

Regional Fears about DPRK Refugee Flows: Significant Trends from Other Cases, their Relevance to Korea, and Lessons Learned

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Abstract: This paper makes use of existing research on refugees, research on North Korea and findings from my field research with North Koreans resettled to Seoul and Tokyo since 2005. It is difficult to forecast future refugee flows whether in a peaceful unified Korea, or in two genuinely democratic and free but independent states such as we see in Northern Ireland and the Republic, or in the case of war, but if we are planning a long-term strategy there are lessons from other cases that may become relevant for the future of Korea depending on the type of transformation that occurs. I focus on several lessons for the long-term from other cases: remittances, return migration and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Introduction

According to a 2009 report by the US-Korea Institute at SAIS (Thompson and Freeman 2009), China and the region, are preparing for a “flood” or “trickle-to-a-flood” of refugees from North Korea in the case of regime collapse, or some similar scenario which causes significant internal changes. Thompson and Freeman’s report is not alone in framing North Korean refugee movements as a “flood” – in fact many documents from China, South Korea and the United States frequently use this phrase without any empirical data, in fact this “flood” is based on pure assumption. This paper shifts the discussion of refugees from a focus on China, South Korea or the US, to a focus on North Korea itself and how significant internal government changes will likely impact on migration within the country as current global trends, and regional geopolitical structures strongly indicate that the vast majority of migration will be internal, and this provides its own set of major humanitarian and security issues.

This paper makes use of existing research on refugees, research on North Korea¹ and findings from my field research with North Koreans resettled to Seoul and Tokyo since 2005. It is difficult to forecast future refugee flows whether in a peaceful unified Korea, or in two genuinely democratic and free but independent states such as we see in Northern Ireland and the Republic, or in the case of war, but if we are planning a long-term strategy there are lessons from other cases that may become relevant for the future of Korea depending on the type of transformation that occurs. I focus on several lessons for the long-term from other cases: remittances, return migration and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Using the existing literature on refugees and migrants as my guide, it is my view that a sudden change or conflict on the Korean peninsula may not produce refugee flows in great excess to what we have already seen.² Instead we are far more likely to see increased return-migration patterns along the Sino-Korean border and internally displaced persons (IDP) in the North. Depending on the nature of the sudden change or conflict, IDPs may also be present in South Korea. It is my view that in the *long-term* both Koreas will invariably benefit from projects directed at remittance support, return migration, and strategies to provide the necessary social, economic and political support for would-be-refugees and IDPs such that they self-select to remain in the North.³ The ideal way to stem the flow of refugees is to remove the causal factors of their migration wherever possible. Therefore, a *long-term* plan for strategic infrastructure and economic assistance for a newly-fallen North Korean state will be pivotal in stemming the flow of refugees and ensuring decreased numbers of IDPs.

Lessons Learned and Trends from other Cases:

“Mass” refugee flows are identified as anything above 10,000 persons. There are several types of refugee generating situations. These can be classified as resulting from:

¹ Robinson, Courtland. “North Korea: Migration Patterns and Prospects” CSIS & USC Korea Project: Planning for the Long Term. August 20-21, 2010.

² For different scenarios and possibilities, see Thompson, D. and Freeman, C. (2009). Flood Across the Border: China’s Disaster Relief Operations and Potential Response to a North Korean Refugee Crisis. Washington, CD: US-Korea Institute, Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies, for a counter argument stating there will be mass refugee flows into China.

³ After Weiner, Myron. “Bad Neighbors, Bad Neighborhoods: An Inquiry into the Causes of Refugee Flows” in International Security Vol. 21, No. 1 (Summer, 1996), pp. 5-42

- a.) A government fails to protect minority populations from attacks by the general population. (Non-ethnic conflict)
- b.) A government is under attack, by armed groups seeking power (Inter-state wars)
- c.) Conflicts between states or populations in war against colonial ruler. (Anti-colonial wars)
- d.) A government is involved in the persecution of their own citizens whether ethnic minorities, dissident individuals or social classes. (Non-Ethnic or Ethnic-conflict)
- e.) Migration to deal with the consequences of drought, flood, famine, economic and environmental disaster. (Flights from repressive authoritarian regimes)⁴

North Korean's fall into the final two classifications of refugee generating situations, namely "non-ethnic conflict" and "flight from repressive regime". In the 1990s, the vast majority of people were migrating out of the North because of famine, increasingly in the 2000s it is a response to the socio-economic crisis resulting from the inadequacy of the government itself and political persecution. In 1969 the majority of refugees worldwide were in this classification, coming from 15 different countries.⁵ Increased numbers of refugees fled authoritarian regimes after their collapse because they were able to do so. However by the 1990s, when North Koreans began to out-migrate, global numbers of refugees fleeing similar states constituted only 3% of their former number and they came from only two countries. The causes of North Korean migration are anachronistic to causes of contemporary refugee flows, which are now far more related to inter-state wars and ethnic conflicts.⁶ That being said, a key point of potential resemblance is with the collapse of communist regimes in Europe. At that time, the numbers of refugees increased because people were able to move *and* they had somewhere to go.

The Need for Good Regional Neighbours:

Eastern Europeans benefited from the lifting of border exit controls and visa restrictions. Many of these refugees were discontented with the transition to capitalist or free market economies and were keen to take advantage of their proximity to the West. For North Koreans two stubborn geographic factors act as a bottleneck to transit flows: China and the DMZ. Even unguarded, or with restrictions removed, the DMZ and the Civilian Control Zone (CCZ) near its southern boundary is

⁴ Weiner 1996, 9.

⁵ 4,252,000 persons from 15 countries. In the 1990s the number was 132,000 from 2 countries (See Weiner 1996, 12).

⁶ Weiner 1996.

impassable for large numbers of migrants because it is the most heavily mined tract of land in the world.⁷ This physical barrier ensures vast numbers of North Koreans will either cross into China or remain inside the North as internally displaced persons. China is unwavering in its harsh treatment of North Korean “economic migrants” and there is no sign of change in the future.⁸ North Korean’s do not have the luxury of accessing other territories as easily as their former communist comrades in the past. While they have proximity to booming capitalist nations, they lack the legal means to achieve safe exit in any significant number. Furthermore, it is as yet inconclusive whether the majority population of North Korea is keen to take advantage of their proximity to South Korea and China or whether, as return-migration from the Sino-Korean border seems to suggest, they are more interested in taking the benefits of capitalism and returning home.

Internally Displaced Persons:

During the Korean War there were approximately 2.9 million internally displaced persons, 900,000 of who were from the North moving South.⁹ This was due to several factors of geography, where physical limits made movement out of the country impossible; culture also played a role which combined loyalty to family and territory with a fear of foreign countries. Similar limitations of geography and cultural ties face North Koreans today, not only in terms of passing into China but also in terms of coming to South Korea.

Contexts that produce refugees also produce internally displaced persons. Often the latter is in much greater number. Globally IDPs are on the rise, such that aggregates are greater than refugees. IDPs are separated from family, community and other sources of social support. They often congregate in camps, public buildings or urban centres which increase their vulnerability to disease, illness, sexual and physical violence and detention. Globally, the highest numbers of IDPs are found in DR Congo where 1.7 million were displaced by fighting between the militia and Congolese forces. In Zimbabwe in the 1980s and 1990s rigorous land reforms aimed at redistributing arable land led to an estimated

⁷ See Landmine Monitor Report 2004, p. 1022 Available at: <http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/2004/> Last accessed July 19, 2011.

⁸ Estimates of the number of North Korean’s in China is anywhere from 20,000 to 400,000 Haggard, Stephen and Marcus Noland 2009 “The food situation in North Korea too early to break out the champagne” Asia Pacific Bulletin, East West Centre, no.27, Available at <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/CJAL-7NYRGD?OpenDocument>. Last Accessed July 21, 2011. And also see, Haggard and Noland 2008 “Famine in North Korea Redux?” working paper East-West Working Paper Economics Series, no. 97, October. East-West Centre Honolulu. Available at www.petersoninstitute.org/publications/wp/wp08-9.pdf. Last Accessed July 21, 2011.

⁹ Lee, Luke 1996 T. Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees: Toward a Legal Synthesis? Journal of Refugee Studies Vol. 9, No. 1. pp.27-42.

700,000 IDPs. In the Sierra Leone rebel war of 1991, 1 million were displaced. IDPs are covered by the laws of the country where they reside which can seriously curtail the impact and efforts of aid agencies in providing necessary relief.

Given the negligence of the DPRK government in facilitating aid distribution, access and assessment, it is likely that sudden conflict or other major change in the North will result in a failure to protect the rights of IDPs, making them more vulnerable.¹⁰ Within the global trend of IDPs is perhaps where the North Korean case will likely find its match. Due to the limits placed on movement out of the North and the limitations of migration by boat, the greatest number of Koreans in need of assistance will be those IDPs in the North. At the moment their number in North Korea is very tricky to quantify.¹¹ The official census in 2008, the last on record, found only 1% of people had moved from one province to another in the last five years.¹² The world over the most common response to famine and food shortage is movement. In 1840s Ireland, millions of Irish were on the move to such an extent that when ships offered passage to America 1.3 million elected to travel. Prior to displacement on an international stage, famine victims first experience displacement on a local, regional and national level in their search for food.

In North Korea, a natural response to famine was movement in search of food and other resources to enhance entitlement to food (through selling, for example). Internal migration has been present since the early 1990s though it has been limited by government requirements for authorization permits. In contemporary times, increased acceptability of bribing has facilitated movement both within North Korea and across the border, though neither is officially sanctioned. In fact, the North's Public Distribution System was the central means of political and economic control in the country – one had to stay put to collect food, shoes, wages and so on. When that failed repeatedly through the 1990s, there was less incentive to stay in one place. Robinson found a movement rate of

¹⁰ Robinson, C. 2000 Famine in Slow Motion: A Case Study of Internal Displacement in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*. 19 (2).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See Robinson 2010, 8 in reference to DPRK Central Bureau Statistics (2008) DPR Korea 2008 Population Census National Report. Pyongyang: Central Bureau of Statistics.

18.7% among the 3000 informants he spoke with in China.¹³ My research indicates a loosening of punishments for border-crossers who traveled to China for reasons of food shortage.¹⁴

Of the thirty North Korean defectors I worked with in Japan and Korea, all had experience of internal migration. Some had devised intricate schemes to get from one end of the country to the other, for example in feigning mental illness so that inspectors would grow weary of asking for a ticket. Orphan children, in particular, were prominent in the IDP population. Anecdotal accounts from my informants suggest children were adept at riding underneath and above the train carriages, getting into small placed adults could not fit and escaping the clutches of ticket police. Invariably, a large number of IDPs will be orphan children.

Refugees and Return Migration:

“Refugees, by nature, have a clear disincentive to return to their home countries, and the seriousness of the threat that made the refugee leave the home country of course affects the possibility of return migration. For some refugees return migration is simply not possible... The situation in the home country may also change to the better, improving return migration opportunities for a large part of the refugees.”¹⁵

Globally, between the end of the Second World War and the late 1980s, return of refugees was not deemed important. The majority of refugees were from communist countries and in this sense the ideological interests of the West supported local integration into host countries in Europe or resettlement to North America. Labor shortages also made this influx of refugees an attractive option for receiving states.¹⁶ Policy was driven by the motivation to integrate and assimilate refugees, rather than considering their return.¹⁷

¹³ Robinson 2010. See also, Robinson, C. 2000 Famine in Slow Motion: A Case Study of Internal Displacement in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*. 19 (2).

¹⁴ Fahy, Sandra (in press). “Ethnographic Contributions to the Study of Famine: North Korean Oral Accounts of Survival” Special Issue on Contemporary Ethnography of Korea at *Journal of Korean Studies*.

¹⁵ Klinthäll, Martin. Immigration, Integration and Return Migration, International Symposium on International Migration and Development. Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat, Turin, Italy, 28-30 June 2006 pp. 3

¹⁶ Chimni, B.S. 1999. 'From Resettlement to Involuntary Repatriation: Towards a Critical History of Durable Solutions to Refugee Problems.' *New Issues in Refugee Research* No.2. pp.2

¹⁷ Black, Richard and Saskia Gent. Working Paper 17 “Defining, Measuring and Influencing Sustainable Return: The Case of the Balkans” Sussex Centre for Migration Research, December 2004 pp. 5, 6.

Despite these high-level policies effecting their lives, migrants, refugees and internally displaced peoples often plan to move temporarily. Most nurture a wish to return to their home country some day. On route, situations often change and people are forced to change plans according to important factors such as family, work, money, health or politics. Routes of migration are often adapted to changing situations, compelling people to move in one direction or another. My research with North Korean defectors reflects this process where decisions evolved according to differing realms of possibility. Ten of the thirty informants explicitly stated they passed into China to get medicine and food, with every intention to return. The decision to continue on toward South Korea was taken when they realized what punishments they would likely face on return to the North. Recent research found a decrease in the number of North Koreans in China.¹⁸ These numbers were reduced from around 75,000 in 1998 to 10,000 in 2009. The decrease in numbers is attributed to several factors: increased migration to South Korea and other countries, lower expectations of what is available in China and tighter border security.¹⁹ The decrease may also be linked to return-migration, though it is not possible to quantify how many North Koreans in China would have willingly taken this choice.

Depending on the enterprising abilities of individuals, there may be economic disincentives to return migration. Countries where refugees arrive are often both politically and economically more stable than the environment they left. A successful integration process requires the ability to access and make use of productive and gainful employment.²⁰ However South Korea has not successfully achieved this goal with the current refugee population which may keep them wedded to underemployment in the South rather than achieving the necessary economic security to enable return to a, hopefully, reformed and improved North.

Return migration to Croatia had a number of different outcomes due largely to inequalities in access to critical resources in the reintegration process.²¹ Return migration often happens when the host country is less developed in economic, democratic or civil rights terms.²² Studies of migration show

¹⁸ Robinson 2010

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ghosh, Bimal 1999. The Promise and Pitfalls of Return Migration. In *International Migration, Development and Integration: Towards a Comprehensive Approach*. Kristof Tamas and Malin Hansson, eds. Stockholm: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

²¹ Blitz, Brad K. 2005. Refugee returns, civic differentiation, and minority rights in Croatia 1991-2004. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 362-386.

²² Kibreab, Gaim 2003. Citizenship Rights and Repatriation of Refugees. *International Migration Review*, vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 24-73.

that an “acclimatization effect” occurs when new settlers grow attached to the labor market and socially attached through the presence of a spouse and children, for example. Through acclimatization, the likelihood of return-migration decreases.²³ These ingredients for adaptation may sound fool-proof, yet the case of North Korean’s in the South shows how easily these ingredients can sour. Despite the South’s heroic efforts in assisting North Korean’s, some are opting to return-migrate.²⁴ If in the long-term there is a development of a more liberalized state in the North, some would chose to return.²⁵ However, the presence of return-migration or the expression of the desire to do so is perhaps nowhere more complex than on the Korean peninsula.

Present day return-migrants fall into three categories, according to Andrei Lankov. First there are about half a dozen spies who have returned to the North after finishing their missions (growing numbers of refugees make it easier to plant spies in the South). Further, refugees with family back home can be easily coopted by the DPRK government for espionage activities. However because refugees are denied access to information of national security concern in the South, the value of espionage is largely neutralized. According to Lankov, “the only area where they can gather meaningful intelligence is the activities of refugee groups from North Korea. Indeed, many of the refugees who have gone missing in recent years once demonstrated suspicious interest in defectors’ groups and organisations.”²⁶

On the other side we have North Koreans who may have come South with notions of society based on TV dramas and found they were horribly disappointed. Experiencing economic disparity between themselves and South Koreans, feeling duped by a celluloid fantasy and earning half of the national average, may have provoked humiliation and even regret. The North, like the South, has powerful family ties of loyalty and duty. In recent years we have seen family defections arranged through large monetary bribes to border guards, the vast majority escape alone. Thus some likely return to reunite with family, perhaps in the hopes of bringing them out.

²³ Constant, Amelie and Douglas S. Massey 2002. Self-Selection, Earnings, and Out-Migration: A Longitudinal Study of Immigrants to Germany. IZA Discussion Paper No. 672.

²⁴ Lankov, Andrei 2010. “North Korean Refugees Head for Home” East Asia Forum. Available at: <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2010/08/20/north-korean-refugees-head-for-home/print/> Last accessed July 21, 2011.

²⁵ I have developed the habit of asking this hypothetical question to every North Korean defector I meet, in my experience only a handful have said they would not return. “Of course, it is home” is a common reply.

²⁶ Lankov 2010

North Korean's in the South are systemically disenfranchised socially, economically and politically. While their numbers have grown over the last ten years, now reaching 21,000, full integration is as yet aspirational. According to a 2011 report by Crisis International, "South Korea is prosperous and generous, with a committed government and civil society, and yet refugees from the North almost all fail to integrate or thrive."²⁷ Part of the problem is due to the make-up of contemporary refugee populations. Gone are the days of high-ranking leaders and MiG pilots, now is the time of the "ordinary" North Korean whose intelligence of the North is deemed less valuable, whose numbers cause economic strain to the South resulting in diminished resettlement packages and greater need for training so that they can contribute to civil society.

Existing literature demonstrates that migrants who left their home country for economic reasons are usually unlikely to go back unless there is some measure of economic improvement for them, or at least the legal entitlement to improve economic security; return migration is not an "inevitable response to political improvements in the home country"²⁸ However, according to longitudinal individual-level data on refugees settled in Sweden from Poland and Chile, return migration was motivated by the development of democracy in the country of origin.²⁹ When material needs are met, and conflict neutralized, psychosocial factors can facilitate return migration flows and permanent resettlement.

In contemporary policy circles addressing issues of migration and refugee return brings up a mix of enthusiasm, alarm and concern. Clearly in the contemporary North – South Korean climate return-migration is not a sober policy option. It is my view that in the long-term, if there is sufficient liberalization in North Korea, the majority of defectors in the South and refugees in China will self-select to return home. Therefore, policy may wish to prepare for this forecast along with preparation for the much larger issue of IDPs. Where conflict and hostility have been neutralized return-migration offers the chance to reestablish family, community and society building.

My research with North Korean defectors indicates that the vast majority would have stayed in the North if only the most meager of life's necessities had been available. Nobody wants to be

²⁷ International Crisis Group "Strangers at Home: North Koreans in the South" Asia Report N.208. July 14, 2011.

²⁸ Klinthäll 2006, 5.

²⁹ Klinthäll, Martin 2003. Return Migration from Sweden 1968-1996. A Longitudinal Analysis. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International. pp.5

compelled to flee their country and no nation finds ease in accepting large numbers of refugees; the best scenario is that the causes of IDPs and mass refugee flows be addressed before they worsen. 34 out of 37 North Koreans I interviewed agreed that if things were liberalized in the North, they would return home.³⁰ However, other scholarship working with significantly larger numbers found starkly different results, though the style of question may have affected the results. Survey research with refugees in China and third countries has revealed that 63% of North Koreans selected South Korea as their destination of “permanent resettlement” with 19 % selecting the US, 14% selecting China and a mere 1% (13 people) selecting North Korea.³¹ Several factors may have led to the choices indicated in these numbers. It is my contention that had the survey questions posed in hypothetical and open style, for instance “Under what conditions would you be willing to return to the North?”, a different set of statistical data would detail the reforms North Koreans wish to see in their country and the conditions under which they would return.

Life in South Korea: Issues in Defector Social Integration and Adaption:

The problems of adaption to South Korean society are increasingly seen in instances of crime, drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence and other psychological issues. Arguably, South Korea has already experienced “mass” migration from North Korea with numbers of defectors reaching 21,000 in this year. If the South were to receive that number in one year alone there would be huge social problems. South Korea has failed in its efforts to deal with North Korean refugees, if studies on psychological issues, adaption rate and the opinions of North Koreans are any indication.³² Not only this, but it seems that South Korean society is growing increasingly indifferent or unfriendly to defectors.³³ In my experience with defectors in Seoul, unification and brethernhood are largely aspirational concepts. Having physical proximity to North Koreans, or any association with them at all is viewed with suspicion and fear.³⁴

³⁰ While the sample of informants was small, thirty in Seoul, five in Tokyo and two in Los Angeles, even those who had lived in North Korean prison camps agreed that if things were different at home, they would return.

³¹ Chang, Haggard and Noland 2008

³² Jeon, Bong-Hee, Moon-doo Kim, Seong-Chul Hong, Na-ri Kim, Chang-In Lee, Young-Sook Kwak, Joo-hyuk Park, Jaehwan Chung, Hanul Chong, Eun-Kyung Jwa, Min-ho Bae, Sanghee Kim, Bora Yoo, Jun-Hwa Lee, Mi-Yeul Hyun, Mi-Jeong Yang and Duk-soo Kim. 2009 “Prevalence and Correlates of Depressive Symptoms among North Korean Defectors Living in South Korea for More than One Year” in *Psychiatry Investigation*. September 6 (3) pp.122-130.

³³ Kim, Jih-Un and Dong-Jin Jang. 2007 “Aliens Among Brothers? The Status and Perception of North Korean Refugees in South Korea” in *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 31. No. 2 pp.5-22. See in particular pp. 18-19

³⁴ The fact that I, a foreigner, had North Korean friends or studied the North often made me an object of suspicion. This was observed in both South Korea and Japan.

Tendencies toward isolation, crime, abuse and trauma are typical to migrant groups that have undergone profound stress in their home country and during their transit. There is nothing inherent to South Korean society or to North Koreans which is provoking this outcome, however their adjustment might be exacerbated by the fact that these groups are at once the same and profoundly different along with the assumption that integration is inevitable.

Remittances:

Where there are large numbers of refugees, they have the ability to help those still at home. Refugees' remittances provide opportunities for social, political and economic stability. Remittances also serve to maintain contacts resulting in psychological and social adaptation in the host country. In the case of North and South Korea this is clearly very long-term planning, but lessons from the wider body of refugee literature suggests that where it is possible sending financial remittances is crucial to social, economic and political advancement at home.

According to a recent survey, nearly half of North Koreans in the South have been sending money back to the North.³⁵ Remittances are a huge factor in sustaining the underground economy in North Korea. They serve other purposes, such as giving those who stay in North Korea the means to remain and those who wish to flee the opportunity to do so. "Remittances support people who cannot or do not choose to leave because leaving carries the prospect of losing everything and being stranded in miserable conditions in an unfamiliar place. Those who stay are highly vulnerable and, more often than not, economically dependent."³⁶ Not only do remittances keep North Korean defectors connected to their country or origin, they also indicate the desire to maintain and forge connections that are geared toward improving their family back home, and possibly the nation, at high risk. The vast global literature on remittances indicates that it is largely a positive phenomenon

³⁵ Yonhap, 2011, 2, 23. "Defectors use gov't subsidy to help families in N. Korea: poll". 396 defectors were polled, and 49.5% of them were sending money back home. The average amount of money was about 1million won, what could last six months for living expenses in North Korea. Available at: <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2011/02/23/50/0401000000AEN20110223005000315F.HTML>. While the Chosun Ilbo (February 7, 2011) states that defectors send approximately 10 million USD per year to North Korea. Available at: http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/02/07/2011020700405.html.

³⁶ Fagen, Patricia Weiss and Micah N. Bump. "Remittances in Conflict and Crises: How Remittances Sustain Livelihoods in War, Crises, and Transitions to Peace" February 2006. The Security-Development Nexus Program, International Peace Academy.pp.iii Available at: www.ipacademy.org/Programs/Research/ProgReseSecDev_Pub.htm. Last accessed July 19, 2011; Fagen, Patricia Weiss "Refugees and IDPs after Conflict: Why They Do Not Go Home" United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 268. April 2011.

where earnings have assisted families and communities.³⁷ It is through the North Korean diaspora network in South Korea, Japan and other countries that remittances earned can reach their family and friends back home. This diaspora network is of considerable importance in the case of peace building in North Korea, growing the North's underground economy and spreading the work that the South is not a destitute American colony the official propaganda used to criticise.³⁸

Material and Psychosocial Factors for North Koreans:

The decision to migrate was often expressed in material and or psychosocial terms as North Koreans weighed the value of staying against the value of going or the risk of staying against the risk of going. The decision is almost never purely political in nature. Material pull factors can be identified as medicine, food and other saleable/ tradable goods for use at home or in entrepreneurial activities. These were almost exclusively identified as items unavailable, or in great demand, inside North Korea thus necessitating cross-border movement. Upon attaining these items and returning to North Korea, individuals move within the country.

Psychosocial needs are more complex. Individuals describe the necessity to leave North Korea in order to flee persecution. Crimes may have been committed, inherited or attributed to individuals, with the country lacking any legal means of redress or leniency, some people crossed into China to escape punishment or to escape the limitations placed on them due to their family of origin. North Koreans retain connects to the homeland whether through remittances, creating networks to get family out or working to establish human rights through activism in South Korea. It is of course human nature that North Koreans reflect on returning to their homeland with ambivalence, that they may leave with some reluctance and regret. However, the nation is rarely abandoned entirely; the desire to return if socio-political factors were transformed is frequently expressed.

Psychosocial Impetus of Migration is often connected with distress migration, rarely politically aspirational. The psychosocial reasons for defecting are reported less than are material reasons for migration. When combined with material distress and the awareness that one's social class in North Korea is marginalized, psychosocial reasons for defection are equally important. Some factors inhibit

³⁷ Fagen and Bump 2006, 5.

³⁸ For examples of how this has been effective in other cases see Fagen and Bump 2006, 7. See also, Lankov, Andrei. 2010 "Remittances by Defectors" in The Korea Times. Available at http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2011/04/137_84916.html. Last Accessed July 21, 2011.

the motivation for psychosocial migration. For example, studies have shown that increased economic difficulties result in increased likelihood for people to adhere to former “ways of life” or “ways of doing things” and recoil from different, more radical or alternative solutions to problems.³⁹ It has also been shown that people are more likely to adhere to authority figures during times of increased food shortage or economic difficulty – whether or not they believe or endorse the authority it is seen as benevolent in so far as it can support life.⁴⁰

Recommendations:

Therefore, in reviewing the literature on refugees in general and North Korea in particular, it is my view that current preparations for the long-term should consider:

- 1.) The skill-set of existing refugees in the ROK requires strengthening both for their integration into South Korea, but also in the case that they may return-migrate to the North if conditions there are liberalized. Their unique knowledge and experience of issues faced by internally displaced persons and refugees is an asset for the long-term future of Korea. Couple this with,
- 2.) government, non-government and international group expertise on how best to cope with the likelihood of internally displaced persons in the Northern part of the peninsula. While at the same time preparing for the long-term by,
- 3.) forecasting incentives to encourage would-be refugees to remain at home. My research has found that existing populations of defectors in Japan, South Korea and abroad have useful insights on this and the likelihood of its success.
- 4.) Increase and support the current transfer of money and other resources from the refugee population into North Korea, this is not without its problems of course. The South’s

³⁹ De Waal, Alex 1989 *Famine that Kills: Darfur, Sudan, 1984-1985*. Clarendon Press: Oxford. For examples of how local “cosmologies” are knowledge is used to understand extreme collective suffering, see Argenti-Pillen, Alex. 2000 “The discourse on trauma in non-Western cultural contexts: Contributions of an ethnographic method” in Shalev, A., Yehuda, R., McFarlane, M.D. (ed.) *International Handbook of Human Response to Trauma*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 87-102

⁴⁰ Cawte, John. 1972 *Cruel, Poor, and Brutal Nations: The Assessment of Mental Health in an Australian Aboriginal Community by Short-stay psychiatric Field Team Methods*. University Press of Hawaii: Honolulu

government and legal system is currently dealing with this formally in areas of inheritance rights, but more could be done. Identify and establish networks for secure legal transfer of funds.

- 5.) If it is the case that the North's regime collapses, the vast majority of the population will become IDPs rather than refugees, in such a case I would discourage full-scale unification and instead support a two state solution on the peninsula, resembling Northern Ireland and the Republic's free and democratic governments. This would ensure South Korea would not be compelled to absorb the extreme poverty of the North, but instead implement strategies to assist North Korean's in building up their state for a future time when both could sit as equals discussing the prospects of unification.

Conclusion:

In the 1990s, famine was the main cause of refugee flows. In the 2000s, the cause has been largely economic in nature. Recent reports from the United Nations state that another food crisis has hit, so we will likely see a re-emergence of famine refugees into China and third countries and IDPs within North Korea.⁴¹ It is my view that in the *long-term* remittances, return migration and the protection of IDPs will hold the key to peace building and the strengthening of democracy throughout the Korean peninsula. The success of this hinges on the formation of relatively stable North Korea, or unified Korea, post-regime collapse.

⁴¹ United Nations "North Korea Faces Critical Food Shortage" March 25, 2011. Available at: <http://www.wfp.org/content/un-north-korea-faces-critical-food-shortage>