

# Remarks at the American Enterprise Institute

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

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*(As delivered remarks)*

Thank you very much for that introduction, Nick, and I want to thank the American Enterprise Institute for organizing the event and inviting me back. As I came up on the elevator, I recalled that in 1993 for about nine months, I had the great pleasure of working here at AEI, and it was a remarkable place for those of you who do not know AEI. Every day, I'd take my bag lunch, and I'd go into a little conference room and I would sit, and I would look up and Irving Kristol or Bob Bork or Lynne Cheney and certainly Nick Eberstadt, and a whole variety of other wonderful scholars would be sitting having lunch. And I felt that I was finally getting what I should have gotten out of graduate school many years earlier.

Since President Bush appointed me special envoy last year, I have found Nick to be an absolutely indispensable source of information, insight, and occasionally criticism. I really appreciate Nick's friendship and all of his support. I also want to acknowledge Michael Cromartie, Sung-Yoon Lee and Tom Malinowski, and especially David Hawk who has written what I think is an absolutely indispensable work about life in North Korea today.

If you only have time to read one piece of work about North Korea, read David's work. It is frightening, it is chilling, and it is true. And it is really the impetus for why two years ago, the United States Congress, building on the work of a lot of important NGOs in the United States and with the support of this Administration, passed the North Korea Human Rights Act, which is the statute under which I am now serving the President. There is a direct link between the prevalence of freedom in the world and the prospects for security and peace. President Bush articulated this idea -- which has a long heritage in America's view of the world -- very clearly in his second inaugural address.

On that January morning last year, he recommitted the United States to the general relational struggle to end tyranny and he noted, "When you stand for liberty, we will stand with you." He said that not just for the audience in front of them. He said that principally to people around the world who are, in fact, struggling being deprived of freedom. And there is no group of people right now who are being deprived of freedom any more than the North Korean people.

Our job, our mission is to help one of the world's most oppressed people secure recognition for their inalienable rights including, ultimately, their right to government by their own consent. The other concerns that we have and that our allies have with North Korea, the counterfeiting of our currency, the smuggling of drugs, the proliferation of weapons, the effort to build a nuclear arsenal and to threaten their neighbors with war. Those are not nearly coincidental to the human rights issue; rather, they are the predictable conduct of the government that possesses no apparent respect for the rights of its own citizens.

The link between government oppression and challenges to international security is well articulated by a great freedom fighter, someone on whose behalf of freedom I worked for many years when I was younger and who I now count as a good friend, Natan Sharansky. He languished for nine years in a Soviet prison based on trumped-up charges before ultimately, pressure from the international community secured his release. And he said, "Non-democratic regimes imperil the security of the world. They stay in power by controlling their populations. And while the mechanics of democracy makes democracies inherently peaceful, the mechanics of tyranny make non-democracies inherently belligerent."

Our objective, our goal with respect to North Korea is not so much democracy as simply lifting the veil, creating an opportunity for the people of North Korea to thrive, to achieve what their relatives -- only a hundred miles away -- who themselves in South Korea lived under repression by an autocratic regime less than 20 years ago, and have now been able to build the 12th-largest economy in the world in an incredibly vibrant democracy -- an economy of over a trillion dollars. Now I believe that North Korea will ultimately follow the same type of transformation that we saw during the 1980s and early '90s with the fall of the Iron Curtain. And I believe that the impetus for the North Korean government to open up and respect the rights of their citizens will grow stronger in the time ahead, but only if there is concerted international pressure, and only if the countries in Asia who have the most influence with North Korea step up to the plate and join this international community.

The President is proud to be a participant and to commit U.S. energy and capital and resources to this effort, but we know in the United States that we cannot on our own bring this about. We require an international coalition. We require cooperation from the United Nations, the European community, many of whose members have direct relations, diplomatic relations with Pyongyang, have to be engaged in this process. And most of all, we have to engage in this process without fear that a little bit of criticism will set us back. On the contrary, when we speak the truth about freedom and liberty, the truth resonates.

Now what are my principal objectives as the special envoy? It seems to me that a key way to empower the North Korean people is to force a ray of light through the veil that Kim Il Sung has drawn over North Korea. The propaganda that he uses to suppress his people can be countered only by information about the outside world and information about what is actually going on inside North Korea. This can be

achieved through enhanced radio broadcasting and other means to disseminate the type of news and information that the rest of the world takes for granted but which is hidden from the people of North Korea. Most North Koreans cannot travel even domestically. All broadcasting is controlled by the government. Radios come fixed to a single state channel for propaganda.

And yet in recent years, there have been some hopeful signs. A survey of defectors suggests that about a third of all North Koreans have now modified their radios, and that half of all the people know somebody who has. That creates an opportunity source; it creates an opportunity to ramp up the kind of broadcasting that we have the capability of doing.

The National Endowment for Democracy has taken the initiative in this area by funding a pilot program to train North Korean defectors and South Korean democracy activists in journalistic and broadcasting standards, and then supporting the broadcasting cost so that they can go on the air for a period of time each day to transmit information into North Korea. We support this information. Just this morning, I met with the Chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors to talk about increasing the quality and the quantity of information, the transmission quality and the sheer quantity of information transmitted into North Korea by Radio Free Asia and Voice of America.

And why? Because when we talk to the defectors, they tell us that one of the most important things sustaining them in North Korea was the ability to have some link with the outside world. And with information, more North Korean people will learn that just to the south, there is a vibrant democracy, a strong economy with freedom. They will learn that they do not live in a socialist paradise. They will learn that right now their lives are shorter on average, infant mortality is more than three times their neighbors to the South and that because of the terrible policies of food deprivation directed by the government of North Korea, the average North Korean male is now several inches shorter than his South Korean brother. More information from the outside world will also assist North Koreans who worship God in defiance of the State. David Hawk will speak far more eloquently about this than I can, given the excellent report he has prepared.

But I will simply note that North Korea spares no effort in suppressing religion. Faith empowers the individual. It creates an alternate structure, a higher moral authority than the despotic ruler. It might, in fact, lead one to question the cult of personality that has come to become the government of North Korea. Indeed, it is a cult reminiscent of those that surrounded Stalin and Mao. It is taken very seriously by this regime, and as David reports, every North Korean is expected to attend one or more of an estimated 450,000 Kim Il Sung revolutionary research centers at least once a week for instruction. Yet despite all of these, again, we are seeing some signs of a ray of light, some signs that underground expressions of faith are taking hold.

Another key objective on my brief is to make clear that we need to do more -- and we can and will do more -- for the North Korean refugees. Hundreds of thousands of North Koreans have fled North Korea since the mid 1990s. Most refugees are in China, and although the numbers vary wildly by the different groups that have tried to do some fact finding in the region, there is no question that they are neglected. They are not treated humanely and indeed, just recently, a defenseless North Korean woman who braved the border crossing and reached China and sought refuge at a school in Beijing was sent back to her tormentors in North Korea. This happened despite the pleas to the government and the United Nations.

We will press to make it clear to our friends and allies in the region that we want to accept North Korean refugees. The United States has a wonderful tradition of being a refuge to vulnerable people seeking refuge from despotic regimes and we will do our part. But the United States is never going to be the solution for most North Korean refugees. Quite properly, they will want to be reunited with families, with their culture in South Korea. South Korea makes it clear that they are all, in fact, citizens and we need to press other countries -- in particular the Chinese government, which is violating and ignoring its international obligations under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol by refusing to protect the North Korean on its soil or recognizing them as refugees, and by severely impeding the United Nations and its High Commissioner for Refugees from doing its job.

These are steps that we can do to help the North Korean people but there are also policies that we need to avoid. Unfortunately, some of the nations in Asia today may, unwittingly, be doing more to help continue the conditions in North Korea than to bring about a change. One example of well-intentioned but perhaps counter-productive assistance is in the area of unrestricted humanitarian aid. The United States is very proud of the humanitarian aid that we have given to North Korea over the last decade to try to help alleviate the conditions of suffering and deprivation by famine. But we have always insisted that the humanitarian aid we provide comes with monitoring to make sure that it is not sold in the black market or used for the military.

Our objective with humanitarian aid is that it serves humanitarian purposes. But when countries provide unrestricted humanitarian aid without proper monitoring, they are not necessarily helping the situation. And I think it is very important, particularly at a moment in time when the North Korean government has basically kicked out for all intents and purposes the World Food Program, that we make clear and we call on countries to provide productive humanitarian aid to help people with food or health care, but to do it in a way that we can insure an international community that it serves the humanitarian objective.

Another example of well intentioned assistance that we frankly do not know enough about, and so I would say the jury is simply out right now, has to do with some of the joint economic ventures near Kaesong, a city north of the DMZ where you can literally look out from the border and see where 15,000 South Korean companies have invested hundreds of million of dollars into an economic facility where South Korean goods will be manufactured and ultimately sold using North Korean labor. The South Korean official has enthusiastically described this as a cooperative project benefiting both the South and the North, a peace project overcoming the wall of the Cold War through economic cooperation. It may some day turn out to be that way, and indeed I have no doubt that it may be much better to be a North Korean worker in Kaesong today than anywhere else in North Korea. But the real question for the international community is, should we be imposing and insisting on fair treatment for the workers for goods and served goods that are going to be sold internationally?

What we know about what goes on in Kaesong certainly in light of North Korea's track record, I think creates a presumption, maybe a rebuttal presumption, but a presumption of concern. The companies apparently pay less than two dollars a day per worker, and there is no guarantee that the workers receive this small amount because the North Korean Government deducts a social fee from their wages and empowers labor brokers to control the rest. The site is fenced in, workers come and go through a single entrance manned by armed soldiers and, of course, the South Korean government does not have the ability to enforce its own good labor laws in Kaesong.

I would submit that at a minimum, North Korea should allow an independent party such as the International Labor Organization to inspect and assess Kaesong and report its findings to the UN. There are hopeful signs in terms of building international support. The United Nations passed a resolution at the third committee last year. Not all of the countries that should have joined that resolution did, but many, in fact, did and I think there will be more this fall if we have another resolution.

The Japanese government is taking the important step of appointing its own ambassador for human rights. The Japanese have a particular set of concerns because of their close proximity to North Korea from a security perspective because of the terrible, terrible human rights violations of Japanese families being abducted by North Korean agents. But I'm pleased to say that the Japanese government is focusing in its effort on North Korean human rights more broadly than just its own parochial interests. It is joining in the international community's concern and fight for North Korean human rights for the people of North Korea. And I certainly hope that the European community will follow suit and appoint its own special envoy for human rights.

When I was in Seoul in December, it became clear to me that there are many people in South Korea who cared deeply about their brethren in the North. We need to energize people like these at home. We need to energize the Korean-American community so they can do for this struggle what the American-Jewish community did in the 1970s and '80s in the fight for freedom for self-determination. The United States will work with other democracies toward the day when North Koreans are free. We will strive to give them hope and to help them assert their inalienable rights. As President Bush said when he was in Kyoto in November, "We will not forget the people of North Korea. The 21st century will be freedom's century for all Koreans."

But this is not a challenge for the United States alone, and I dare say that it is not a challenge that the United States can achieve on its own. So we need the cooperation of the Europeans, we need the cooperation of the Asian countries, we need the cooperation of the South Koreans and the Chinese government. And if we are successful, we will help bring about a peaceful and productive peninsula for all Koreans. Thank you.

I'm happy to take a few questions that people have. Please.

**Questioner:** (Inaudible, speaks without a microphone.)

**Amb. Jay Lefkowitz:** I do not know that there is an official State Department position on reunification. Obviously, I think it is in everybody's long term interest to see a unified, peaceful, productive peninsula. How is that for an alliteration of the topic? But I think there are an awful lot of obstacles right now. We are trying to make as much progress as we can through the Six-Party discussions on the nuclear issue.

But fundamentally, the real threshold test for North Korea in terms of international acceptance and legitimacy will be its conduct in human rights. Henry Jackson, Scoop Jackson, said it more clearly than anyone else I guess 30 years ago now, when he made clear that the best way to understand how much a country can be trusted in international affairs is by looking at how that country treats its own population. Yes, sir.

**Questioner:** This morning, Dr. Carl Muller from Open Doors International claims that there are 40,000 Christians in labor camps or in other incarceration. Are you comfortable with this number, 40,000?

**Amb. Jay Lefkowitz:** I wish I could tell you that I'm comfortable with any particular number. I think, given the lack of international inspections, the fact that the Red Cross obviously has been afforded no access, and the special rapporteur for the United Nations is not even being given access, I do not think we really know what the numbers are. We know that there are thousands, very likely hundreds of thousands of political prisoners in the North Korean gulag and obviously many of them are there because of direct religious persecution, but I do not know that I can give you a precise number.

**Paul Eckert:** I'm Paul Eckert from Reuters News Agency. Can you bring us up to date on the efforts and the policy towards bringing North Korean refugees to the United States under the Act? So tell us what the hurdles are, any timeline you might have to share?

**Amb. Jay Lefkowitz:** I think we have had a series of hurdles, both domestically and internationally. I think we have been able to resolve the domestic hurdles. There are obviously legitimate questions about security and the security risk of potential refugees from North Korea. Certainly, it is a concern of the South Korean government that the North Koreans basically send agents out to try to become refugees. I think we have resolved internally, and I think we are certainly prepared to accept North Korean refugees. We have also had challenges and hurdles to overcome in the region because, obviously, we need to respect the sovereignty of the countries in the region. But I think we have got a lot of friends and allies in the region who want to cooperate and recognize that this is something the United States is really committed to.

In terms of the timeline, I cannot speak to a particular timeline. It is not something that I can just press a button and make sure we have a refugee here at the next AEI event, but I am hopeful and really confident that we are at a turning point now in our ability to bring North Korean refugees here if they are legitimate refugees, have legitimate concerns, and if the United States is an appropriate place for them.

**Jae Ku:** Jae Ku, Freedom House. You said it today and you have said it in the past that maybe the European Union or the European community in general, that you hope they will appoint a special envoy themselves. Freedom House recently had at the Third International Conference in Brussels, and from my conversation with the NGO of community there as well as our limited contacts with European officials, that this is not on their radar screen. And I'm wondering if there are things that you are doing behind the scenes that you could share with us that would lead us to believe that maybe this is an option something that the European Union or the parliament could do in the near future?

**Amb. Jay Lefkowitz:** If there were things I was doing behind the scenes, and I shared them with you, they would not be behind the scenes anymore. So I will not share those with you, but I will tell you that I have actually had very encouraging discussions, in particular I think there is a great deal of support in Eastern Europe. Some of the former Soviet bloc countries really understand what the cost -- the human cost as well as the economic and political cost -- of the regime like North Korea is. I think this is an area where the United States and France can cooperate in a very productive way. So I'm hopeful that the European community will move ahead and be more focused on this issue in the coming month.

**Thean Gung:** Thean Gung with the Saga Times. According to the Immigration Reform Bill passed at the Judiciary Committee of the Senate, most Koreans who can provide to some useful information about the WMD program or counterfeit issue can get an S2 visa to stay and live in this country. Do you think the Administration is ready to accept North Koreans?

**Amb. Jay Lefkowitz:** I think the United States is prepared to accept North Korean refugees. It is really one of the hallmarks of our society that we have made our shores available to people seeking refuge. Many of us, I dare say, in this room descend from people who came here as immigrants. And certainly, people fearing prosecution, I think, are prime candidates to accept as refugees, and I hope in the near future we will be in position to do something.

**Mark Jarvis:** Mark Jarvis, Emerging Markets Management. You mentioned Kaesong. Has the United States government formulated the policy on how it would treat goods manufactured in Kaesong?

**Amb. Jay Lefkowitz:** I do not know that we have said anything publicly about that issue, and obviously there were discussions ongoing as we negotiate a free trade agreement, but I think there are certainly very significant questions that need to be answered about the entire operation in Kaesong.

**Chenogang:** Chenogang from Chogang Daily. Only this month, Ms. Condoleezza Rice said, "I'll give more jobs to Mr. Jay Lefkowitz." But even after that, you have been relatively silent. But now today, you present yourself in two consecutive meetings and making your position public in a very clear way. So can we guess it is time for you to gear up to break silence and just go forward for your own campaign?

**Amb. Jay Lefkowitz:** I guess I take a little bit of issue with your premise because having spent a number of years in government, I think it is important to do work both inside and outside and obviously, there is an awful lot of work that needs to be done inside planting the appropriate seeds, plowing the appropriate ground -- do not want to kill that metaphor -- but there is an awful lot of work that needs to be done within the United States government and within the international community. There is also an appropriate time and an appropriate place for public speeches, for dialogue, for negotiation. I do not try to plot what I do on a daily or on a weekly graph but I have been engaged fully in the issue and will continue to be engaged fully in the issue. Yes, ma'am.

**Questioner:** Yana News Agency. You have been emphasizing a lot about getting the Asian region to cooperate in U.S. efforts to bring in refugees. Would that include the establishment of sort of a center somewhere in Asia to check, as a checkpoint maybe, to process the North Korea refugees? Because I would think that you cannot just pluck them out from somewhere in China and bring them directly to the U.S. Really some kind of midpoint, checkpoint.

**Amb. Jay Lefkowitz:** Without getting into too many details about various discussions and issues that we are focusing on, obviously one of the challenges is finding appropriate places to screen and process and assess a potential refugee to the United States, but I think we are making a great deal of progress in that area. And so I think it is going to facilitate our ability to take some refugees. Yes, ma'am.

**Emma Chanlett:** Emma Chanlett at the Congressional Research Service. Can you clarify at what level and how recently U.S. officials have pressed their Chinese counterparts on honoring international obligations in terms of their treatment of refugees?

**Amb. Jay Lefkowitz:** I do not know that I could tell you as I stand here when the last direct bilateral communication of that nature has been. So in direct answer to your question, I guess I do not know. I certainly, just 10 minutes ago, in a public forum made very clear our view on the issue but I do not know when there has been the last direct bilateral. Yes, sir?

**Foster Klug:** Foster Klug with the Associated Press. You mentioned unhelpful actions by neighbors of North Korea. Is South Korea doing enough to confront human rights violations in North Korea?

**Amb. Jay Lefkowitz:** It is a very good question and it is a question that I think can certainly be discussed with our panel later on. I had, when I was in South Korea, some very good productive discussions with members of the South Korean government. I think certainly the people who are in the government in South Korea now know frankly far better than most of us here what it means to live under an autocratic regime. They understand the blessing of freedom. They understand the blessing of democracy in free markets. They also have direct concerns given the close proximity of the North Korean military to their population centers.

I would be the first to say that I'm not sure that from a tactical approach, they are doing everything that I would be recommending to them. I think their overall long-term objective which is a united, free and peaceful and productive peninsula, is the same as ours, but I think it is important for the South Korean government to listen carefully to the people in South Korea who I heard from when I was there, who have made it very clear that human rights issues are a significant concern and should be very much front-and-center on the agenda in that country.

**Sin U Nam:** Sin U Nam from North Korea Freedom Coalition. Maybe this is a follow up question, and also this may be an off-mark question but the work on this has gone on for over five years now and in my opinion -- and I told you so through a letter and at the meeting I went to with you -- the key problem is South Korea because they are doing everything against the human rights issue.

For example, everyone who is here, they abstained or stood away from the UN resolution on North Korea human rights issue. As of two days ago, they said they are sending \$20 million to the WHO. Even North Korean Free Radio, they have been doing nothing but harassing them and short of closing the station. They have been making it very difficult for the defectors. They have a policy of not accepting their own refugees, their own citizens into South Korea. And I know you asked for meetings with top level government officials over there. Those meetings did not happen when you were there.

Do you have or the State Department, do they have any kind of a contingency policy in case South Korea -- who is entirely the opposite direction -- decides to keep feeding the money to the dictator, keep feeding the military and even on the human rights issue. Everything is a human rights issue. I can number thousands of human rights violations. But even your own story being played right now in South Korea, nobody attends from the government, nobody attends from the majority party. So do you have a contingency plan in case you cannot work with the South Korean government, work alone or put them in line or something?

**Amb. Jay Lefkowitz:** At this point I think that we are working with the South Korean government. Again, there may be somewhat different tactical approaches but I think we are working with them, and I think fundamentally the people of South Korea are the most important group with respect to helping to bring about change in North Korea. They have direct relationships. They are united by a common culture, a common land mass and indeed many, many, many South Koreans have first degree relatives in North Korea.

My sense from having visited South Korea is that there is a strong degree of support. Indeed, I would imagine that there would be very strong support from the South Korean population for their government to join in the resolution at the United Nations this fall. And so I'm confident that working together with the South Koreans, we can bring about the kind of opening that we need. Thank you very much.

**Nicholas Eberstadt:** Ambassador, thank you very much for joining us this afternoon. We very much appreciate your presence and your insights.

*For more information, please contact Christian Whiton (202-647-1185).*