



Engaging North Korea

**BUILDING TOWARD DIALOGUE WITH U.S. GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED
PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE EXCHANGE PROGRAMS**

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Introduction

“Of all the joint ventures in which we might engage, the most productive, in my view, is educational exchange. I have always had great difficulty—since the initiation of the Fulbright scholarships in 1946—in trying to find the words that would persuasively explain that educational exchange is not merely one of those nice but marginal activities in which we engage in international affairs, but rather, from the standpoint of future world peace and order, probably the most important and potentially rewarding of our foreign-policy activities.”

—J. William Fulbright, *The Price of Empire*, 1989

Communication between the United States and North Korea (or Democratic People’s Republic of Korea—DPRK) has almost entirely ceased in the last years of the Obama administration. The administration’s current policy of “strategic patience” has failed to produce diplomatic progress and tensions reached historic heights in the first few months of 2016. Following the failure of the “Leap Day Agreement” in 2012, communication between the U.S. and the DPRK has continued to dwindle and, reportedly, even back channel discussions have ceased following the DPRK’s fourth nuclear test in January 2016. As the Obama administration prepares to leave office and tensions continue to rise, careful consideration should be given to creating the conditions for meaningful dialogue and laying the groundwork for the next administration to stabilize the situation and make significant diplomatic progress in Korea.

Presently, high-level dialogue remains deadlocked over the U.S. priority to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula and the DPRK’s priority to reach a peace agreement to officially end the Korean War. This impasse has permeated all levels of diplomacy and as channels for communication constrict, both U.S. and DPRK officials and bureaucrats lose the ability to communicate effectively, identify political opportunities, and retain institutional memory of successful cross-cultural collaboration with one another. This loss of capacity associated with severing dialogue ultimately manifests as a lack of confidence and trust between the parties, driving a cycle of high tensions and failed accords.

Despite the high-level deadlock between the U.S. and DPRK, several policies exist that may create conditions conducive for dialogue via sustained, lower-level bureaucratic engagement. Through on-the-ground work in the DPRK (discussed below), the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) has identified one such policy that appears particularly suitable for implementation—U.S. government-sponsored people-to-people exchanges with the DPRK. International exchange programs are a time-tested foreign policy tool, and a vast and capable network exists within the U.S. to receive delegations from all over the world. Alumni of these exchange programs tend to excel in their careers and carry with them more nuanced understandings of different cultures, societies, and government systems. History has shown that people-to-people exchanges often precede the normalization of relations between the United States and its adversaries. For example, science diplomacy was a critical strategy to engage the USSR in the years leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall and ping-pong diplomacy paved the way for Nixon to begin normalizing relations with China. Recent examples of steps toward normalization such as in Myanmar, Iran, and Cuba were also preceded by people-to-people exchange programs—albeit in a less dramatic fashion.

It may be no coincidence, then, that diplomacy in Korea remains in a state of arrested development and that the DPRK remains one of the only countries with which the U.S. government does not sponsor people-to-people exchange programs. The cycle of tensions and broken agreements between the U.S. and DPRK has created a pattern of on-and-off diplomatic communication, and has made it difficult for engagement efforts to proceed on a regular and sustained basis. This has deprived the people and governments of both countries of opportunities to better understand the societies and political dynamics of the other—there is no substitute for the firsthand experience and insights that come from regular interaction and communication. While exchange programs sometimes create breakthrough moments such as when the U.S. Table Tennis team visited Beijing in 1971, the real value of exchanges comes from continuous interaction and cooperation. Through sustained lower-level contact, capacity for cross-collaboration is developed and retained, creating the conditions conducive for higher-level progress.

Notably, people-to-people exchanges would not necessarily require the reversal of current policies or stances on high-level dialogue with the DPRK. The recent sanctions legislation passed by the U.S. Congress and the latest U.N. sanctions resolution do not interfere with exchange programs and, according to U.S. and U.N. spokespeople, are not intended to affect ordinary North Koreans. Through a general license issued by the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), exchange programs remain an explicitly protected activity for NGOs—preserving one of the very few remaining channels of communication. Further, OFAC has established practices for approving third party organizations to conduct exchange programs with

sanctioned states on behalf of the U.S. government. As exchanges are almost all conducted via a public-private partnership between the U.S. State Department and private NGOs, OFAC's established procedures could be applied in the case of people-to-people exchanges with North Koreans.

Additionally, higher-level priorities such as nuclear nonproliferation and the peace process are not contradicted by exchange programs either. As noted, exchanges between the U.S. and the USSR took place during tumultuous periods and, despite periods of aggressive public rhetoric and diplomatic stasis, exchanges were carried out in a persistent attempt to break through barriers. Similarly, science exchanges took place with Iran over the course of several high-level negotiations, demonstrating that exchange programs can be effectively delinked from more pressing issues such as nuclear non-proliferation, even as they indirectly contribute to a more conducive environment for such diplomacy over the long run.¹ Further, as the “Asia Pivot” remains a tenant of Obama’s foreign policy, exchange programs throughout the Asia region have expanded with programs such as the Young Southeast Asian Leadership Initiative (YSEALI) and the “100,000 Strong” educational exchange program with China. The administration’s efforts to foster the power of citizen diplomats to strengthen ties with partners and allies in Asia makes a strong internal case for applying similar efforts to the most difficult relationships in the region, including the DPRK.

Conflict on the Korean Peninsula is often considered one of the most intractable situations in the world. However, failures to capitalize on basic policies such as people to people exchanges has created an environment devoid of understanding and fraught with suspicion—conditions that have been brewing since the Korean War ended only in an armistice over six decades ago. While a number of NGOs have been conducting exchanges with the DPRK for years (or, as in the case of AFSC, decades), the private sector lacks the scale, quality of programming, access to professional resources, safety and security measures, and collective expertise that the U.S. State Department and associated private network of exchange NGOs have perfected over the last half- century. Utilizing this network, professional exchanges between the U.S. and DPRK could reach a larger number of individuals and have a deeper impact on relations over a period of several years, laying the groundwork for more successful dialogue in the future. Moreover, the organizations that currently operate in the DPRK have valuable cultural expertise and have established successful modes of working with the DPRK. The U.S. State Department could draw upon the experiences of NGOs to model large-scale exchange programs, and rely upon NGOs to open the channels of communication necessary for selecting participants,

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1 Hampson, Michelle. “Science: Eased Sanctions May Lead to Greater U.S.-Iran Science Collaboration.” AAAS. N.p., 04 Sept. 2015. Web. 31 May 2016.

issuing invitations, and other matters that may be difficult in the nascent stages of an exchange program.

Through a number of discussions held with both U.S. and North Korean professionals and experts, this report assesses the feasibility of U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs with the DPRK. The report also examines existing models of U.S. NGO engagement with the DPRK, programming considerations, North Korean perspectives on exchanges, and U.S. political and policy implications. It recommends that Congress allocate funding to initiate exchanges between the U.S. and DPRK through the International Visitor Leadership Program or a similar mechanism, and for the administration to implement these exchanges on a regular basis. Initial exchanges could be on topics such as medicine, agriculture, or the environment, and U.S. NGOs currently working with the DPRK on these topics could play a role in selecting participants. If these initial exchanges prove successful, there may be sufficient momentum to expand the scope of exchanges appropriately.

Methodology

The authors of this report sought to examine the feasibility of applying current State Department exchange models with North Korea. Based on insights from AFSC's current agricultural assistance program and exchange model, as well as consultations with U.S. and North Korean exchange professionals, the report offers a comprehensive overview of how exchanges could be conducted with North Korea, methods of successful programs, policy implications for enacting exchanges, and lessons learned from analogous situations.

To assess the practicality of institutionalized exchange programs, authors of the report—AFSC's Asia Public Education and Advocacy Coordinator, Daniel Jasper, and the National Committee on North Korea's Senior Program Officer, Daniel Wertz—spoke with professionals (program officers) in the network of private organizations that implement U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs, the Global Ties Network, and the Alliance for International Education and Cultural Exchanges. The authors also spoke to practitioners who have conducted private exchanges with the DPRK or other countries with comparable relations with the U.S. In all, the researchers held discussions with 12 U.S. organizations—five national programming agencies, four community-based members (local exchange NGOs), two advocacy and umbrella organizations, and one science organization that conducts exchanges with the DPRK. These conversations focused on the practicalities and logistics of programming exchanges with North Koreans. Professionals also drew upon past experiences to assess the feasibility of exchanges with the DPRK.

Following the survey of international exchange professionals in the U.S., authors of the report accompanied AFSC's agricultural delegation to the DPRK in May 2016 and had discussions on exchanges with North Korean professionals. Conversations during the delegation's visit were held with AFSC's partners in the DPRK, including past AFSC exchange participants such as farm managers, agriculture scientists, researchers, and government officials, as well as academic administrators and international exchange professionals. In total, the authors talked about exchanges with more than 13 North Koreans. These discussions focused on the concerns raised by U.S. professionals, the impact of past exchange experiences, the practicalities of participating in U.S. exchange programs, the hypothetical receptivity of the DPRK government, and possible initial topics for exchanges such as agriculture and other natural sciences.

Current models of engagement with North Korea

The DPRK presents challenges to efforts at engagement, given its reputation for isolation, volatile international relations situation, and highly complex historical disagreements with the U.S. and others in the region. But despite these obstacles, there have been several recent and ongoing examples of successful engagement by U.S. NGOs. These efforts provide a foundation that an institutionalized exchange program can build upon. U.S. NGOs provide both models of successful collaboration as well as existing networks of contacts within North Korea that provide channels to initiate U.S. government exchange programs.

American Friends Service Committee

AFSC's work in the DPRK draws upon a unique organizational history that spans more than 35 years. In 1980, AFSC was the first U.S. public affairs organization to enter the country as part of a peace delegation. Following the initial delegation, AFSC continued people-to-people exchange projects by bringing delegations of Americans to the DPRK and North Koreans to the U.S. As famine hit the DPRK in the mid-to-late 1990s, AFSC began providing humanitarian assistance to address basic human needs of North Koreans.

As the humanitarian situation stabilized in the years after the famine, AFSC segued its humanitarian work into an agricultural assistance program. Since 2005, AFSC's program has focused on pragmatic, farm-tested interventions to improve long-term food security and on education and training to address issues of practical concern to Koreans. AFSC currently works in partnership with four cooperative farms, the Academy of Agricultural Sciences, and Kye Ungsang College of Agriculture.

The success of these partnerships is demonstrated by two AFSC sponsored projects—a greenhouse project and a plastic tray project. AFSC has provided its partners with training in greenhouse management via annual exchange tours to China so that participants may observe Chinese practices in greenhouse cultivation. Farm managers reported that these trips have been some of the most valuable experiences in working with AFSC as they are able to immediately apply lessons learned in China to their greenhouses in the

DPRK. Greenhouses are not subject to state quotas, meaning that produce can be used to generate extra income. Accordingly, farm managers report that as a result of these exchanges farmers have become increasingly adept at producing more vegetables for local markets as well as planning ahead for which crops are best to grow and sell in different seasons.

AFSC's partners have had considerable success in using plastic trays for seedling preparation as well. Used in the cultivation and transplant of seedlings, plastic trays can increase yields in a variety of crops, such as rice and corn, by up to 10 percent, and this technology was first introduced to AFSC's partners in 2007 on a study tour to China. Since the initial exchange on which the farm managers saw plastic trays, the technology has been adopted nationwide. AFSC continues to support this project and its spread throughout the DPRK.

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A man holds a plastic tray on roadside propaganda in the DPRK. Trays were first introduced to AFSC's partners in 2007.

The success of these projects underscores the potential impact of exchanges with North Koreans, since an organization with limited resources such as AFSC has had the ability to affect state policy via professional exchanges. These exchanges have not only improved the lives of ordinary Koreans, but have supported national agricultural reform efforts as well.

Farm managers consistently cite the “sincerity” of AFSC as being the bedrock of such a successful partnership. AFSC's partners note that the exchange programs in China focused on issues of practical concern to them and that AFSC staff worked diligently to provide relevant and meaningful resources to support their work. Furthermore, AFSC's exchange planning is responsive to the needs and requests of farm managers, demonstrating a genuine interest in their success rather than a predetermined agenda.



Figure 2: Soil Scientists from the University of Missouri and North Korea inspect the soil in rural Missouri, 2011

University of Missouri

Building on AFSC's existing contacts in the country, the University of Missouri (UM) began working with scientists from the DPRK's Academy of Agricultural Sciences (AAS) in 2000. Initial exchanges engaged North Korean animal scientists, and focused on issues related to animal nutrition and disease control.² In 2011, UM hosted a team of four North Korean scientists from AAS for a three-week academic program on soil science. According to follow-up conversations with the North Korean scientists involved, as well as meetings with North Korean collective farm managers, this workshop led North Korea to significantly change its practices in soil testing at a national level, helping to make for a more effective agriculture policy.

American Association for the Advancement of Science

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) has a long history of promoting international scientific exchanges, including exchanges between the U.S. and countries with which it has difficult relations. AAAS's work in North Korea has included conferences and projects related to tuberculosis control, reforestation, and the environment.

2 C. Jerry Nelson, "Development Cooperation in the DPRK Compared with Other Developing Countries"

However, the most sustained project has been a partnership between AAAS, the UK's Royal Society, and the DPRK's Pyongyang International Information Centre of New Technology and Economy (PIINTEC) to research volcanic activities at Mt. Paektu, a volcano on the border of North Korea and China. This research has had a clear practical purpose—to assess the prospects of a major eruption—and has also enabled a sustained scientific inquiry into the unusual geological history of the volcano. The project has led to a month-long trip to the UK for a small team of North Korean scientists as well as a published scientific paper co-authored by Western and North Korean scientists, and has potentially opened the door for future sustained scientific engagement.

Past success in person-to-person diplomacy

It is hard to quantify the value provided by person-to-person exchanges between Americans and citizens of countries with poor relations with the United States. Though visitors in formal programs typically provide immediate feedback via surveys, the ultimate influence of these exchanges is not easily measured. Visitors in fields such as science or medicine may find their intellectual horizons expanded, but lack the resources to test or implement new ideas upon returning home. Person-to-person diplomacy with individuals from closed societies may also help improve their individual perceptions of the United States (and lead to more nuanced and informed views among their American interlocutors, as well), but it is difficult to predict when and how attitude changes at an individual level might translate into broader policy changes and lead to improvements in their countries' relations with the United States.

Nonetheless, there are many examples demonstrating that person-to-person diplomacy with closed societies can have a lasting impact, creating new channels of communication and subtly reshaping the environment surrounding the big-picture political issues, while also addressing apolitical issues of mutual concern. Such exchanges have helped send a signal that the U.S. is not hostile to the people of a targeted state, but has only sought changes in the behavior of their government. Almost every instance of the U.S. improving relations with a once-antagonistic state has been preceded by an expansion of exchanges and contact. While person-to-person diplomacy is only one component in the foreign policy toolkit, it is a low-cost, low-risk instrument that has yielded high dividends on several occasions.

Soviet Union

Even at the height of the Cold War, the United States and Soviet Union engaged in person-to-person diplomacy in fields such as education, science, and medicine. Nongovernmental engagement addressed issues that were in the mutual interests of the two superpowers, forged networks and contacts across different segments of U.S. and Soviet society, and ultimately helped contribute to the desire for greater openness within the Soviet Union.

Some aspects of this cooperation took place on a large scale, with clear global ramifications. From 1966 to 1980, scientists from the U.S. and Soviet

Union cooperated under the framework of the World Health Organization to eradicate smallpox globally. Similarly, Soviet and American scientists collaborated closely in the development and mass production of the Sabin vaccine, the global standard for the prevention of polio. Nongovernmental dialogues on international security and arms control complemented or influenced intergovernmental negotiations on arms control at several points in the Cold War.

Some aspects of the U.S.-Soviet academic and cultural exchanges did not necessarily have an immediate impact, but proved highly effective in the long-term. In the first year that Soviet students were allowed to travel to the U.S. for a year of graduate studies, four studied at Columbia University. One of these students, Alexander Yakovlev, would eventually become a close advisor to Mikhail Gorbachev and an architect of glasnost. Another, Oleg Kalugin, worked his way up the ranks of the Soviet intelligence apparatus after returning from Columbia, becoming the KGB's most prominent internal critic in the 1980s.

China

“Ping-pong diplomacy” famously played a role in ending the long estrangement between the U.S. and China, and the 1972 Shanghai Communique pledged both sides to facilitate exchanges in “such fields as science, technology, culture, sports and journalism, in which people-to-people contacts and exchanges would be mutually beneficial.”³ These exchanges created opportunities for routine contact between the two governments, which worked together to facilitate the exchanges organized by American NGOs. Initial academic exchanges focused on the hard sciences—Beijing’s primary area of interest—which created openings for later exchanges in the social sciences and humanities. The small-scale exchanges that took place in the 1970s paved the way for a rapid increase in person-to-person contacts after the normalization of relations, and the creation of a complex transnational network of personal and professional ties between the two countries.⁴

South Africa

In 1976, a South African politician, F.W. de Klerk, traveled to the United States through the International Visitor Program. As a profile in *The New York Times* tells it, his travel to the U.S. had a strong impact on his thinking,

3 “Joint Communique of the United States of America and the People’s Republic of China,” February 28, 1972, <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/communique01.htm>

4 Kathlin Smith, “The Role of Scientists in Normalizing U.S.-China Relations: 1965–1979,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 866 (December 1998).

and “convinced him that race relations could not be left to run their course.”⁵ Thirteen years after his visit, de Klerk became the last Apartheid-era president of South Africa, playing a crucial role in the negotiations that led to the peaceful dismantlement of the Apartheid system.

Cuba

In the decades prior to the recent thaw in U.S.-Cuba relations, academic and cultural exchanges between the two countries took place on a stop-and-go basis, according to changing travel regulations and political moods. Before the reopening of diplomatic relations with Cuba, a modest number of Cubans traveled to the U.S. for exchange programs on topics including entrepreneurship and grassroots activism; in 2014 a total of 49 Cubans traveled to the U.S. on J-1 visas for cultural exchanges.⁶ During his 2016 trip to Havana, President Obama announced plans for the U.S. to greatly scale up such exchanges. In a press conference during his visit, one young Cuban woman who had previously traveled to the U.S. under a State Department-sponsored exchange initiative promoting entrepreneurship expressed the impact that the program had for her:

What started as a T-shirt shop has become a project with 14 employees, and it is creating over 25 products ... So we've been having business training, and that's essential for us. That has changed our lives and the way we think of our own project, which began as a project and now is a company. We do have many expectations for the future and for what we can do with young people in our township in Old Havana also.⁷

Myanmar

U.S. exchange programs with Myanmar began on a small scale several years prior to the start of the country's political reform process, and have been ramped up in tandem with increased political engagement between Washington and Naypyitaw. An American Center offering an extensive library and computer area opened in Rangoon in 2005, quickly becoming

5 Christopher S. Wren, “How Far Will De Klerk Go?” New York Times, November 19, 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/19/magazine/how-far-will-de-kerk-go.html?pagewanted=all>

6 “Building Bridges with Cuba,” U.S. Department of State, J-1 Visa Visitor Exchange Program, September 17, 2015, <https://j1visa.state.gov/building-bridges-with-cuba/>

7 “Remarks by President Obama at an Entrepreneurship and Opportunity Event – Havana, Cuba,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 21, 2016, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/03/21/remarks-president-obama-entrepreneurship-and-opportunity-event-havana>

a major draw for Burmese seeking to learn about American culture.⁸ The Fulbright Program, offering Burmese students the opportunity to study in the U.S., was reinstated in 2007 after a long suspension. As relations between the U.S. and Myanmar began to warm, the pace of both U.S. government and NGO-sponsored exchanges picked up, including through educational and professional exchanges as well as through medical and scientific exchanges.

Iran

The first major cultural diplomacy initiatives between the U.S. and post-revolutionary Iran took place during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005). In 1998, for example, a U.S. wrestling team participated in Iran's Takhti Cup, the first delegation of Americans officially representing their country to visit Iran since 1979; the team was warmly received in Tehran, and was invited to visit the White House after their return. These initial efforts faltered after the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, but were soon revived, with hundreds of Iranian professionals traveling to the U.S. under the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) and other U.S. government-sponsored programs. A U.S. diplomatic outpost established in Dubai in 2006, the Iran Regional Presence Office, played an important role in facilitating these exchanges, as did nongovernmental actors.⁹

Recent person-to-person diplomacy with Iran has taken place across a wide range of fields, from science, to sports, arts, and music. Iranian delegations sponsored by the IVLP have included doctors and entrepreneurs, as well as a group of folk musicians who jammed with American jazz musicians at a Baptist church in Kentucky,¹⁰ and a delegation of museum specialists who met with the curators and archeologists at the National Gallery, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Guggenheim.¹¹ American teams continue to compete in wrestling tournaments in Iran, which provides a unique form of U.S. outreach to the sport's working class fan base. The American Association for the Advancement of Science has also hosted delegations of Iranian scientists

Person-to-person diplomacy has enabled the creation of new ties between the people of the U.S. and Iran; if any progress toward the normalization of relations between the two countries is possible in the wake of last year's nuclear deal, person-to-person diplomacy will likely play an important facilitating role.

8 Jane Perlez, "American Center in Myanmar Provides a Lifeline of Information," *New York Times*, November 23, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/23/world/asia/23iht-myanmar.3647680.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

9 Ramin Asgard and Barbara Slavin, "US-Iran Cultural Engagement: A Cost Effective Boon to US National Security," *The Atlantic Council, Iran Task Force*, 2013, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/us_iran_cultural_engagement.pdf

10 "Reflections on the Impact of the International Visitor Leadership Program – Matt Madden," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, no date, <https://eca.state.gov/video/reflections-impact-international-visitor-leadership-program-matt-madden/transcript>

11 Elise Labott, "Iranian Arts Experts Visit Counterparts in the United States," *CNN*, February 27, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/02/27/us/iranian-arts-specialists/>

for professional conferences on topics such as addressing air pollution in large cities.¹²

The Iranian government has had a mixed attitude toward these exchanges, and some Iranian participants have faced punishment or harassment upon their return from the United States. However, person-to-person diplomacy has enabled the creation of new ties between the people of the U.S. and Iran; if any progress toward the normalization of relations between the two countries is possible in the wake of last year's nuclear deal, person-to-person diplomacy will likely play an important facilitating role.

¹² Norman P. Neureiter, "The U.S.-Iran Symposium on Air Pollution in Megacities," American Association for the Advancement of Science, February 27, 2014, <http://www.aaas.org/report/Iran-airpollution>

Programming people-to-people exchanges with the DPRK

As the State Department has been conducting regular exchange programs since the 1940s, exchange programs are now conducted with remarkable regularity and scale. According to the Bureau of Education and Cultural Exchange (ECA), 55,000 individuals participate in State Department sponsored exchanges annually. ECA operates a public-private partnership with a network of organizations across the country in order to receive delegations of ordinary citizens from around the world. Professionals in the network interact with participants from every walk of life and understand how to match participant interest with the local community and resources to drive impact. According to the Alliance for International Education and Cultural Exchange, “97% of exchange students from Muslim-majority countries said their year in the U.S. gave them deep, nuanced, and more favorable views of American people and culture.” Program officers from the U.S. exchange network reported that while experiences with participants were not always pleasant, most visitors changed their attitude by the end of the exchange period. One program officer estimated that around 60 percent of “openly hostile” participants contact the officer with a written apology and/or explanation of how the program changed their minds after returning home. These results speak to the professional nature of those that conduct exchanges and the lasting impact exchanges can have on participants.

Notably, most exchange programs continue to operate in countries with active or ongoing conflict such as Iraq and Ukraine. Program officers in the exchange network indicated that international incidents or turns in foreign relations did not typically impact exchange programs with the concerned states. Given the tumultuous relations between the U.S. and DPRK, people-to-people exchanges offer a foreign policy tool with consistent and meaningful impact. Nonetheless, there are a number of practical issues to address in order to successfully carry out U.S. government exchange programs with the DPRK. Below you will find assessment of how to address the most significant concerns of initiating and maintaining international exchanges between the U.S. and DPRK.

According to the Alliance for International Education and Cultural Exchange, “97% of exchange students from Muslim-majority countries said their year in the U.S. gave them deep, nuanced, and more favorable views of American people and culture.”

Type of exchange program

As authors were not able to assess the feasibility of conducting government-to-government exchanges in the DPRK, this report examines only exchange projects in which North Korean participants would visit the U.S.¹³ While exchanges of Americans to the DPRK may present a productive policy as well, research for this report was limited to the perspective of the U.S. receiving delegations. In this regard, researchers were able to narrow down a selection of current State Department exchange programs that could receive North Korean delegations.

INTERNATIONAL VISITOR LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Perhaps the most viable choice for U.S. State Department sponsored exchanges is the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). IVLP is a well-established program dating back 75 years and the program includes participants from 190 countries. The program is a short-term, professional exchange where delegations of professionals from a wide-range of fields as diverse as neuromuscular diseases, climate change, and agriculture are invited to the U.S. to meet and collaborate with their U.S. colleagues. Given the difficulties of high-level discussions with the DPRK, IVLP offers a mechanism by which Americans and North Koreans can discuss professional and academic concerns in an environment removed from political deadlock. At the same time, the program activates bureaucratic processes in the U.S. and DPRK, building official capacity in bilateral relations.

IVLP projects typically run from several days to three weeks, with three weeks being the most common length of time. Given the level of culture shock North Koreans could be expected to have on entering the country, the three-week period offers participants enough time to acclimate and absorb new information, without completely exhausting participants. Several program officers warned that participants from countries with highly unfavorable views of the U.S. often need more than a few days to have a truly impactful visit. Three weeks was cited by exchange professionals most often as being the appropriate amount of time that would give participants nuanced insights into the U.S. and Americans.

Alumni of IVLP programs have proven to be a class in and of their own as more than 300 current and former heads of state have participated in IVLP. Participants are chosen for their promising outlook in their respective fields and IVLP has proven to be a reliable vehicle to reach the next cohort of top decision makers (see “Participant Selection” below for more). The drawn-

¹³ The authors spent 10 days in the DPRK. Comparatively, researchers conducted interviews in the U.S. over a period of six weeks.

out nature of U.S. and DPRK deadlock suggests that successful high-level dialogue takes foresight and preparation. IVLP offers a method of laying the groundwork necessary for high-level talks by exercising diplomatic capacity to work with the DPRK and cultivate communication between Americans and North Koreans in a wide-range of fields.

REGIONAL AND YOUTH EXCHANGE MODELS

As noted above, exchange programs have featured as an element of the Obama administration's "Pivot to Asia" with programs such as YSEALI. YSEALI is described by the State Department as "Obama's signature program to strengthen leadership development and networking in Southeast Asia."¹⁴ The program includes U.S. educational and cultural exchanges with 18-to-35 year olds from Brunei, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Laos, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The scope of multilateral partnership for YSEALI suggests that regional capacity for operating exchanges spans a fairly broad spectrum of governments including those that the U.S. has had difficult relations with or that have restricted borders such as Laos or Myanmar.

In May 2016, a group of three Nobel laureates visited the DPRK for an educational exchange. The laureates visited Kim Il-sung University, Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, and Kim Chaek University of Technology to give lectures and reportedly found students hungry for knowledge but with a significant lack of access to resources. One encouraging remark from one of the laureates was in regard to the language ability of the students, stating, "The English was striking. In two of the three universities we did not need translation."¹⁵ Given the Obama administration's attention to international youth exchanges, YSEALI provides an excellent format to serve as a possible Northeast Asia regional exchange model for youth that could include university students from the DPRK.

Selecting and inviting participants

Participants for State Department exchanges are often selected by U.S. Embassy staff for professional exchanges such as IVLP, but youth and education exchange participants typically apply for a position in the program. Without a U.S. Embassy in Pyongyang or alternative channels of communication, participant selection presents a significant obstacle. However, several program officers surveyed for this report indicated that it

Given the difficulties of high-level discussions with the DPRK, IVLP offers a mechanism by which Americans and North Koreans can discuss professional and academic concerns in an environment removed from political deadlock.

14 "About YSEALI | Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative." Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative. United States Department of State, n.d. Web. 02 June 2016.

15 Perlez, Jane. "After North Korea Trip, Nobel Laureates Describe Students Eager to Learn." The New York Times. The New York Times, 07 May 2016. Web. 02 June 2016.

is not uncommon for U.S. exchange programs to take place with countries where the U.S. does not have diplomatic ties. Using the public-private model of the State Department exchange network, U.S. officials have often worked with NGOs on the ground to identify and evaluate exchange candidates in a number of similar situations. In one example, a program officer noted that exchange NGOs “had better eyes and ears on the ground than the U.S. Embassy” when initially beginning exchanges with Turkmenistan—a former Soviet Republic that bares resemblance to the DPRK in terms of U.S. access.

Currently, a few U.S. NGOs operate in the DPRK on topics such as agriculture, medicine, humanitarian assistance, wildlife conservation, and other subjects. AFSC is one such example, but other organizations represent significant channels for the State Department to utilize in selecting participants on a wide range of topics as well. With regard to student exchanges, the State Department may be able to partner with the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST)—the first and only private university in the DPRK, established by U.S. citizens in 2010. PUST employs volunteers from all around the world including the United States, offering useful insight into student applications for exchange programs.

Additionally, the authors of this report found that North Korean participants who have participated in exchanges elsewhere felt overwhelmed during their first trip abroad. As a result, participants reported feeling exhausted and unable to retain much information in their first exchange but, during later exchanges, found the trips exceptionally rewarding. Therefore, exchange programs with the DPRK may want to focus, at least initially, on inviting individuals with prior experience abroad to maximize the impact and reduce stress on participants.

Community reactions

The state of relations between the U.S. and DPRK is plagued by historical grievances, vicious public rhetoric, and caricatured media narratives. As a result, public perceptions of North Koreans in the U.S. and of Americans in the DPRK can be extremely negative. However, programming officers and professionals throughout the U.S. international exchange network expressed reassurances that North Koreans would not be more susceptible to harassment or negative local reactions than any other delegation. While some program officers expressed reservations over taking North Korean participants to particular rural areas, all of those surveyed agreed that North Koreans would generally be welcome in these programs. In reference to professional attitudes transcending international relations, one program officer even noted, “I guarantee you the farmer in Iowa wants to meet the farmer from North Korea.”

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Harassment has been reported with exchange participants, but all program officers noted that harassment is rare and particularly rare on professional exchange programs. When incidents do occur, however, they tend to be nonviolent and take place when participants stray from the delegation. Some program officers noted that the State Department “label” offered some protection to the visitors, a luxury that many NGOs conducting private exchanges with the DPRK lack. While no official figures were found on harassment cases with exchange participants, students may require a higher degree of protection as their length of stay is typically much longer than professionals.

One consistent concern raised by program officers was the question of North Korean attitudes toward exchanges and participants that visited “an enemy” country. Consequently, program officers asked how North Korean participants would be treated upon return. After surveying North Korean professionals and exchange alumni, the authors of this report found that alumni of exchange programs excelled in their careers. For example, farm managers who have participated in AFSC exchange programs to China report being “innovators” and “leaders” among their peers. Academics who have participated in exchanges excel in their careers too as they gain access to resources, information, and professional networks in their fields. While some farm managers expressed reservations over visiting the U.S., others expressed a willingness to learn professionally anywhere in the world. Particularly ambitious farm managers even suggested possible areas of exchange topics such as rice cultivation in the U.S. and mechanized farming methods. Furthermore, as in the case of the U.S. exchange network, North Korean professionals who implement exchange programs often carry these skills forward as they advance in their careers—creating and retaining political capacity for future bilateral or multilateral dialogue.

The authors of this report also asked program officers in the U.S. if they would be willing and able to carry out exchange programs with the DPRK. All program officers indicated that they would not only be capable and willing, but particularly interested in programs with the DPRK. One professional noted that organizations within the U.S. international exchange network would be “fighting over these projects” as the North Koreans represent a particularly meaningful exchange.

Themes for professional exchanges

The sensitive nature of U.S.-DPRK relations limits the themes of professional exchange projects to fields that are removed from politics such as public health and the natural sciences. As NGOs currently offer the best channels of communication to North Korean professionals, exchange themes could help augment existing programs by focusing projects on areas NGOs are currently

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working in such as agriculture, science, tuberculosis, and other fields. Issues of mutual concern such as climate change may offer project themes in the future, and domestic priorities such as the DPRK's reforestation efforts may provide other sources of agreeable themes.

Sports and art diplomacy have, like science, often played roles in bridging diplomatic gaps (e.g., "ping-pong" diplomacy with China). In the past, the North Korean Tae Kwon Do demonstration team has visited the U.S., but under the auspices of a NGO-led delegation. The program, however, did not have the aggregated effect of being one project in an ongoing series of projects. Perhaps, then, particular sports exchanges, done annually for special competitions, could be a productive and consistent way to maintain professional exchange programs.

Monitoring and evaluation

Today, most NGOs carry out monitoring and evaluation on their projects and programs, but the efforts of any one NGO pale in comparison to the data that's collected at every level of the U.S. international exchange network. The U.S. State Department conducts monitoring and evaluation (M&E) on alumni attitudes and careers, while network umbrella and advocacy organizations conduct M&E on the economic impact of exchanges. National implementing agencies and local implementing organizations also carry out their own M&E methods to gather program feedback from participants. The accumulative effect of the data collected by the U.S. international exchange network provides a uniquely holistic view of how the policy is performing. The aggregate feedback may offer a quick understanding of how North Koreans respond to various resources and, consequently, allow diplomats to identify mutual priorities. Responding to these priorities would help develop a sincere and mutually beneficial partnership and would develop political capacity to identify opportunities in the future.

"Something's gotta change"

A final question posed to U.S. international exchange professionals was whether, given their professional experience and the state of U.S.—D.P.R.K. hostilities, they thought exchange programs with the DPRK would be a good policy decision. Every professional surveyed stated that they thought it would be a good idea for the U.S. to initiate exchanges with the DPRK and several professionals added, verbatim, the same afterthought: "something's gotta change." Admittedly, these professionals sustain their careers on exchanges and may have an interest in growing exchange programs. However, those interviewed supplied thoughtful and informed insight as to the importance of exchanges. Many professionals indicated that these programs are initiated when embassies or policymakers "take the long view" and understand the

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preparation that's needed to work toward dialogue. One programing officer emphasized that exchanges like IVLP also allow Americans to learn about the delegation's country, which can be of paramount importance in dealing with countries that the U.S. lacks knowledge of such as the DPRK.

Policy impact of people-to-people exchanges with the DPRK

Cost

Another significant reason why people-to-people exchanges are a particularly useful policy tool is the cost effectiveness of running exchange projects. One program officer noted that exchange programs represent a mere “drop in the bucket” of the federal budget and, in FY16, State Department education and cultural exchange programs operated with \$590.9 million of the federal budget. The authors of this report estimate that to include the DPRK in an existing exchange program or to create a new, separate exchange program for North Korea would cost approximately \$2–\$5 million. The estimate is based on the portion of the federal budget dedicated to initiate YSEALI (\$5 million) and other country-specific exchanges that brought the same number of participants.¹⁶ However, if Congress is unable or unwilling to earmark funds for exchanges directly, emergency funds are held within specific program budgets such as IVLP to respond to urgent situations, for example, when tensions and violence flared in Ukraine. As tensions rise on the Korean Peninsula, a good case could be made for using these emergency funds to begin dialogue on, at the very least, basic items such as food security and public health.

Additionally, exchange programs that bring participants to the U.S. also help stimulate local economies and Global Ties reports that the U.S. exchange network has a total economic impact of \$39 million. While only a portion of the total federal budget is awarded to organizations in the exchange network in the form of grants, Global Ties reports that for every \$1 in federal funds, members of the exchange network raise over \$3.52. Exchanges operate in and impact every state and almost every district, indicating a truly national constituency for continued and improved international exchange programs.

¹⁶ “Fulbright Saved from an Unprecedented \$ 30 Million Cut.” Save Fulbright. N.p., 16 Dec. 2015. Web. 02 June 2016.

Sanctions

As noted in the introduction, U.S. bilateral and international sanctions on the DPRK do not expressly prohibit nor discourage people-to-people exchanges, other than those involving sanctioned individuals/entities or in sensitive fields. In fact, the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control's General License No. 5 for the DPRK protects activities related to educational exchanges conducted by U.S. NGOs. While the General License protects private exchange programs, OFAC has also developed approval processes for NGOs working on State Department sponsored exchanges with participants from sanctioned countries. This established practice would be helpful in the beginning phases of U.S. government exchanges with the DPRK as organizations are familiar with the process and would not require any additional capacity to ensure compliance.

The transfer of sensitive technology could also be a primary concern in relation to sanctions. However, through interagency coordination and various levels of security clearances, U.S. State Department-sponsored exchanges simply don't run the risk of transferring sensitive technology to participants. Further, U.S. exchange professionals indicated that science exchanges do not provide "trainings" but rather entail demonstrations or presentations of completed and public work. Consequently, science exchanges focus on current public discourse in their respective fields and not direct instruction.

International incidents and the media

As relations between the U.S. and DPRK are considerably volatile, exchange programs must be able to continue functioning during urgent situations and rapid declines in communication. To ensure participant safety and to avoid international incidents that may further destabilize regional security, programs cannot be prone to frequent and sudden cancellations or early program closures (i.e., while participants are still in the U.S.). However, the U.S. international exchange professionals interviewed for this report indicated uniformly that international incidents or bilateral developments did not impact individual exchange programs. Some exchange professionals did indicate that the number of program cancellations were marginally higher among countries that have poor relations with the United States but that, over time, programs develop a "rhythm" that allows the bureaucratic process to function more smoothly and consistently. Reassuringly, no U.S. exchange professional could recall a professional exchange program that terminated midway through, potentially forcing participants to leave the U.S. early.

Policymakers may be concerned that a U.S. exchange program with the DPRK could become an international incident or spectacle in and of itself. Yet, U.S. exchange professionals indicated that, while some particular

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exchange programs receive a high amount of publicity, most exchange programs operate without much or any press coverage.

Some high-profile incidents have occurred over exchanges, however, almost all reported incidents took place in the participant's home country as some participants have been attacked by non-state actors after local or international press covered their participation. These incidents are rare, though, and related to highly publicized programs or award ceremonies, and almost exclusively occur in countries with active conflicts and/or extremely poor rule of law.

Another significant advantage of the U.S. international exchange network is the ability to disseminate information quickly to members of the network. Many practical concerns could arise in conducting exchange programs with North Koreans such as press coverage, and the network is well-practiced in providing project-specific information such as media sensitivity to the relevant parties. All but one U.S. program officer consulted for this report indicated that, if exchanges were initiated with the DPRK, they felt confident that proper support and information would be provided by the State Department and exchange network to facilitate safe and productive programs—as has been the case for other sensitive exchange projects in the past.

Participants fleeing exchange programs or claiming asylum

A final consideration given to all exchange programs is the possibility that participants from unstable or less developed states may try to claim asylum and/or flee the program in an effort to stay in the United States. Program officers did report very rare incidents of participants attempting to flee the program, however, officers also mentioned that the State Department is able to take prompt action to recover participants after being alerted by local hosts (NGO program officers) when incidents do occur.

Program officers also noted that the few participants who do attempt to flee a program most often have family in the United States and/or are from regions with active conflict or extremely unstable political situations. Given that active combat is not taking place in the DPRK and that no major political transition is currently underway, North Koreans do not necessarily fit the profile of participants who are most likely to flee the program. While some North Koreans have family in the United States, relatives may be a generation or more removed from likely exchange participants and communication between families is undoubtedly minimal. Furthermore, as public North Korean views toward the U.S. are extremely unfavorable, it's highly unlikely participants would feel comfortable enough navigating American culture to the point that they would flee the program.

Recommendation and conclusion

The situation on the Korean Peninsula has been one of the most intractable conflicts in recent history and, with communication currently deteriorating, solutions to stabilize the situation are in short supply. High-level dialogue will likely remain deadlocked for the remainder of Obama's tenure. The Obama administration remains committed to prioritizing the DPRK's nuclear program, while the DPRK continues to indicate that a peace treaty or agreement must precede nuclear disarmament. Meanwhile, communication between the two countries remains almost exclusively in the "track 2" realm with NGOs acting as the primary bridge between the two countries. Official capacity to work with one another suffers from the lack of communication, and progress in higher-level dialogue suffers from the lack of official capacity to identify political opportunities, interpret intentions, and generally collaborate across the American-North Korean cultural divide. Given the deep rift between governments, policymakers need to seek intermediate steps toward building official capacity and institutional knowledge for working with one another to lay the foundations to successful high-level dialogue in the future.

Government-sponsored people-to-people exchanges offer one such intermediate step toward laying the groundwork for meaningful diplomatic breakthroughs. Exchange programs are an effective foreign policy tool that have been proven to work for the United States in some of the most challenging foreign policy dilemmas, including with the U.S.S.R. and with China, prior to normalizing relations. Furthermore, within Obama's own tenure, people-to-people exchanges have proven to be vital bridges in diplomatic breakthroughs such as with Myanmar, Cuba, and Iran. Obama made exchange programs a core aspect of the "Asia Pivot" with programs like YSEALI and the "100,000 strong" educational exchange program with China—indicating a strong appreciation for exchanges within the Obama administration.

The merits of exchange programs have been widely known among policymakers and diplomats for quite some time and exchange programs are seldom called into question once initiated. However, discussions on whether or not to establish exchange programs are often fraught with logistical concerns, worries over "diplomatic signaling," and other arguments that ultimately prove unfounded. Despite the fact that the DPRK represents one of the United States' most difficult bilateral relationships with almost

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no official or backchannel communication between governments, several channels do exist in the private sector such as AFSC and other NGOs that can work in partnership with the U.S. government to identify participants and help facilitate exchanges. This public-private model is not a new suggestion but, in fact, the very manner in which all exchange programs function. In every comparable situation to the DPRK, on-the-ground NGOs in foreign countries served as the conduit to launch and implement these programs. The same mechanism is available in the DPRK, yet remains unutilized by the U.S. State Department.

Worries over “diplomatic signaling” and the idea that low-level exchange programs may undermine negotiating power—or that exchanges indicate a tacit recognition of the government with which the U.S. conducts exchanges—prove an invalid concern as well. Exchanges have taken place during many periods of negotiations and periods in which the U.S. did not recognize the government in power. Most recently, exchange programs were conducted between the U.S. and Iran during the multilateral discussions on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).¹⁷ Far from signifying the United States’ recognition of Iran’s nuclear program, the exchanges only served to foster desire among ordinary Iranians to return to the “international community,” exercise diplomatic procedures and coordination, and cultivate a growing constituency for a successful, lasting agreement in both countries.

Logistics can be a challenge for any international exchange program and, as participants arrive every day from all over the world to participate in U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs, the U.S. remains one of the most capable countries of successfully carrying out these programs. Establishing exchange programs can often present the most challenging period in terms of logistics, but professionals from around the U.S. indicated that these initial problems rarely persist once routines are established and programs occur with regular frequency. In the case of the DPRK, the authors of this report found that no logistical concern presented an insurmountable challenge and that past examples provide practical roadmaps for initiating exchanges with the DPRK.

Notably, legislation in recent years regarding the DPRK has continuously increased funds to establish communication with North Koreans, including several significant broadcasting efforts. However, these efforts miss a final and important leg of an effective communication strategy—face-to-face engagement. Without face-to-face engagement, dialogue becomes monologue and important opportunities for Americans to learn about North

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17 Ramin Asgard and Barbara Slavin, “US-Iran Cultural Engagement: A Cost Effective Boon to US National Security,” The Atlantic Council, Iran Task Force, 2013, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/us_iran_cultural_engagement.pdf

Koreans are missed. Without interpersonal interaction, North Koreans are unlikely to listen or trust faceless American voices originating from far-off radio towers.

The authors of this report have sought to assess the feasibility of U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs by examining current State Department exchange models, speaking with U.S. and North Korean experts and professionals, reviewing the history associated with exchange programs, and participating in a delegation to the DPRK. At the conclusion of the assessment, the authors found a clear and recommended path for the U.S. government to initiate and maintain exchange programs with the DPRK. Existing programs such as IVLP provide practical mechanisms by which exchanges could take place and NGOs currently operating in the DPRK may be able to augment their work by suggesting participants and topics for programs. Furthermore, levers to establish a program exist for both Congress and the administration, and funding for the program could be shared from sources such as the “emergency funds” for IVLP programs. Congress could also consider allocating additional funds for an exchange program with the reauthorization of the North Korean Human Rights Act which will likely contain measures to increase funding for broadcasting and communication methods as well.

As diplomatic deadlock persists and the situation in Korea inches closer to conflict, policymakers have a responsibility to utilize a spectrum of foreign policy tools to seek progress. Indeed, as William Fulbright is quoted at the start of this report, “...educational exchange is not merely one of those nice but marginal activities in which we engage in international affairs, but rather, from the standpoint of future world peace and order, probably the most important and potentially rewarding of our foreign-policy activities.” From this perspective, the failure to initiate and maintain people-to-people exchanges with the DPRK may be one of the largest oversights of Obama’s policy toward the country. Given the risk associated with active conflict in Korea, the general geopolitical importance of the DPRK, and the Obama administration’s propensity for exchange programs (both regionally and globally), people-to-people exchange programs present a familiar, safe way forward.

In every comparable situation to the DPRK, on-the-ground NGOs in foreign countries served as the conduit to launch and implement these programs. The same mechanism is available in the DPRK, yet remains unutilized by the U.S. State Department.

About AFSC

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that promotes lasting peace with justice, as a practical expression of faith in action. Drawing on continuing spiritual insights and working with people of many backgrounds, we nurture the seeds of change and respect for human life that transform social relations and systems.

AFSC has nearly a century of experience building peace in communities worldwide. Founded in the crucible of World War I by Quakers who aimed to serve both humanity and country while being faithful to their commitment to nonviolence, AFSC has worked throughout the world in conflict zones, in areas affected by natural disasters, and in oppressed communities to address the root causes of war and violence. In 1947, AFSC was a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, on behalf of all Quakers for our work “... from the nameless to the nameless....”

From our experience, we know that peacemaking requires more than merely advocating against one war or another. Real peace is more than the absence of war. Rather, we need to change the culture, situations, and systems that lead to violence.

AFSC knows that miracles can happen when we build the capacity for peace person by person, community by community. When people understand the terrible consequences of violence and witness realistic alternatives, they come together as a powerful force to address the underlying causes and lay the foundation for lasting peace.

“Of all the joint ventures in which we might engage, the most productive, in my view, is educational exchange. I have always had great difficulty—since the initiation of the Fulbright scholarships in 1946—in trying to find the words that would persuasively explain that educational exchange is not merely one of those nice but marginal activities in which we engage in international affairs, but rather, from the standpoint of future world peace and order, probably the most important and potentially rewarding of our foreign-policy activities.”

—J. William Fulbright, *The Price of Empire*, 1989