

Summit for Peace Assembly and One Million Rally: Bring Peace to the Korean Peninsula

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Last October, I had the pleasure of joining you virtually during UPF's Special Forum on Security and Peace in Northeast Asia. I discussed the fundamental importance of religious freedom both to reunification efforts here on the peninsula and to confronting the authoritarian regimes -- chief among them the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) -- throughout the Indo-Pacific.

Confronting China

But today, I want to drill down further on the American project and, indeed, the project for every human being who desires peace and seeks the protection of the dignity of every human being. Hotels shut down to prevent contagion.

Truckers shutting down traffic on the Canada U.S. border. Kids missing school and education. Businesses shuttered. The entire way we lived altered now, for over two years, and continuing.

Why? The Chinese Communist Party did not do the divinely right thing. It put its own ill citizens on planes traveling to Milan, Italy, and elsewhere to infect the world while denying the world access to important information.

What conception of humanity finds this remotely decent or acceptable? What vision of a higher power justifies such wanton diminution of the value of each human life? This entity, and its leaders are the challenge for those of us who seek peace and harmony in the world.

The Chinese Communist Party today is possessed by the same lust for power that Mao embodied. At home, they have managed to channel this into sophisticated systems of repression which are designed to utterly crush freedom. This has been on full display during the Olympics. Though the CCP may use Olympic fanfare and celebration to obscure it, we cannot ignore the staggering, ongoing persecution of anyone the government can't easily control, especially religious believers across the country.

Every time the communist regime seeks to extol its accomplishments for the world to see, we should point to the concentration camps they have filled in Xinjiang with genocidal intent and acts. We should make plain their brutal treatment of Falun Gong practitioners and Tibetan Buddhists. We should amplify reports of CCP officials recruiting children to become informants against their Christian, churchgoing parents.

The CCP cannot tolerate the idea that the Chinese people would find their identity or meaning in life through God, or that they could conceive of anything holding greater authority over their lives than the state. Party leaders believe the party alone should command the loyalties of the human heart. But little do they know that their suppression of faith is bound to backfire. God calls out to every human heart, and we each hear his calling. Any person, any government which places itself in between that call is utterly doomed. The CCP has tried to erase any memory, teachings, and images of the Dalai Lama to manifest their atheist commitment. But seven decades later, the faith of the Tibetan people has become even stronger. The CCP has utterly failed to discredit and erase their peace-loving, truth-telling leader. Faith cannot be destroyed by tyrannical fiat or communist thuggery.

Try as they might to crush religious freedom, the communist overlords in Beijing forget that no scheme of man can hinder the work of the Divine. And North Korea takes its cue from the CCP and oppresses people of faith in its own prisons -- I learned this first-hand when I was able to free three brave Americans held hostage in that totalitarian state.

Back in April 2018, President Trump asked me to go to North Korea. He wanted me to meet with Chairman Kim to work on arrangements for the upcoming summit in Singapore that June. In the course of my meetings with Chairman Kim, I repeated the President's request, his expectation, that he release three Korean-American men who had been wrongfully detained. Dong-chul Kim, Hak-song Kim and Tony Kim were held in part for being men of faith.

Now, thank God, I was able to return home with those men. And it was a joyful scene on the tarmac as they were reunited with their families. We should also consider the CCP's aggression outside of its borders, so much of which happens right here in Northeast Asia.

China continues to turn a blind eye to North Korea's sanctions evasion. It has become more aggressive toward Taiwan and is constructing approximately 250 new nuclear missile silos. All of this is to say nothing of the CCP's cover-up of the outbreak in Wuhan, leading to a pandemic which has greatly damaged Asian economies in particular. Make no mistake, China is a destabilizing force for this region.

China's actions represent a broader trend we are seeing throughout the world; authoritarian actors are seeking to disrupt peace, violate sovereignty, and endanger civilians to achieve their whims. In Myanmar, a military coup has resulted in thousands of civilian deaths and arrests. The brutality of the military regime continues today. Russia continues to violate and threaten the sovereignty of its neighbors, most recently in Ukraine. Twenty Indian soldiers were killed in a violent incursion by the Chinese military on their border in the Himalayas, and Chinese aggression toward Pacific Island nations must not go unaddressed.

These efforts to disrupt peace are part of a broader, troubling trend indicating we are right now moving towards a world where, to quote Thucydides, "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."

That's why diplomacy and dialogue should always be our first tools to resolve crises. Indeed, I'm encouraged that UPF urges personal connections to try to make progress toward peace and reunification between North and South Korea. I know firsthand from my time as Secretary of State that a personal approach is an outstanding asset for diplomacy.

I spoke earlier of having been able to negotiate the release of three men who were wrongfully detained. If I hadn't personally asked Chairman Kim to free those men, hadn't sat across from him and made that connection, I'm not sure it would have happened. And the historic meetings between President Trump and Chairman Kim that followed in June showed the power of a personal connection as well. In the end, of course, we didn't get everything we wanted, but those meetings between an American president and a North Korean leader – the first in history—ultimately produced an agreement from North Korea to denuclearize.

It was the first-ever commitment to do so at that level of leadership. Those negotiations also resulted in a moratorium on nuclear and long-range missile tests. When North Korea cannot test its weapons, it limits their ability to gather data on what they have and how to improve it. It reduces the risk of accidents that could have collateral damage for the entire peninsula and other parts of northeast Asia. It also creates a necessary condition for the eventual reunification of the Korean people on the Peninsula, because any form of reunification must not come at the expense of the peace, security and liberty of the Korean people. And as a matter of human nature, it's probably a whole heck of a lot harder to fire a weapon of mass destruction at someone after you've shaken hands with them. My experience as secretary of state confirms that peace comes from strength.

Finally, unlike the Trump Administration, the Biden Administration gave Russia a clean, free extension of the New START Treaty—no concessions. Meanwhile, they made no effort to address Chinese nuclear weapons. China shouldn't be able to increase its nuclear arsenal in a secretive manner. Imagine the Chinese Communist Party with nuclear parity with the United States, and how Beijing could wield that power to coerce free nations. The good news is everyone here has the capacity to speak up and push leaders in both Beijing and Washington in the right direction.

I know one of those cities of power will be more respectful of what other countries have to say than the other. That's why the Trump Administration imposed the maximum pressure campaign on North Korea. We restored pressure and military deterrence on Iran for the same reason. It's the only way to stop the regime in Tehran from executing its violent revolutionary agenda against America, Israel, and the people of the Middle East.

Conclusion

I'll close on this note: we should never give up hope of peace and reunification. Indeed, those three men who came back with me from North Korea didn't. Even in the darkest night of gloom, they were hopeful they would one day be together with their families again. When we got off the plane at Andrews Air Force base in the middle of the night, it was an incredible scene. President Trump and the First Lady were there to greet them. Amid all the drama of the moment, one of them slipped me an index card which I put in my jacket pocket.

When I got home at a very late hour, my wife Susan and I read the card. It was Psalm 126: "The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy." I kept that card framed in my office for the rest of my tenure as secretary of state. You see, moments of reunification are some of the most joyful moments we have as human beings. As a Christian, I think that's because the idea of reconciliation and reunification is at the core of the Gospel, as God welcomes us to himself. There's a divine authorship of even the simplest emotions. That night on the tarmac was certainly a joyful one. But it was just a foretaste of the joy that two whole nations will experience when the Korean Peninsula peacefully comes together as one.

More broadly, we must continue to combine our diplomatic efforts with strength in order to pursue peace everywhere in the world. This is not something we can do alone – it is something we must do together. If we do that, we'll be closer to being "one family under God" than ever.

Thank you all for having me today, and God bless you.