

## Smart Talk No. 17

### Presenter

Stephan Haggard

### Moderator

Sook-Jong Lee

### Discussants

Youngshik Bong  
Byung-Yeon Kim  
Yong-Hyun Kim  
Young-Ho Park  
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This product presents a policy-oriented summary of the Smart Talk.

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## Witness to Transformation: Refugee Insights into North Korea July 11 2011

Dr. Stephen Haggard visited the East Asia Institute on 11 July, 2011 to discuss the main findings and conclusions he presented in his latest book, *Witness to Transformation: Refugee Insights into North Korea*. This book is based on the insights from North Korean refugees now living in China and South Korea.

### Summary of the Seminar

Based on the findings from the surveys on refugees, Professor Haggard presented an image of a North Korean society that is becoming more unequal and an economy driven by corruption.

In showing an overview of the refugees surveyed, Professor Haggard noted that a majority suffered from post-traumatic stress. Contrary to popular belief, this was not due to the terrible conditions from life as a refugee, but actually from the experiences endured in North Korea with forced starvation or having witnessed executions.

For the majority of refugees surveyed, engaging in corrupt or criminal activities is the only way to get ahead. Furthermore, they also believed that the only way to advance in society is to become a government official which would allow them to engage in this kind of activity. Seen together, it shows how corruption is becoming more ingrained in society and is part of the markets that most people depend on to survive.

The political attitudes of refugees are also important in understanding the level of opposition in North Korea. The surveys show that the majority believe the government to be responsible for North Korea's economic fail-

ings. While that may not be surprising for refugees, the fact that those who believe foreign countries are responsible for economic failings has decreased significantly shows growing disillusionment with the regime. Professor Haggard though pointed out how this does not translate into political opposition. When viewing the data on the level of overt political activity, the numbers are very low, even for political gestures such as making jokes.

The growing marketization would seem to indicate that the official ideology in North Korea is being challenged as people have growing access to foreign news and media. However, Professor Haggard believed that there is still no major opposition to the regime. Collective action and organization – a mix of institutions, political movements, and technology – are essential for a revolution to take place, and North Korea lacks all of those key ingredients to facilitate change.

With the growing corruption and market activities, some discussants wondered how long the North Korean regime could survive. In Professor Haggard's view though, the North Korean regime is expected to survive the current dynastic leadership succession process, avoiding the "hard landing" scenario that many analysts fear. Party cadres and military elites would mostly perceive the incentives to support Kim Jong-un to outweigh the possible benefits of openly challenging him. Moreover, although marketization is creating a distinct socioeconomic sphere outside the reach of the state, it has not developed enough to be a platform which can challenge the regime from below. It is expected that the regime will prob

ably proceed to further rein in the market once the power transition is completed.

When discussants raised the possibility for outside intervention to facilitate reforms, Professor Haggard felt that it would be best if the regional powers adopted coordinated policies that can address the material deprivation in North Korea while also encouraging structural transformation, such as by supporting Pyongyang's membership in international financial institutions. A line should be drawn when making policies, however, between reciprocal economic engagement and unconditional humanitarian aid, as the purpose of the later is neither to change the regime nor to improve relations.

In this regard, the question of providing humanitarian aid to North Korea was debated considering the current dire situation in North Korea and the high levels of corruption as outlined before. Professor Haggard believed that the situation in North Korea was worse than 2008 (the previous period of major food shortages) and therefore required urgent food aid. He believed that the question of whether to provide aid should not hinge upon seeking developments in nuclear negotiations but should be purely to address the dangers of widespread famine. Aid though should still be properly monitored with the further goal of promoting agricultural reforms in mind. ■

## **About the Speaker**

### **Stephan Haggard**

Stephen Haggard is the Lawrence and Sallye Krause Professor at the University of California, San Diego Graduate School of International Relations and Pacific Studies, where he is director of the Korea-Pacific Program since 1999. He is also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, as well as the editorial boards of journals such as *International Organization*, the *Korean Journal of Policy Studies* or *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*.

Stephen Haggard received his Ph. D. in political science from Berkeley in 1983, and taught in the department of government at Harvard University from 1983 to 1991. He also served as director of the University of California's system-wide Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation (IGCC), based at UC San Diego. His research interests center on international relations and political economy, with a focus on East Asia and Latin America. He has written on East Asia's economic growth, the Latin American and East Asian financial crises, democratization and federalism. He has recently turned his attention to the study of the North Korean economy, writing two books in cooperation with Dr. Marcus Noland.

### **Moderator**

Sook-Jong Lee, President of the East Asia Institute

### **Discussants**

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Byung-Yeon Kim, Seoul National University

Yong-Hyun Kim, Dongguk University

Young-Ho Park, Korea Institute for National Unification

Seungji Woo, Kyung Hee University

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