

“A tool of warfare”: Economic sanctions and the right to health in North Korea



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Presenter Disclosures

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(1) The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

No relationships to disclose

Economic sanctions as a foreign policy tool

“Sanctions should only be lifted based on North Korean performance. If the North Koreans do not meet their obligations, we should move quickly to re-impose sanctions that have been waived, and consider new restrictions going forward.”

- Hillary Clinton, Senate Confirmation Hearings, Jan 2009

Economic sanctions as a foreign policy tool

- 6-Party Talks stall
- North Korean actions (April-May 2009)
 - Satellite launch (long range missile?)
 - Short-range missile tests
 - Detonation of a nuclear device
- International response
 - US and UN announce tightening of existing economic sanctions
 - No public discourse on public health implications

Overview of US Sanctions against North Korea

- Imposed since 1950
- Based on several justifications
 - Marxist-Leninist state
 - Non-nuclear state that detonated a nuclear device
 - Poses a national security threat
 - Trading with the Enemy Act designation (lifted in 2008)
 - State Sponsor of Terror list (lifted in 2008)
- Increased use of financial sanctions since 2005
- Tightening of sanctions in 2006 and 2007
- Dual use goods

Examples of US Financial Sanctions

- Blocking of development loans from the IMF and the Asian Development Bank
- Stuart Levey, Undersecretary for Terrorism and Foreign Intelligence
 - Financial sanctions tour in 2006
 - 24+ financial institutions restricted or ended business with NK

"the line between illicit and licit North Korean money is nearly invisible... [financial institutions should] think carefully about the risks of doing any North Korea-related business."

- Stuart Levey
Undersecretary for Terrorism
and Foreign Intelligence



Overview of UN Sanctions against North Korea

- UN Security Council Resolutions 1695, 1718, and 1874 (2006-2009)
 - Prevents trade, purchase, and financial interactions for missile-related technology
 - Restrictions on trade in dual-use items
 - Interdiction and inspection of cargo to and from North Korea
 - Restrictions on specific NK companies suspected of weapons-related activity

Economic sanctions as a human rights violation

- Effect of Economic sanctions
 - "Macroeconomic shock"
 - Deprivation of resources necessary for health
 - Food
 - Clean water
 - Energy
 - Medicine
 - Restricts the capacity of the state to protect the right to health of its people
 - Most vulnerable are harmed
 - Little or no effect on political change



Economic sanctions as a human rights violation

- Human Rights Principles
 - Universal Declaration of Human Rights
 - Convention on the Rights of Children
 - The right to "a standard of living adequate for health and well-being"
- Human rights obligation transcends borders
 - The state is the main duty-holder, but not the only one
 - Factors beyond national borders particularly important in today's globalized economy



Economic sanctions as a human rights violation

- UN trade sanctions in Iraq
 - 2x increase in mortality among children <5 in the 1990s
- US trade sanctions in Cuba
 - Exacerbated by the disintegration of the Soviet trading bloc
 - Shortages in meds associated with
 - 48% increase in TB mortality
 - 77% increase in pneumonia and influenza mortality
- US blocking of Inter-American Development Bank loan for Haiti
 - Bacterial contamination of water supply
 - Increase in typhoid fever and diarrheal illnesses

Current Public Health Crisis in North Korea

- Collapsed social infrastructure
 - Energy shortage
 - Lack of clean water
 - Shortages in medical supplies and medicine
- Ongoing food insecurity
 - Famine during 1995-1998 lead to 200,000-1 million excess deaths
 - 2004 survey
 - 7.0% acute malnutrition
 - 37.0% chronic malnutrition
 - Poor harvest reported for 2009

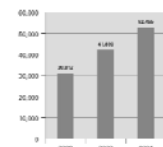
Current Public Health Crisis in North Korea

- Re-emergence of infectious diseases
 - Epidemiological transition prior to 1990s
 - Burden of disease shifted from infectious diseases to chronic
 - Most infectious diseases thought to be controlled
 - Near 100% immunization rates among children

Current Public Health Crisis in North Korea

- Increase in infectious disease incidence since 1995
 - Malaria
 - Tuberculosis
 - Diarrheal disease
 - Measles
 - Respiratory illness

Figure 51. Reported cases of TB, 2002-2004



Source: WHO, OCHA support for tuberculosis control program with UN Women, UN Women Health Organization. WHO Global Tuberculosis Report for 2004. WHO Weekly Epidemiol. Rec. 2005, available at WHO, 2005.

Factors that Contribute to the Public Health Crisis in North Korea

- Centralized economic policies
- Limited natural resources
- Ecological disasters 1995-1997
- Collapse of the Soviet trading bloc

Public Health Crisis

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Economic Sanctions

Public Health Crisis

Human Rights in North Korea

- Much attention to North Korean human rights in recent years
- Focus on social and political rights
 - Movement
 - Religion
 - Political prisoners
 - Conditions in labor camps
 - Torture
 - Expression
- Recent attention to social and economic rights, in particular, the right to food

Human Rights in North Korea

- US Government
 - North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004
 - Radio broadcasts into North Korea
 - Appointment of Special Envoy
 - Funding for organizations promoting human rights, democracy, and market reforms
- UN
 - General Assembly resolutions on North Korean human rights every year since 2005
 - Special Rapporteur appointed by the Human Rights Council

Human Rights Organizations and North Korea

- Reports by mainstream human rights organizations
 - Amnesty International (2000, 2004)
 - Human Rights Watch (2002, 2006, 2008)
 - Refugees International (2005)
- Reports by North Korea focused organizations
 - US Committee on Human Rights in North Korea (2003, 2005, 2006a, 2006b)
 - Good Friends, South Korea (2004)

Human Rights Organizations and North Korea

- Review of 11 reports
 - Three reports mentioned the existence of economic sanctions
 - As background information on US-NK relations (Amnesty 2000)
 - As contributing to conditions that will result in continuing migration to China (USCHR 2006a)
 - Japan urged to lift sanctions due to its harmful effect on North Korean civilians (Good Friends 2004)
 - None explicitly explored sanctions as a potential source of human rights violations

Human Rights Organizations and North Korea

- Limitations of current dialogue on North Korean human rights
 - Narrow focus on the North Korean state as the only responsible party
 - Focus primarily on civil and political rights
 - Little apparent consideration of geopolitical context (North Korea does not exist in a vacuum!)
 - Ignores reality of today's global political economy
- Incomplete human rights analysis and misses a major source of rights violations

Recommendations

- Use of economic sanctions should be opposed based on principles of health and human rights
- Policy of diplomatic engagement needed for sustained improvements in human rights
- Human rights organizations must broaden discourse and activism on human rights
- Public health community leadership needed to contribute health consequences to public discourse

“The inhabitants of a given country do not forfeit their basic economic, social and cultural rights by virtue of any determination that their leaders have violated norms relating to international peace and security.”

- UN Committee on Economic, Cultural, and Social Rights, 1997



Additional Resources



- **Korea Policy Institute**
<http://www.kpolicy.org>
- **National Campaign to End the Korean War**
<http://www.endthekoreanwar.org/>
- **National Committee on North Korea**
<http://www.ncnk.org/ncnk>
- **Bossuyt M. The Adverse Consequences of Economic Sanctions on the Enjoyment of Human Rights. UN Commission on Human Rights 2000**
<http://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/202/42501.html>

Photos were taken by coauthors Christine Ahn, Ricky Choi, and Haeyoung Kim during trips to North Korea in 2006-2008.