



**HOW CHINA AND RUSSIA
FACILITATE**
*North Korea's
Human Rights Abuses*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dr. Victor D. Cha and Dr. Katrin Fraser Katz

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Dr. Victor D. Cha is a Senior Fellow at the George W. Bush Institute and Senior Vice President for Asia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies

Dr. Katrin Fraser Katz is an Adjunct Fellow (nonresident) in the Office of the Korea Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and Professor of Practice in the Department of Political Science and Master of Arts in International Administration (MAIA) program at the University of Miami

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the George W. Bush Institute, and the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK) convened a panel of government and nongovernmental experts to discuss China's and Russia's roles in North Korea's human rights abuses. The group identified specific areas where China's and Russia's facilitation of North Korean human rights violations are most apparent, the degree to which COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine have made the situation worse, and what the United States and its international partners should do to increase awareness of this issue and press for progress. The meeting took place on a not-for-attribution basis.

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This paper was inspired and informed by a panel of government and nongovernment experts convened by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the George W. Bush Institute, and the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea to discuss China and Russia's role in North Korea's human rights abuses.

Above all, the North Korean regime focuses its resources on maintaining its own survival. While this is true in some regard for all political regimes, North Korea's case is exceptional because its strategy for doing so is based on the complete subjugation of its citizens. This results in gross human rights violations being committed against the North Korean people.

The February 2014 U.N. Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), or COI report, specifically details the DPRK's violations of the freedoms of thought, expression and religion; discrimination; violations of the freedom of movement and residence; violations of the right to food and related aspects of the right to life; arbitrary detention, torture, executions and prison camps; abductions and enforced disappearances from other countries; and crimes against humanity.

However, the roles played by authoritarian leaders in Beijing and Moscow in facilitating North Korea's human rights violations are less frequently examined. Examples include helping Pyongyang evade international sanctions in ways that are mutually beneficial, human trafficking and transnational repression, forcible repatriation of North Korean refugees, and even coopting entities within the United Nations to discourage initiatives on advancing North Korean human rights.

China and Russia's complicity in these abuses stems from a combination of political support for North Korea's Kim regime; nonenforcement of international human rights obligations and sanctions; economic profit; and general allegiance against the West.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have both presented North Korea with new incentives and opportunities to further repress its own people, both within and outside its borders. While there has been some recent movement by the United States and United Nations to advance North Korean human rights, more can be done.

Specifically, Washington should ensure that human rights are integrated into a clear North Korea policy, enforce existing legislation like the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, impose additional sanctions on Chinese and Russian companies complicit in abuses, and recruit the private sector to be vigilant against contracting with entities linked to human rights abuses.

The United States, however, can't be the sole actor in this effort. International partners should be engaged to reinvigorate the North Korean human rights movement, work with civil society on raising the profile of North Korean labor abuses, and use the 10th anniversary of the COI report to assess areas of progress and vulnerability in advancing North Korean human rights.



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2943 SMU BOULEVARD | DALLAS, TEXAS 75205