

Question and Answer

"Promoting Religious Freedom in North Korea": Panel 2 Questions and Answers
Panel 2 Questions and Answers

(left to right):
Jack Rendler, Chuck Downs, Donald Oberdorfer, Stephen Linton

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Mr. Rendler, thank you very much and thank you to all our panelists. We now will have questions from the commissioners. I may start with one if I can.

I'm not sure I can start a fight on the panel exactly but I thought I heard some, at least in tenor, some different kinds of suggestions and let me tell you where I see the tension and see if you could speak to this for me.

Dr. Linton, you suggested that conditionality is not a good idea; if we put pressure on the Korean government they don't respond well to that. Both Mr. Downs and Mr. Oberdorfer I think highlighted that it's an enormously manipulative government where people get excited about openings, do something for the North Koreans, at which point they immediately pull back. I've seen that not only in the public sector--I think Kim Dae Jung is not faring as well with his opening measures as I think he'd hoped, both domestically and with the North Koreans--but also in the private sector on a number of occasions. Even when they have encouraged businesses to come over, the business representatives will get as far as Beijing and then they will pull the rug out from under them.

It sounds like some of you are saying that we ought to say here's what we'll do but in order for us to do this you have to do the following, and some of you are saying don't condition it and I'm not quite clear. I seem to be getting slightly mixed messages. If you could sort of speak to that issue a little bit it might enlighten me some.

DR. LINTON: Would you like me to start?

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Please.

DR. LINTON: Well, first of all, when we use the word "they," North Korea is much more complicated than it appears from Washington. When you get on the ground you find out that it's a very complex society. Who do you mean by "they"? Do you mean the leadership? Do you mean middle level bureaucracy? Do you mean the people themselves?

I'll give you a case in point. When you apply for a visa to North Korea if you're a Korean-American or of Korean dissent you go through one government channel; if you're a non-Korean American you go through another and the treatment is very different.

So to say pressure them as though--they've been pressuring us, we've been pressuring them for 50 years. Where have we gotten? That doesn't mean that you give them things unilaterally. When one tuberculosis institution doesn't want to open its doors to our--we call them dedication ceremonies, monitoring, whatever, we just go somewhere else. We don't sit down and try to pressure the North Koreans to do it our way.

I guess the biggest example is this light water reactor project. The assumption was here's a \$5 billion project. If we give them the \$5 billion project then perhaps they will do as we asked because if we don't, if we refuse to deliver on the \$5 billion project they will be pressured into doing things our way. I think the people who have been in that process have learned very, very much to their distress that the pressure doesn't work very well. And my argument has been well, if they won't allow--if you can't pressure them or if you can't condition \$5 billion, what is humanitarian aid going to do? I think I'll end there.

MR. DOWNS: If I could? Or Don, do you want to go ahead.

MR. OBERDORFER: Very briefly, I don't believe in preconditions. I think the preconditions are a way not to have negotiations. They don't work. And if you throw up saying we won't negotiate, we won't talk to you unless you do X, Y and Z first, you'll never get to the negotiations.

And I think in this case the process of talking to them and having them talk to us is extremely important and that's why I think that we should stick up for our beliefs but not laying down a line saying unless you do X, Y and Z we're not going to communicate with you.

As regards the nuclear project, that was an agreement made between two governments. They agreed to stand down their nuclear weapons program, which they have, as far as we know, and we agreed to sponsor a light water reactor project which would take the place, in theory, of the energy that they lost. And both sides, although our performance has been slow for various reasons, both sides are keeping to that and I think the North Koreans have shown that when they make an agreement they generally try to keep it.

MR. DOWNS: I think it's a very important question and when I say "they" I mean the regime in Pyongyang, the North Korean regime, certainly not the people of North Korea. But the North Korean regime certainly responds to pressure and it has responded to pressure over the last 50 years. The pressure of our deterrent capabilities has kept the peace on the Korean Peninsula for 50 years.

But the reason why pressure is so important is because they are now and have always been a failing society. They lack genuine loyalty among their people. They lack an economic philosophy that allows them to produce anything that could normally be called an economy. And they lack friendly relations because they prefer to take a hostile posture toward their neighbors. And it is these three things that they always try to get in negotiations. They always want to have a show of outsiders coming in and giving the regime benefit so that they can tell their own people that they have no hope except to cooperate with the regime.

So everything we do has a tendency to support the regime's ability to oppress its people and that's an unfortunate aspect of the aid and the kinds of things that we do when we go to negotiations.

Let me give as an example when we first started negotiations with North Korea after the Korean War we made the mistake of allowing them to choose the site and they chose what we called a tea house. It was, in fact, a separate residence that was owned by a landowner who had just been executed. The signal to the people of North Korea was that they were able to start these talks in a place where they had just killed a local rich person. So this was very much a manipulation of the outside and we had no idea that we were falling into this kind of thing.

It happens time and again in the way that they use aid and we've had people report in recent years that they've seen that when we give them food they reward people who are loyal to the party by giving them the food and they use it as a punishment against the people who they don't consider to be loyal. And that's always the first objective of the regime, which is to just establish its sense of legitimacy because it doesn't have any.

Economically they have been unable to produce the food for their own people and they've been unable to keep their factories going and it's not our fault; it's not the fault of the rest of the world; it is the fault of their failed policies. So they are extremely susceptible to pressure and we've got to keep it on.

DR. LINTON: Could I say just one more thing? I'm not here to apologize for North Koreans. I deal with them on a daily basis and they're tough. They are manipulative. They're smart. They're not stupid. And often it's like pushing a big rock uphill.

But I think even in your question, as well as some of the responses, there's something I just want to point out. Why would they invite people to Beijing and then cancel a visa? What do they gain by that? Failed policies. What does that mean? It's not just that North Koreans are bad, manipulative, evil, whatever. They're also to some extent dysfunctional. It's a semi-dysfunctional state. And the more you're really engaged in Pyongyang and everywhere else in the countryside the more you begin to realize this and you somehow find foci in the society, you find people, groups who are willing to help you try to work through the difficulties that you both confront in their system. It's a very, very complicated process.

MR. RENDLER: I would just like to say that the only disagreement I have with Stephen is that he refers to 50 years of pressure. I don't think there has been 50 years of pressure, certainly not 50 years of meaningful pressure.

You know, this regime gets away with murder, literally and every day, because governments don't pay attention to what it's doing; human rights groups don't pay attention, the large international human rights groups, partly because it's so hard to get information and partly because it appears to be too strange to deal with.

I agree with Steve in the sense that that's wrong. We need to deal with them and we need to adjust our frame of reference so we can deal with them. But I would say this. This is a regime that has dozens of labor camps around the country and this is a regime that classifies the population in categories and subcategories according to their loyalty to the government and they are served on the basis of that classification. What do we know about regimes in the past who have done that? We know that there's going to be trouble. We know that there's going to be some kind of internal if not a bloodbath then certainly a crackdown that affects a majority of the families.

And we need to get in there. We need to talk to them and get in there before it becomes another Cambodia or Rwanda or whatever.

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Thank you. Dr. Land?

DR. LAND: I have two questions. Number one, I would like to have the panelists that would choose to do so to talk about the situation of Buddhists in North Korea vis-a-vis we've heard tragic and eloquent testimony about the condition of Christians.

Then secondly, when I was listening to the testimony the example that came to mind of a certain kind of engagement and one that turned out to be very effective was with South Africa. This country put a great deal of pressure on South Africa, a supposedly very intransigent regime that felt that its survival was at stake, and ultimately that pressure brought about revolutionary change or helped to bring about revolutionary change, made it difficult if not impossible for the apartheid regime to maintain itself.

Why is South Africa, the South African example, that different from North Korea? I would agree personally that we've never put the kind of pressure on the North Korean government that we put on the South African government.

MR. RENDLER: Well, the situations are hugely different. I don't think they could be more different and that's part of the problem.

South Africa, for whatever the policies of the government, was an open society in terms of information. You couldn't keep that society bottled up. Eventually every meaningful violation of the rights of the black majority in South Africa was chronicled as it happened.

That's unthinkable in North Korea. This is a society where now two generations, going on a third generation of people, not only have received all their information from the government; they haven't gotten any information from anywhere else. And if they're not resigned to it, if their souls haven't been slain, as Chairman Young alluded to, certainly it's going to be really hard to persuade them that the only things that they have known for two generations are wrong.

The difference between North Korea and other places is how tight the control is, how information doesn't come out and it doesn't go in. That's the obstacle that keeps many groups and individuals from acting and that's why information on the regime and on the people is so important.

DR. LAND: Anyone else want to respond?

DR. LINTON: Does anyone want to talk about Buddhism?

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Please.

DR. LINTON: North Korea has several recognized official religions. One is the Doctrine of the Heavenly Way. It's a nativistic Korean religion and that's by far the largest. The second, they have a Christian federation, they have a Catholic association, and they have a Buddhist association.

I don't know where the testimony came from that there was only one temple in North Korea because I haven't looked for them and I've seen at least half a dozen. Buddhist temples were all over North Korea and many of them were destroyed during the war but these are cultural properties and they attract tourists and for that purpose alone they are maintained.

Now they do have what are called Buddhist clergy who maintain these temples and, of course, they reflect the policies of the state, just as the Catholics and Protestants--and, by the way, in North Korea Catholic and Protestant are almost considered two different religions because of some vocabulary problems.

But anyway, what makes them look false, aside from the rhetoric when you talk to them, is that they are married monks or married priests and also they grow their hair long. Well, in by far the preponderant Buddhist denomination in the South they're celibate and cut their hair, so it's a question of what do you consider legitimate Buddhism. But they do have active relationships with South Korean Buddhist organizations and they funnel a good bit of humanitarian aid up from South Korea. I could go on and talk to you about this for quite a while.

In fact, there is a Buddhist humanitarian aid organization that has done more work on refugees than every organization combined and they have an arm, one of their arms that's a U.S.-based organization has a respectable humanitarian program in the northeast part of the country. I'll stop there.

About South Africa, that was a very good question. How did we put pressure on South Africa? We were engaged. If you don't do such and such we'll withdraw our companies. We have no companies that are engaged in North Korea. Someone said we had businesses and they should do something about the policies of those businesses. I'd like to see the list of those businesses; they don't exist.

South Africa was part of a network. It was an ally. It was our friend and it's quite easy--it's much easier to put pressure on your friends than countries with whom you have no relations. About the only pressure we can put on North Korea is either not sending humanitarian aid and/or threatening to invade them. We have, in a sense, by our sanctions eliminated the levers of pressure, if you want to put it that way, that might effect reasonable change there.

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Dr. Linton, could I just follow up on Dr. Land's question in one particular way? You mentioned the existence of the formal Buddhist church and you mentioned the humanitarian aid that the Buddhist organizations provide. This morning we heard a great deal of testimony about some amount of persecution that seems to be directed particularly at Christians. Is there the same sort of persecution directed at Buddhists or are they largely left to their own devices and simply subject to the extraordinary deprivation of human rights that others are subject to?

DR. LINTON: You don't want my one-hour lecture on this but it's a very complicated situation. It has to do with how North Koreans see these organizations.

The Korean nativist organizations by far have the most latitude because they're Korean. Buddhism has more latitude because it's been around a long time and is essentially considered a Korean religion. Its Indian roots can be overlooked because they've been in Korea since the 6th Century.

Again we get back to this thing. Protestantism is persecuted for a number of reasons. The Korean War has a lot to do with it, Protestants and Catholics, because Christians were accused of being American spies and in some sense have never been able to escape from that stigma.

Catholicism is persecuted most. Why? Because Catholics are organizationally connected to a foreign entity, whereas Protestants can be self-ordained. So there is no Catholic clergy. So there's a huge debate within the Catholic Church over whether the Korean Catholic Association is, in fact, a legitimate association. Again we could go on and on and on.

So it's the political component that's a problem. And I don't want to comment about what goes on up at the border because I haven't personally witnessed the persecution. I'm sure it goes on but I don't want to give details of something that I haven't personally been involved in.

I'll get right back to the problem. It hasn't been but a few years and even now if a South Korean wants to be a missionary and talk to North Koreans he or she has to get permission from their government to do so. Imagine what the receiving government would think if every American missionary had to get certification from the CIA to be a missionary. Well, this is the state of affairs in this particular part of the world because again that fire wall isn't there.

So lots of innocent people get sucked in or at least tarnished with the stigma of intelligence so that what goes on on that border is an enormously complicated process. That's why I keep hinting that we've got to start building better fire walls. Even our own CIA has used Bible smugglers to collect information on North Korea. Now what kind of impression does that give a North Korean, a paranoid regime, about a religious body? It doesn't take a lot of explanation to see where we're going with this.

But do they persecute religion for religion's sake? Yes, they do, but in descending order beginning with the people who are considered the biggest threat to the state and most likely to have connections with hostile foreign powers.

MR. RENDLER: Could I add one thing?

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Please.

MR. RENDLER: Along with the establishment of these labor camps and prison camps around the country and the classification of people, another totalitarian worry is not so much that religions are persecuted but that worship is encouraged. I mean reading about the number of statues and monuments that are dedicated to Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il and the way that they're talked about and the classes that are required--it's required that you attend class on the ideology of Kim Il-Sung as if you were being required to go to church--it's hard to escape the notion that Kim Il-Sung is being presented as God the father and Kim Jong-Il as God the son and, as usual with totalitarian regimes, without the mitigating influence of Mary.

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Thank you. Commissioner Gaer?

MR. RENDLER: But I'm serious. When you have these elements in place it's time to worry.

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Thank you. Commissioner Gaer?

MS. GAER: Thank you. I wanted to thank the witnesses for some extremely interesting testimony and I particularly wanted to thank Mr. Rendler for the work that the Minnesota lawyers did in the past on countries like North Korea and Saudi Arabia that nobody else had done. And the point you make about information and the need for it is crucially important.

I wanted to ask three very specific policy-oriented questions. As I understand, the U.S. State Department report indicates there's only 25,000 believers in North Korea. They estimate 25,000. The government of North Korea reporting to the United Nations indicated about 40,000. It's either 0.1 or 0.2 percent who are believers, according to those numbers. That's probably the smallest proportion of any country we can know of. I'm wondering; it doesn't quite square with the other information we've talked about in terms of traditional religions, Buddhism, and the like.

So my first question is really to Mr. Linton, if you could just clarify for us the statistical situation.

My other questions are policy-related. Humanitarian aid, we've talked a lot about small organizations but there's been no discussion in our hearings of the role of the World Food Program. Now Mr. Rendler did suggest that U.N. agencies and U.N. standards were particularly important. I'm wondering if any of the panelists wanted to provide any suggestions as to United States policy with regard to the U.N. World Food Program and whether that has been an effective use of U.S. funding to provide humanitarian aid and support, as opposed to the voluntary effort or efforts working together with voluntary organizations.

My other question deals with this point that came up both in the written testimony and the oral remarks, which is the improper associations that are attributed to people doing the most proper and sincere work, whether it is humanitarian or religious or social or educational, and that is the relationship with intelligence organizations.

In the United States there was a great deal of attention to this issue in the '70s and specific legislative prohibitions indicated that intelligence agencies in this country would not approach or use journalists, human rights activists, et cetera, as sources and in other countries precisely to make it clear that these civil society contacts are not tainted in any fashion.

I'm wondering and I'd appreciate from any of the panelists who've addressed this or have a view on this, whether you think it is time for there to be another specific prohibition on contact by American intelligence agencies with humanitarian aid groups, religions organizations, and the others that I mentioned--journalists, human rights, et cetera--and whether there should be any element in the policy of the United States with regard to other countries and their intelligence agencies, whether there's any prohibition that would be similarly appropriate or possible through international standards or the like. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Do any of our panelists want to take on any of those?

DR. LINTON: I'm waiting my turn.

MR. RENDLER: I guess I would ask Steve about--I read in the World Food Program statistics that they were contributing to the feeding of over 90 percent of children under eight in North Korea. Does that square with your experience?

DR. LINTON: Let me just sort of flesh this out. I really wouldn't be in a position to comment on the extent of WFP's effectiveness because I haven't really been

involved in those processes.

Statistics don't exist. The Christian Federation, which is merely the Protestant Federation, and I got in real trouble once because I was thinking in Korean and I said Christians and Catholics and really got nailed once but if I do that, understand that the Korean vocabulary is different.

The Christian Federation is what their official name is. Protestants claim to have 10,000 people, 50 house churches, and they have two official buildings built by South Korean aid in Pyongyang. I have never been able to get them to allow me to go to a house church and I don't have too good a relationship with them because they're not as interested in humanitarian aid as they are in other things.

Catholics officially have 7,000 and I don't know how many house churches they're supposed to have but the big issue in the Catholic community is that they don't have a priest. The reason they don't have a priest is because--and forgive me, Bishop; I don't want to get into this too much, but essentially the Catholic Church controls the ordination of bishops and is not willing to surrender that right to the North Korean government.

Then you have organizations that claim to be in touch with the underground church and statistics roll out on how many underground churches there are and how many believers there are and I have no way--I don't think anyone has any way of verifying those statistics at all. I wouldn't believe that it would be--then you get back to the whole question of who is a Christian? Because in a society that does classify people--and, by the way, South Koreans classified people until fairly recently, not nearly as Draconian a classification as the North Koreans but there's a tendency. I mean people whose ancestors were communists were not allowed to have good jobs in South Korea for a long time.

If you are of a Christian family or a religious family often you get classified as a religious person whether you want to or not. The flip side of that is you do run into people even in their Foreign Ministry whose parents were Christians. There was one guy we worked with with the Billy Graham organization. They assigned him to Dr. Graham and they called him Reverend Chun because his parents had been Christians and he was the butt of the jokes but he had at least reached the level of a mid-level bureaucrat.

So what makes you a Christian or a religious person? Is it the fact that in your ancestry there were ministers or elders or religious leaders or is it a profession of faith?

Too long, and here we get down to this intel thing again, and I don't want to dwell on that too much because it's getting better, I think, simply because there's so many people contacting North Koreans these days, but there was a partnership between U.S. intelligence and South Korean intelligence and the human intelligence was handled by the South Koreans and they do not have those laws. So all the CIA has to do is just write a memo to their South Korean counterparts and you can effect whatever debriefing of civilians you would like.

South Korea to this day doesn't have those protections but the irony is with the religious communities as strong as they are in South Korea, they don't feel the need for them because, and again this is something I tried to point out in my paper, in East Asian society the assumption that the state should control religious organizations is not that big of a problem.

WFP, I think they do the best job they can. The problem is they bartered away the right to put Korean-speaking people on the ground. So no matter how many people they have on the ground, and I think they have upwards of 40, none of them speak Korean. And every time we go out in the countryside there's a remarkable difference between what you learn from a local official or a person in the local area and one who is assigned to you by the central government in Pyongyang.

So there's a fundamental disconnect there and it makes their information, to some extent, limited to what they can glean by sight rather than by ear and also statistics that are provided to them by the North Korean government.

And finally, the North Koreans would love for Americans to handle the aid bilaterally because North Koreans have about the same notion of U.N. agencies as the John Birch Society: where three or more are gathered together there's a conspiracy, from their point of view. After all, this country is still at war with the U.N., at least officially. They would much prefer the U.S. to engage them bilaterally, everyone to engage them bilaterally. They just don't like international organizations very much and I think we could get a lot more bang for our buck, and I think this has been kicked around in the U.S. government a bit, if our aid was more bilateral and less, in a sense, cycled through international organizations like the WFP. Not to say they're not doing a good job. It's just that U.S.--donor identity is very important to the Eugene Bell Foundation and you get more donor identity when your people are passing it out.

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Mr. Downs?

MR. DOWNS: If I could, I'd like to make two points on what Mrs. Gaer has said.

First on food programs, I find, given the way people respond to my arguments, that people sometimes conclude that I would, of course, not like to provide food aid to North Korea. Actually, the contrary is true. I think that there is every reason to try to provide food aid directly to the North Korean people.

The problem comes in the way the programs are administered. Monitoring is clearly one problem. Steve just spoke to the problem of having Korean speakers on the ground when the

monitoring is done. But let me tell you that there are also examples of cooperation with the state that are quite troubling. There is a food program that is done that allows work to be done during the day and then food to be offered in the evening and the work projects are chosen by the state, of course--they have to be in North Korea. Then at the end of the day after everyone has worked, the food is provided.

I went to a briefing once provided by the people who do that particular program and when you saw the slides you noticed that the DPRK flag was fully unfurled, flying above the hillsides where this work was being performed. There was actually a generator, a gas-powered generator, that was making a fan go so that the flag of the People's Party could hover over all of these workers as they were doing it. This is a food program that actually supports the propaganda efforts of the state and we ought to avoid that kind of thing.

On the intelligence question, which is a very important one, I think that Mrs. Gaer's point is an especially good one to bring up at this hearing. We live in a society that is not only open but that tries to allow people to set up fire walls and if they want to be on the side of North Korea and have CIA on the other side of the fire wall there are actually legal protections that they can pursue to claim that they should be seen as completely innocent and unconnected to the CIA and any other intelligence agency of our own government.

So even though there's no question of moral comparison between what the United States tries to accomplish in the world and what North Korea tries to accomplish in the world, nevertheless we have put in place the procedures, legal procedures that can be enforced that allow our missionaries, that allow our humanitarian aid workers to insist that they are not seen as intelligence agents and I think that's a very good point to be brought out in this hearing and I think that it's good that Steve raised it.

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Thank you. Our time is very short but we're going to take questions from two more commissioners. First, Ambassador Stith?

AMBASSADOR STITH: When I listen to your testimony, all of you, and I want to thank you, offered reasonable and rational, thoughtful bases for our engagement in North Korea. But when you juxtapose that with some of the bone-chilling testimony we heard in the first panel about abuse and oppression, the video clip that we saw in between the two panels, and then I was particularly struck on the note that Mr. Rendler ended his testimony when he said that he has never seen in the 30 years he's been involved in this sort of stuff a government that was as abusive and as repressive and oppressive as this government is.

As a practical matter, is there any prospect for religious freedom or respect for human rights under this present government? And if you think so, then why?

MR. OBERDORFER: I'll start. I think there's very little in the short term. In the long term we do not know what's going to happen in North Korea. This society, the government is moribund economically. It has shown in the last couple of years an amazing,

for those who've watched North Korea for a long time, an amazing tendency to change its course in terms of international connections. It has yet shown no tendency to change its domestic policies. But there's always the possibility that some day in the future it will.

I wouldn't want to predict when it will happen or whether this government will survive but I don't think, going back to the main point which I think all of us in one way or another have made, I don't think by trying to avoid contact and engagement with North Korea, government and people, we're going to advance that prospect. Even though it may seem remote, things can happen that you don't anticipate.

I remember when I first started covering U.S.-Soviet relations the idea that a Gorbachev could come out of the Soviet Union seemed utterly impossible and I'm not predicting one will come out of North Korea but you can't tell what's going to happen in that place in the future. One thing about both Koreas is that it's a land of surprises.

MR. RENDLER: I'd like to pick up on that. In countless strategy sessions with international human rights organizations where you try to pick your priorities, partly on the basis of need and partly on the basis of opportunity--I mean, is there any opportunity there?--and I can remember being asked or asking the same questions. Is there any chance that the People's Republic of China is going to loosen its grip on the people anywhere in that country? And for a long time the answer was no but now it's better than it was. It's a lot better than it was.

The same could be said of many other--you know, Albania comes to mind. Is there any chance that Albania--at one point we seriously considered this, there's no point in helping these people because Albania will never have human rights. And the thrust of this historical period in the world is toward human rights, toward respect for human rights. Human rights and women's rights are the great movement of this historical period and you've got to have faith that it's hard for anybody, including the North Korean government and especially the North Korean people, to resist that impulse.

DR. LINTON: Let me add just--I've probably done more than my share of the talking this time but we built a wall around North Korea. At least we've made as thick a wall as we could and we imposed sanctions. When I first got into this field, when I first began to study North Korea in the early '70s, it was almost universal truth that North Korea would collapse as soon as Kim Il-Sung died. Now there's a school of thought that it's going to collapse when Kim Jong-Il dies.

But the point is that we've been waiting for this government to implode due to internal stress, in a sense stimulated in part by economic embargoes and military pressure, for 50 years and it hasn't happened.

So I'm not sure that waiting for North Korea to collapse is--I wouldn't bet on that horse. Koreans are survivors. They have an incredible tolerance for poor leadership but above all,

they will make the adjustments they need to survive. And besides, China isn't going to let them fall. China will limp them along half-starved because it's very convenient to have the North Korean fire wall between China's sensitive northeastern border and the West. So isn't a lot of international pressure for North Korea to go away, either.

Then in terms of is it changing? Yes, it changes. It's changed a lot. You may not think what I'm going to tell you is a lot but to me it's huge progress.

TB, if you don't treat it, if you don't treat it, a new TB patient will make 10 to 15 other TB patients per year. So one way to deal with TB is just to isolate people. So North Korea has this network of 15 hospitals and 63--we call them care centers; it's a nice word for it. What were the care centers? Well, once you run out of medication a care center is a medical concentration camp because you send people there who have an infectious disease and you make sure they don't leave. And the fact that nine out of ten of them are going to die is secondary to the fact that you're preventing new cases, at least from that particular person.

Well, what is the condition in these camps? Let's call them camps here. I don't want to be quoted in the press as saying they're camps. They're rest homes--excuse me. What are the conditions today? Well, people can't be kept down on the farm anymore. They can't be kept in the rest home, especially women who say I've got to go see my baby, and they just take off.

So one of the things we're doing, and this is kind of ironic, one of the things we're doing is providing medical aid to these care centers so that people won't leave and keep infecting folks.

Now is the freedom, relatively speaking, to run away from a care center progress in human rights and religious freedom? I would like to think so. It certainly is progress over the way things were before.

You see gradually a loosening of the society. There's a lot more movement since the famine and once these things start it's very hard for them to reimpose the kind of order they had before. It becomes virtually impossible.

So yes, I think North Korea--I think our best bet is to influence change the best way we can and that is from the inside, engaging these people.

When I used to go to a care center in '97 the patients would run away and hide in the bushes. Now people are friendly and wave and are much more open and willing to talk about this and that and the other--not politics but you see changes. Incremental change is going on and is probably the best horse we have in this race.

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Thank you very much. We're going to give Commissioner Shea the last question.

MS. SHEA: Thank you.

Our Middle East policy is in somewhat of turmoil right now after the events of last September and being reevaluated and one of the things that we've seen is that the country that the people are most favorable to us is the country that we've had least engagement is, and that is Iran and perhaps the populace of the countries we've had most engagement with and best relations with the government, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, are the most hostile to us; in fact, supplied the population that produced the suicide bombers.

Is there a lesson here that perhaps there are limits to engagement with a government that's so odious as North Korea? I just, in the interest of time, I don't want a long discourse from any of you but maybe if there's anyone who believes that there are limits to engagement, if you could briefly say what they might be.

MR. OBERDORFER: Well, I think there are limits. I don't think the situation is at all comparable to Saudi Arabia and Egypt. We are basically sponsors and almost like part of their regime. Certainly that is not true in North Korea, not at all.

South Korea is rather instructive in this way. South Korea was an authoritarian country, never a totalitarian country like North Korea, but the United States stuck in there. When I was a correspondent in the early 1970s and Park Chung Lee was president and he cracked down on the press, cracked down on Christians, by the way, and others, there was afloat in Washington and elsewhere, including some in South Korea, the idea that we should withdraw our aid to South Korea which we had then and we should somehow stigmatize the government by pulling away from them and having nothing to do with the South Korean government.

U.S. government decided, I think wisely, not to do that. It stayed in there in touch with the South Korean government. The people of South Korea have had cycles where they felt Americans were at fault for some of the horrible abuses that took place, for instance, in the early 1980s under military regimes. But our government, to give it credit, tried to use its influence often quietly because it did have a lot of influence. And not because of us but we were a contributing factor, South Korea is today a democratic country. You might not like everything they do but it is a democratic country for sure.

People in South Korea appreciate that. They appreciate the U.S. role in doing that. And while there are ups and downs in our relationship, the relationship is good.

I don't think the situation in North Korea is at all comparable either in the level of American involvement with the government or in the reaction of people but the way to, as I see it anyway, the way to advance the interests and the beliefs of the United States and to have the credit given by the North Korean people is to show the United States believes in what it believes and engage and try to do what it can, sometimes quietly, sometimes openly, to advance the interests of the people of North Korea, and I think that would be very worthwhile.

MS. SHEA: So are you saying there's no limits or there are limits and what are they?

MR. OBERDORFER: Well, any limits there are are so far away from where we are now that as a practical matter--I mean we have practically no, except for the humanitarian workers and some occasional contacts through the State Department, we basically have no connections at all with the North Korean regime. If we were to be seen as supporting the North Korean regime in some major way that might be a limit but we're not anywhere near that.

MS. SHEA: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Mr. Downs, we're going to give you the last word.

MR. DOWNS: Thank you. I think that there definitely are limits to engagement and it's exactly the point that Don just ended with. We have to be careful not to be appearing to support the regime. And it seems to me that what we should think of is that the policy prescription that we might come up with actually focuses on the people who are in North Korea but are clearly opposed to the regime, who are suffering there and trying to get out.

Refugee policy has always been a very important way to deal with the crisis that is created by totalitarian societies. If the West provides asylum to people who can get across the Berlin Wall or get out from Hanoi and into the South China Sea, if we can provide some comfort to the people who leave North Korea and get across the Tumen and the Yalu Rivers into China and set up camps and allow them to live better lives, eventually the word will get back just through word of mouth to people in North Korea. Pressure will build. People will want to leave.

In the past in Marxist societies when there has been a clear pressure among the population to leave the society, it has been impossible for the regime to try to claim that it had a workers' paradise. In East Germany there were places where if they heard the border was going to open up there would be huge traffic jams.

This is a place that did not allow protests but as soon as there was hope of leaving, the evidence was absolutely irrefutable that people wanted to get out of the society.

The next step a totalitarian regime has to do after everyone realizes nobody wants to be there is they have to decide whether their military is going to be devoted to killing their own citizens and even in the worst totalitarian societies, I think even in North Korea, it is difficult for the military to decide to shoot innocent fleeing civilians that they are sworn to serve.

So it seems to me that you create a crisis in the society with your refugee policy that allows the truth to be told right there in the totalitarian society in very stark terms. You set up the crisis that occurs between the military and the people and eventually the system collapses under its own weight of lies. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Thank you very much.

We will conclude these hearings. The record will remain open for seven days. If you'd like to supplement your remarks in any way we would be delighted to have that happen. But we do very much thank you for your time and--

MR. RENDLER: May I ask a procedural question?

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Please.

MR. RENDLER: What happens next?

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: At this point the Commission will study these matters with an eye to issuing some very specific additional recommendations with respect to North Korea. If you have additional information you'd like to share with us we'd be delighted to receive it at any point.

Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 12:34 p.m., the hearing was concluded.]