforestation can come about in a variety of interlinked ways. These methods include farmers clearing a few acres of forest for the purposes of subsistence agriculture, cutting down trees and burning them in a process called "slash and burn" agriculture or logging.⁵⁵

Deforestation presents significant long-term problems for the environment outside of the Korean Peninsula. When trees are cut down, it causes habitat loss for various species of animals and alters the Earth's climate. It contributes to climate change because the cut down trees, which usually intake carbon to produce and release oxygen, instead release large stores of carbon into the atmosphere. The peninsula's capacity to deal with climate change decreases because the deforested area can no longer take in greenhouse gases, which are subsequently released into the atmosphere.⁵⁶

Studies conducted over the past few decades indicate that mass releases of carbon into the atmosphere contribute to the global temperature increase that alters rainfall patterns, leading to unexpected torrential rains or drought periods when rainfall is predicted. Removal of forests dries topsoil, leading to topsoil erosion and potentially uncontrollable mudslides during periods of rainfall. Eventually, topsoil erosion outpaces new soil formation, which leads to infertile ground and the further release of carbon matter into the atmosphere. Soil erosion has been characterized as "the silent global crisis," highlighting the fact that soil stores more carbon (2,500 billion tons) than what currently resides in the atmosphere (760 billion tons), according to soil scientist Rattan Lal of Ohio State University.⁵⁷ North Korea's landscape has fallen victim to these conditions, making it an environmentally degraded nation.

Following the environmental devastation of the Korean War, the regime's economic agenda took precedence over environmental concerns.⁵⁸ Deforestation in the North has caused South Korea to undertake dam and levee construction projects in order to help prevent any flooding from reaching Seoul via the Kumgangsan dam on the Han River.⁵⁹ In U.K.-based risk analysis firm Maplecroft's 2012 study, North Korea ranked third among 180 countries with "extreme" deforestation, only behind Nigeria and Indonesia. North Korea's position in this study should not be surprising, given the many reports chronicling the North's desperate food situation and the frequent natural disasters that have further crippled food production. In Jaime Koh's work on the human security of North Korean refugees, she revealed that the natural disasters of 1994 destroyed approximately 90 percent of arable land in North Korea, leading to widespread famine and hunger from which the country has never fully recovered.⁶⁰ Environmental insecurity from deforestation and climate change has severely altered North Korea's food security

situation. For example, the flooding and mudslide events in 2011 and 2012 exacerbated the food security situation to the point that the UN declared a state of emergency, with the death toll ranging from 88-160 people.

North Korea is but one contributor to the global phenomenon of rapid deforestation. As mentioned earlier however, its contributions have exacerbated climate change because of its heavy dependence on deforestation to spur economic growth. Deforestation's effects have wide reaching implications for climate change and, to a larger extent, other areas of human security. In a centrally planned economy such as North Korea, where private property is non-existent, deforestation is the result of government policy, as could be reforestation.

The most relevant precedent could be the reforestation of South Korea, possibly the least celebrated of South Korea's success stories. In the early 1960s, under the direction of then Forestry Minister Jang Kyung-soon, South Korea managed to restore its depleted forests in a relatively short period of time.⁶¹ The key to this South Korean success was to get local communities involved in looking after the saplings planted in pits that were filled with a 20 cm layer of farmland mud. In order to incentivize villagers to protect the trees, they were offered flour from U.S. PL 480 assistance.⁶² The same solution, however, would be difficult in North Korea, where fuel is scarce, the winters long and cold, and private property non-existent. North Korean villagers, desperate to keep their homes warm in the winter, are known to cut down saplings and use them for fuel. Planting grass instead would not be the answer, as in North Korea grass is also pulled, dried, and burned in stoves in the winter. One possible answer could be to incentivize villagers by offering them coal, the same way that the South Korean government offered its citizens flour in the 1960s. However, this would require a resource shift geared towards the people, rather than regime survival, which seems unlikely under the current political circumstances in North Korea.

Industrial challenges to environmental security

The effects of North Korea's fledgling industrial sector, combined with deforestation significantly deteriorate the country's environmental security. Aging and inefficient industries coupled with worker under-productivity characterize the northeastern region of North and South Hamgyong and Ryanggang provinces, referred to as the "Rust Belt." While a well-acknowledged phenomenon by some analysts, there is a

dearth of research on this region. Years of underinvestment, shortages of spare parts, and poor maintenance have caused chronic damage to its industrial capital stock. Regrettably, these industries are directed to continue operation. This diminished industrial output amounts to a fraction of its potential at pre-1990 levels, according to the *CIA World Factbook*.⁶³

Measuring the industrial impact on the environment is quite difficult. Although analysts and researchers speculate about the North's inefficient industries, reliable data cannot currently be obtained due in part to the regime's tight control over statistical data and the uncertainty of the methods used to record such data. It is generally known that North Korea maintains an old industrial development model that relies on heavy industries and mining—sectors that often harm environmental security. According to the Bank of Korea's 2010 Gross Domestic Product Estimates, agriculture, forestry and fishing fell 2.1 percent, mining 0.2 percent, electricity, water, and gas 0.8 percent, and light industry 1.4 percent, while production in heavy industries (e.g., steel production) saw a slight rise of 0.1 percent.⁶⁴ North Korea clearly still focuses its resources on the environmentally harmful sectors of heavy industry and mining, which total 36.3 percent of national GDP compared to 34.6 percent in 2008.⁶⁵ While economic output has decreased, industry still plays a major role in damaging environmental security.

There are indications that North Korea is somehow following China's pattern in regard to slowing industrial production. The Chinese rust belt in the Liaoning province provides a case study for North Korea's aging industries. China's legacy of industrial concentration in the northeast region began in the Maoist era, when the Korean War cut China off from much of the world, forcing it to rely on Russia for industrial inputs.⁶⁶ This caused industry to migrate to Manchuria, due to its proximity to Russia. The Liaoning province provided cheap labor for much of China's efforts to take advantage of a globalizing world in the 1980s. However, by the 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union meant the end of an integral market for the region's goods. The Central Committee hit the region with mass layoffs and factory closures, thus garnering the rust belt moniker.⁶⁷ Workers protested for more stringent environmental standards in the name of workers' health. The case of China's rust belt is only partially relevant to North Korea for a variety of reasons, namely the dearth of region-specific economic data and the lack of academic focus on this subject.

Carbon tax credits and the environment ignored

As early as January 2011, North Korea expressed an interest in entering the business of earning carbon tax credits through the creation of clean energy projects. Under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) in Article 12 of the Kyoto Protocol, North Korea could earn tradable carbon credits for emissions reduction programs. These tradable credits are called Certified Emissions Reductions (CERs) and can be bought by richer nations that need to meet emissions caps.⁶⁸ CDM approved emissions caps for 38 nations and companies as of 2012, thereby establishing a global carbon market.⁶⁹ Although partial funding from CDM looks to provide incentives to expand the carbon market beyond 38 nations, analysts believe that Pyongyang is simply using this program to generate hard currency to avoid the financial setbacks of the UN Security Council's sanctions. Some industry analysts believe that North Korea could gain 241,000 CERs from its seven hydroelectric plants and earn approximately \$1.3 million from the market.⁷⁰ This worries outside observers, who believe the regime will direct this currency toward developing its nuclear and long-range ballistic missile programs.

Overall, the currency generated via carbon credits does not appear to solve any of North Korea's problems affecting environmental security. While maintaining the guise of environmental concern, the North Korean regime has not made any serious effort to address issues of deforestation, climate change, or its industrial capacity. North Korea must seriously reevaluate its developmental priorities, because neglecting environmental security may prove to be a grave miscalculation that will cause suffering for the people and also create larger problems for the regime.

Community Security

Community security is described by UNDP's 1994 Human Development Report as the protection of people from the loss of traditional relationships and values as well as from sectarian and ethnic violence.⁷¹ While group membership is a requisite element of community security analysis, the impetus behind community security is the protection of the individual, overlapping with personal security.⁷² This reflects the overarching theme that human security elevates the protection of an individual over any state or community.⁷³ Given that issues of community security often include violence and oppression from an outside force, community security is categorized as freedom from

fear.⁷⁴ This section expands upon the concept of community security and analyzes the overall situation in North Korea by applying the community security framework.

Community security stems from the belief that most people derive security from their membership in a group—family, community, racial or ethnic group—which provides a cultural identity, reassuring set of values, practical support, and even physical protection.⁷⁵ For example, many tribal societies operate on the principle that heads of households protect the weaker members of the family from outside forces.⁷⁶ However, communities can also perpetuate oppressive practices toward their members.⁷⁷ One important consequence of community conflict is that it erodes trust, namely in people, communities and existing government institutions, thus undermining social cohesion.⁷⁸

Community security covers two types of conflicts: 1) intra-community tension, where a community oppresses some of its own members, and 2) inter-community tension, where members of one community harm members of another community.⁷⁹ An example of intra-community conflict is the practice in Africa, where hundreds of thousands of girls suffer genital mutilation each year under the banner of community tradition.⁸⁰ In comparison, inter-community conflicts involve disputes between different communities, particularly ethnic or religious groups.⁸¹ In several nations, ethnic tensions lead to violent conflicts often over ethnic hostility or limited access to opportunities and resources.⁸² In the former Yugoslavia, more than 130,000 people were killed and more than 40,000 women raped in “ethnic cleansing.”⁸³ In Afghanistan, there was a violent dispute between the Kuchis and internally displaced persons driven from their homes by military forces.⁸⁴ These comprise examples where ethnic conflict broke down community social structures and then engendered distrust between different sub-communities at clan, tribe, and ethnic levels.⁸⁵

Both intra-community and inter-community conflicts exist in North Korea. Regarding intra-community conflict, the North Korean government has sharply divided North Koreans based on the *songbun* system, giving rise to intra-community tension among the different classes: the hostile class, the wavering class, and the core or loyal class.⁸⁶ The *songbun* system was originally created to replace the old Confucian feudal system of the Chosun Dynasty and Japanese colonialism that favored the ruling elite with one that empowered the working class.⁸⁷ While the stated intent was to create a society of complete social

equality, the Kim regime has historically used the classification system to isolate and eliminate perceived internal threats, enhance loyalty, and ultimately strengthen its dynastic grip on power.⁸⁸

Every individual is identified and categorized into a *songbun* classification from birth, measured by their loyalty or their family's level of political allegiance to the Kim regime.⁸⁹ All other distinctions and value in terms of personal and social worth, including one's skills or abilities, are secondary to one's perceived political loyalty.⁹⁰ *Songbun* pervades every area of one's life, from access to common resources to the justice system.⁹¹ For members of the loyal class, the government provides exclusive privileges and benefits to reward and encourage further fidelity.⁹² In contrast, those in the hostile class are referred to as "impure elements," and suffer the most traumatic victimization.⁹³ The government's systematic discrimination of every human being in North Korea has ripple effects on how citizens perceive each other and themselves, leading to class tension and undermining social cohesion.⁹⁴ Moreover, the government regularly sends undercover spies to monitor disloyal sentiments among the populace.⁹⁵ Those who report information about treacherous behavior are handsomely rewarded, while those who allegedly commit treasonous acts are severely punished,⁹⁶ often passing liability to three generations of their family members.⁹⁷ As it strives to maintain its own preservation at any cost, the North Korean regime has employed methods such as the relentless surveillance of its people, punishment of those deemed disloyal, systematic brainwashing, and severe restrictions of information in the country.

In North Korea, the extent and depth of surveillance is unprecedented. North Korea's current population is almost 25 million. Its three internal security agencies, the Ministry of State Security (MSS), the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), and the Military Security Command (MSC) comprise 270,000 agents.⁹⁸ In North Korea, every family has to participate in *inminban*, a "neighborhood watch" system involving weekly meetings, self-criticism sessions, and reporting on one's neighbors. Due to the obstinate surveillance of the population, the degree of social cohesion in North Korea is low, with civil society non-existent.

In North Korea, brainwashing begins early; babies are still in the cradle when they are taught to point to the portraits of the Great and Dear Leaders. The relentless indoctrination of North Korea's children continues throughout their school years. Even if some parents

understand the regime is brainwashing their children, they will keep silent to avoid getting into trouble. Young people in their late teens and early 20s brought down the totalitarian regimes of Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania, Ben Ali in Tunisia, and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. In North Korea, most men between the ages of 17 and 27 are in the military, subjected to ever more intense brainwashing. By the time they complete their service, the “age of revolution” has already passed, as they are overwhelmed by other concerns, such as finding ways to make ends meet or establishing a family.

The methods aiming to ensure the survival of the regime, surveillance, control, coercion, punishment, brainwashing, and information control continue to result in the unparalleled suppression of human rights in North Korea. With constant and extraordinary pressure to betray one’s neighbor, especially in poverty-stricken areas where the reward is food, *songbun* and the surveillance system have generated skepticism and distrust in communities where individuals tend to give up their neighbor rather than risk their own downfall.⁹⁹ This pressure undermines the reciprocal trust required for all community members to work together, and can further destabilize community security. Furthermore, the Kim regime has supplanted the traditional family structure wherein the eldest male of a family is the head of the household. While North Korea is still a largely patriarchal society, the Kim dynasty has replaced the role of the eldest man as the “Great Father” for each household, and expects undivided loyalty first and foremost to the Kim regime.¹⁰⁰ This notion is enforced through repeated propaganda and draconian penalties. Children are taught to betray their families if they learn that their parents are planning some form of disloyalty to the Kim regime.¹⁰¹ As a result, these measures continue to threaten the traditional family structure within North Korea.

Regarding inter-community conflict, North Korea is a predominately homogenous community¹⁰² and has in part maintained its homogeneity through “ethnic cleansing.”¹⁰³ One example of such cleansing is the practice in political prison camps and other detention facilities, long or short-term, of infanticide of inter-racial babies, usually Sino-Korean. The typical case involves a North Korean woman living in China who is impregnated by a Chinese man and then repatriated to North Korea. The North Korean government kills these interracial children, citing limited food supplies, which should not be used to feed “children of foreign fathers.”¹⁰⁴ Consequently, racially motivated infanticide undermines

inter-community cohesion between Chinese and Korean citizens, though the Chinese government has yet to raise serious concerns about the genocide of its own progeny. The *songbun* system and violent practices against non-Korean ethnic groups are severe and ongoing threats to community security in North Korea. Other elements undermining community security in North Korea include: food shortages, family units breaking up after the death of members and/or the dispersal of members in search of food, orphans and street children, and women reportedly trafficked to China and subsequently sold as rural brides or prostitutes.¹⁰⁵

Personal Security

Personal security, as defined in the UNDP's 1994 report, concerns the protection of individuals from violence in its multiple forms, "whether from the state or external states, from violent individuals and sub-state actors, from domestic abuse, or from predatory adults."¹⁰⁶ As a component within the framework of human security, personal security involves the application of human security in its narrowest form. Since the inception of human security, two major schools have emerged in an attempt to reach consensus regarding what entails human security—the Freedom from Fear school and the Freedom from Want school.

Personal security is an essential component of Freedom from Fear, with proponents arguing that limiting the practice of human security to the protection of individuals from violent conflict allows for a more effective approach toward ensuring human security worldwide. This approach "conceives of human security negatively, in terms of the absence of threats to the physical security or safety of individuals... All individuals are seen as possessing inalienable and fundamental rights to 'life, liberty and property' by virtue of their common humanity."¹⁰⁷

The topic of personal security bears unique implications for North Korea compared to other violent conflict-ridden developing countries. Whereas major organizations such as the Commission on Human Security identify interstate and intrastate war and transnational terrorism as issues of chief concern to personal security, the situation in North Korea is characterized by a near-state monopoly on the use of violence to control the lives of its citizens.¹⁰⁸

In North Korea, "human security is stymied by the lack of political space for alternatives to state ideologies and restrictions on civil liberties imposed [...] to ensure [...] the regime's] own survival, rather than providing for [...]citizens."¹⁰⁹ The major threat to personal security is

not violent conflict, but the state itself. The current regime has held power for almost seven decades without any successful challenges to its leadership or any democratic institutions to do so. As a result, the regime's embrace of physical and non-physical violence to repress its citizens has persisted without consequence.

State-sanctioned violence in North Korea

The North Korean regime relies upon violence as the ultimate means to assert its legitimacy over its citizens. This brand of violence takes many forms, but its application is characterized by its indiscriminate, arbitrary, and draconian nature. The conditions within the regime's extensive gulag system and the extremely violent punishments committed against prisoners pose the gravest threat to personal security. In North Korea any citizen "suspected of wrong-doing, wrong-thinking, wrong-knowledge, wrong-association, or wrong-class-background (or *songbun*)... 'crimes that are not really crimes'" is, along with up to three generations of one's family, subject to imprisonment in one of a variety of political prisons.¹¹⁰ These forced labor facilities detain some 80,000 to 120,000 prisoners in total throughout North Korea. Political prisoners must endure conditions well below the international guidelines set in *The Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners* and the *UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice*.¹¹¹

North Korean defectors who experienced life in these labor camps report the following physical and non-physical forms of violence in the camps:¹¹²

- Collective punishment
- Forced disappearances and incommunicado detention without trial
- Systemic and severe mistreatment
- Induced malnutrition
- Slave labor
- Exorbitant rates of deaths in detention
- Informants and intra-prisoner hostilities
- Executions
- Other extreme punishments

Racially motivated forced abortion and infanticide also comprise issues threatening the personal security of North Korean women and children.

International Human Development Indicator: Homicide in North Korea

Number of intentional homicides (per 100,000 people)		
HDI Rank	Country	Year: 2008
1	Norway	0.6
2	Australia	1.2
3	United States	5.3
4	Netherlands	1.0
5	Germany	0.9
6	New Zealand	1.2
7	Ireland	0.9
8	Sweden	0.8
9	Switzerland	0.6
10	Japan	0.5
11	Canada	1.8
12	Korea (ROK)	2.3
101	China	1.6
..*	Korea (DPRK)	15.2 [†]

Source: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011 Global Study on Homicide Trends, Contexts, Data

** Country missing from recent report.*

† Country information on causes of death unavailable for most causes.

The homicide rate in North Korea greatly surpasses the average of its neighbors in East Asia, and serves as a stark contrast to the personal security of South Korean citizens, with a rate of 15.2 homicides per 100,000 people as opposed to South Korea's rate of 2.3. The impoverished conditions characterizing life in North Korea exacerbate the spread of violent crime among its citizenry, which then hampers the country's economic development. As the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) states, "There is a clear link between violent crime and development: crime hampers human and economic development; this, in turn, fosters crime. Improvements to social and economic conditions go hand in hand with the reduction of violent crime."¹¹³

Political Security in North Korea

"Political security" focuses on the individual's rights and freedoms in the political area rather than on the state's political security.¹¹⁴ The term is often used to refer to governmental stability or state security from outside countries. However, in the context of human security, this term includes individuals' security.

If national security is also about the political freedom of a state to choose its diplomatic partners/adversaries and to regulate its internal affairs, so also human security is about the political freedom of an individual to associate with others (civic freedom) as well as the freedom to live private life without undue interference from fellow citizens and state authorities (basic freedom)¹¹⁵

Whether or not a state guarantees individuals' basic political human rights is the key point to measuring political security. Therefore, the state's political system is related to the degree of people's political security in that state. This section will clarify the concept of political security and discuss the factors that can affect political security.

Contents of Political Security:

Each human being is entitled to the basic human right to freedom, equality and respect. Political security refers to protection against human rights violations.¹¹⁶ The violation of these rights in the political arena, such as in the electoral process and suffrage, can be referred to as political insecurity. Human rights and political security are the cement that holds together the foundation for human security in all seven critical areas. Mahbub ul Haq¹¹⁷ explains that political freedom contains four

distinct elements: political participation, rule of law, freedom of expression, and non-discrimination.¹¹⁸

Contents of Political Insecurity

Repression, systematic human rights violations, excessive militarization,¹¹⁹ systematic torture, enforced disappearances,¹²⁰ political detention, imprisonment, police used as agents of repression, and government control of the ideas and information of individuals and groups create severe political insecurity.¹²¹ In Freedom House's "2014 Freedom in the World Index," North Korea belongs to a group of ten countries ranked as "worst of the worst" for both political rights and civil liberties.

Effective Factors of Political Security:

The State's political system

A state's political system determines its degree of political security. The democratic system is the ideal system for political security, because the democratic system is based on respect for basic human rights and systematic freedom and equality. This is demonstrated by political pluralism and participation in the electoral process. Therefore, a state's degree of democratization can be an indicator of the individuals' political security.

The State's political stability

A state's political stability can significantly impact the degree of its citizens' political security.¹²² When a state is politically unstable, it becomes significantly more vulnerable to a coup d'état or dictatorial rule. A dictatorship can easily undermine political security. Usually, it is based on military power.¹²³ Prioritizing government spending on the military instead of social programs allows the military to repress individual citizens through brute strength.

In North Korea, political security is blatantly violated. This section analyzes the state of political security in North Korea through each aforementioned characteristic of political security.

Democratization and the Freedom State

As mentioned before, the extent of democratization can indicate a state's political security in that democratic political systems tend to

include political pluralism and freedom. Even if North Korea declares its political system to be democratic, this is only pseudo-democracy. According to C. J. Friedrich and Z. K. Brzezinski, North Korea can be defined as an authoritarian dictatorial state. The North Korean dictatorship relies on its military power by focusing on its military-first policy (*Songun*). About 30 percent of North Korea's GNI¹²⁴ is used for national defense expenditures, and there are 1.19 million active forces (5 percent of the North Korean population) and 7.7 million reserve forces (32 percent).

Especially the Ministry of State Security (MSS, formerly State security Department), but also the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) and the Military Security Command (MSC) keep public order through their extensive networks of informers and secret police apparatus. In recent reports, Freedom House classified North Korea as "Not Free,"¹²⁵ with its political rights and civil rights measured at 7, the lowest possible score. Political rights "enable people to participate freely in the political process, including the right to vote freely for district alternatives in legitimate elections, compete for public office, join political parties and organizations, and elect representatives who have a decisive impact on public policies and are accountable to the electorate."¹²⁶ Civil liberties "allow for the freedoms of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy without interference from the state."¹²⁷ Therefore, due to the very nature of its political system, it is virtually impossible for political security to exist in North Korea.

Electoral System and Suffrage

A free and fair electoral system and suffrage can indicate the level of political pluralism and basic human rights.¹²⁸ Even though an electoral system exists in North Korea, it is merely an imitation of a truly free system. Just one major party, the Korean Worker's Party, controls North Korean politics. There are two other parties according to the 67th article of North Korea's constitution,¹²⁹ but they are merely "paper parties," complicit with the KWP. North Korea's electoral system especially lacks equality. Elections in North Korea provide only two choices to voters: "yes" or "no." Because the vote is not secret, it is very difficult for people to vote against the regime or its candidates, who often win by 99% of the vote.

Political Prison Camps and Public Executions

North Korean political prison camps are infamous for human rights violations. In North Korea, there are at least four, arguably five, still operational political prison camps, with a total prison population estimated at 80,000 to 120,000. The political prison camps are operated by the Ministry of State Security (*Kukka-anjon-bowi-bu*).¹³⁰ Any presumed political, ideological, and sociological “deviants” suspected of wrong-doing, wrong-thinking, wrong-knowledge, wrong-association, or wrong-class-background against the Kim regime are deported to and imprisoned within the political prison camps.¹³¹ These political prisoners are subject to collective punishment¹³². The perceived wrong-doers, along with up to three generations of their extended families, are apprehended by police authorities and forcibly deported to the camps without any judicial process or legal recourse whatsoever, often for lifetime isolation and punishment comprised of hard labor in mining, timber-cutting, farming, and related enterprises¹³³.

Internment camps are located in central and northeastern North Korea¹³⁴. They comprise labor colonies in secluded mountain valleys completely isolated from the outside world¹³⁵. With the exception of Camp 25 in Chongjin, North Hamgyung Province, which is more similar to a penitentiary, the prisons consist of a series of sprawling encampments measuring many miles long and wide.¹³⁶ Prisoners experience torture and inhumane treatment.¹³⁷ Public and secret executions of prisoners, especially in cases of escape attempts¹³⁸, in addition to infanticide (forced abortions and baby killings upon birth), often occur.¹³⁹ Consequently, the mortality rate is very high because many prisoners die due to forced labor combined with induced starvation,¹⁴⁰ illnesses, work accidents, or torture.¹⁴¹

Public executions constitute a type of grave human rights violation. The death penalty, often without judicial due process, is adjusted for a wide variety of political and common crimes¹⁴². Attempts to escape from the country or from the prison camps may also result in execution on the spot.¹⁴³ Personnel in the criminal justice system have wide discretion and are allegedly authorized to operate without regard to any kind of due process or the formal legal rights of citizens.¹⁴⁴ Drug trafficking, embezzlement, murder, robbery, rape, drug dealing, smuggling, piracy, and vandalism have been reported to be cause for execution. In 2011, two people were executed in front of 500 spectators for handling propaganda leaflets floated across the border from South Korea.¹⁴⁵

Recent reports indicate that as many as 70 senior officials have been executed under the Kim Jong-un regime, as a part of North Korea's ongoing purge.

Conclusion

The concept of human security provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the profound economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political insecurity of North Koreans. An overview of the human security theoretical framework and its application to North Korea confirms that none of the seven components of human security can be examined in isolation. In North Korea, although some of the human insecurity may have been the result of natural disasters, the major threat to the human security of North Koreans is the state itself. The human security of North Koreans has degraded not because of inter- or intra-state war, sub-state actors, or international terrorism. Rather, it is the very North Korean state that has refused to allow—for the sake of maintaining three generations of the ruling family in power— democratic institutions or space for alternatives to state ideology. Deprived of political participation, rule of law, and freedom of expression, deeply affected by government surveillance-induced lack of social cohesion, the people of North Korea are denied the opportunity to coalesce in order to improve their human security, or to seek comprehensive, meaningful overseas development assistance for that purpose. In order to understand and alleviate the acute human insecurity affecting North Koreans, one has to grasp that human rights and political security are the cement that holds together the foundation for all seven areas of human security. To improve the human security of North Koreans, one has to begin by advancing their human rights.

Furthermore, the process of developing and bringing North Korea into the 21st century through focusing on human development can take place only if greater transparency and adequate standards of project monitoring and evaluation are allowed. The reclusive regime needs to seek international technical assistance in order to collect real, reliable, actionable statistical data vital to conducting needs assessments. Before one even begins the conversation about North Korea dramatically reducing its military expenditure, the Kim regime would have to regain some of the international trust it has squandered over the past decades by breaching all international obligations it has assumed. If trust rebuilding

were at all possible, perhaps the best starting point would be the dismantlement of North Korea's political prison camp system.

Notes:

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¹⁹ *Ibid.*

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