



## Let's Confront North Korea on Human Rights

**Jay Lefkowitz, Special Envoy for Human Rights in North Korea**

Op-Ed

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### The Helsinki Process Provides a Model for Obama

Memo to President-elect Barack Obama: It's time to adopt a new approach to North Korea that firmly establishes a link between human rights and security. Congress has twice endorsed such a link by passing and reauthorizing the North Korean Human Rights Act without a single dissenting vote.

Throughout the Clinton and Bush administrations, the United States' primary policy objective toward North Korea was to negotiate an end to its nuclear capability. So far, we have not succeeded. For the past five and a half years we've been engaged in the on-again off-again Six Party Talks, which have focused, almost exclusively, on the nuclear issue.

We have also relied on the efforts of North Korea's two neighbors, China and South Korea, both of whom we hoped would join us in applying serious pressure on the regime. It now seems clear that while neither nation is pleased with a nuclear North Korea, each for its own reasons appears to prefer the devil it knows to an uncertain future that could be created by the regime's collapse.

Pyongyang has exploited our single-minded focus by entering into a series of agreements it either ignored or broke, but for which it extracted the maximum amount of concessions. Yet because the negotiations are so narrowly focused, the U.S. has had few carrots and sticks with which to engage the regime. Thus, North Korea continues to receive considerable foreign aid and international recognition, even though it has never accepted verifiable disarmament or an end to proliferation.

An especially troubling development was North Korea's recent assistance to terror-sponsor Syria in building a nuclear facility at the same time Pyongyang was receiving aid won in the Six Party talks.

There is an alternative approach. The basis for Congress's action in passing the Human Rights Act was its recognition that the way a regime treats its own people is highly correlated to the way it treats other countries. This connection also was a key bipartisan tenet of superpower engagement in the latter half of the Cold War.

Beginning in the mid-1970s, the West and the Eastern Bloc began a long dialogue on security, economic and human-rights issues. The key to the negotiations that ensued -- known as the Helsinki Process -- was explicit linkage between these three "baskets," with the West insisting on verifiable progress in each area as a condition of financial aid or international recognition.

As a result, the Soviets were pressed seriously to address human rights. Although progress was slow, the regime gradually began to crack open and over time a homegrown dissident movement emerged. The Soviets did not like the linkage, but they acceded to it because they knew it was a condition precedent to the progress they wanted in the other parts of the dialogue.

Today, a Helsinki-style model should be replicated with North Korea, and the U.S. should promote linkage among security, economic and human-rights issues. Significant economic assistance to North Korea should be offered, including development assistance, World Bank loans, trade access and food aid, but it must be given only in return for tangible, verifiable progress on all issues on the agenda. And human-rights progress should not be measured by bureaucrats meeting and reading prepared statements, but by tangible steps that move North Korea closer to the norms of the international community.

For starters, these steps could include releasing its political prisoners, shutting its gulag network, and recognizing its citizens' right to emigrate. Later, our two countries could move to cultural and educational exchanges and eventually a normalization of relations.

Like the Soviets before, North Korea is unlikely to favor this approach. But it is one that could ultimately serve the interests of all the parties, including the North Korean people. Of course, if the progress we are demanding is not forthcoming, our negotiators must be willing to walk away or increase economic pressure on the regime.

To be sure, the policy I am proposing is diplomacy with our adversaries. But President-elect Obama has made that one of his goals. And if we pursue a comprehensive approach to North Korea, we may find that we'll not only advance our security objectives, but also help some of the world's most abused people.

*Mr. Lefkowitz has served as President Bush's special envoy for human rights in North Korea for the past three years.*

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