



Executive Memorandum

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RUSHING TO NORTH KOREA IS A MISTAKE FOR PRESIDENT CLINTON

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The Korean peninsula has seen some significant events this year. In June, President Kim Dae Jung of South Korea met with North Korea's Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang, where the two leaders took steps toward the eventual reunification of the two Koreas. For his bold trip, President Kim was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Now another president is planning to visit Pyongyang, but President Bill Clinton's trip in November is not likely to advance the cause of peace in the region. Instead, it will bestow legitimacy on a repressive regime that deploys massive numbers of troops, tanks, and artillery along the border with South Korea; engages in terrorism and harbors terrorists; and regularly reneges on agreements with the United States.

Rather than rushing to North Korea, President Clinton should reaffirm the U.S. defense commitment to the democratic government of South Korea as the best way to ensure the stability of the region.

Frenzied Rush. Presidential state visits, especially those that involve a major shift in policy, should be preceded by many months of careful preparation, but President Clinton's trip to North Korea is going forward in a frenzied rush. A visit to the United States by North Korean special envoy Vice Marshal Cho Myong-nok, originally scheduled for November 9, was hastily moved forward by about a month. And after Cho visited the White House, in uniform, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced that she would visit North Korea to

make arrangements for a visit by President Clinton. North Korea is perhaps the last place that a U.S. President should visit at this time.

North Korean Acts of Terrorism. Kim Jong-il, the current leader of North Korea, has done nothing to repudiate the terror policies of his father, Kim Il-sung, who started the Korean War in 1950. Under Kim Il-sung, North Korea bombed and murdered part of the South Korean cabinet in Burma; provided safe haven to terrorists from the Japanese Red Army who blew up an airliner in 1987; and, over a period of decades, kidnapped women from Japan and citizens from South Korea. Kim Il-sung died in 1994, but the North's policies of terrorism did not stop when Kim Jong-il took over the country.

- Even after Tokyo began to provide financial, fuel, and food aid to the North after 1995, kidnapping apparently continued. Japan believes that agents of the North kidnapped a middle-school girl missing from Niigata, Japan.

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- In September 1996, North Korea tried to send armed agents into South Korea secretly by submarine. When the submarine hit a reef and sank, several North Korean commandoes committed suicide while others killed several South Korean soldiers and fought to the death to avoid capture.
- When Hwang Jang-yap, the number-three man in the North Korean government, defected and sought asylum in the South Korean Embassy in Beijing, Kim Jong-il dispatched security personnel from his Beijing embassy to attempt to kill or kidnap Hwang. The Chinese government stopped the North Korean agents.
- North Korean leaders have refused to renounce the use of terror or kidnapping and have yet to return the Japanese Red Army bombers to Japan for trial.

Enduring Military Threat. The North Korean People's Army continues to deploy some 4,000 tanks, 2,000 armored personnel carriers, 13,000 artillery pieces, and 1,160,000 troops against democratic South Korea. These formidable forces face about half that number of South Korean soldiers and weapons, backed up by 37,000 American troops stationed in the South under the terms of the United States–Republic of Korea alliance. Despite years of famine and economic hardship, with as many as 1 million North Korean citizens perishing from starvation, the Korean People's Army continues to be well-fed and to run robust military exercises. Although North Korea has told foreigners that it might accept a U.S. presence on the peninsula after some form of unification with the South, in internal publications, according to the North Korean newspaper *Rodong Sinmun* for September 27, 2000, North Korea has admitted that its major goal in improving relations with South Korea is

gaining the withdrawal of the U.S. troops.

Importance of Symbolism. There is one more important consideration that should be taken into account. The Middle East peace process has fallen apart, and 17 American sailors were killed in an act of terrorism in Yemen when the USS Cole was blown up. Next month—only one month after the memorial service for the Americans killed in Yemen—is not the time for President Clinton to depart on a visit to North Korea.

The President and the Secretary of State should remember that 50 years ago, in November 1950, the 1st Marine Division and other United Nations forces were fighting for their lives around the Chosin Reservoir (Changjin Reservoir) in North Korea, being badly mauled by attacking Chinese and North Korean forces. Today, even though an armistice is in place, the Korean War is not over, and North Korea's forces remain deployed on a war footing against United Nations, South Korean, and United States forces on the 38th parallel.

The memory of the Americans killed in the Korean War and the memory of the Americans just killed in Yemen demands that President Clinton use memorial services in the United States or South Korea to honor allied and American dead and affirm the U.S. security commitment to the region—not rush to create some new “legacy” with a dictator that could blow up as quickly as the Middle East peace process or the USS Cole.

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