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Dear Kim Jong Un: An open letter from a former S. Korean lieutenant general

Writing for NK News, retired LTG In-Bum Chun speaks directly to North Korea's leader

In-Bum Chun

January 23rd, 2017

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Chairman Kim,

My name is In-Bum Chun and I am a retired three-star general who served in the Republic of

Korea Army for nearly forty years.

I am writing this letter in the interests of promoting understanding and hope that you will find it informative. Having led in many contexts, I know the value of receiving external perspectives.

I am told that your Ministry of Foreign Affairs has smart and capable officers that provide you with a steady stream of information from the outside world. However, the nature of the system that your grandfather and father created, and that you now run, makes it highly likely that they are providing you with filtered assessments. It is my intention to provide you with an alternative perspective in the hope that doing so contributes to improved relations and stability in 2017.

I understand that North Korea may see the United States and other democracies as being inconsistent, particularly upon the change of presidential administrations.

I appreciate how this may complicate your decision-making. Although specific strategies, policies, and public messaging may change, ultimately all democracies prefer peace.

Whatever inconsistencies you may believe to exist, this is something that does not change, and hence the opportunity for you to pursue peace is always there. You have only to choose this course. Nobody expects you to unilaterally and completely disarm to pursue this path.



"Some in your system may believe that current situation in the Republic of Korea is unstable" | Photo (<http://wpinject.com/>) by Roman Harak (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/51812388@N02/5015857682>)  (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>)

There are some essential first steps that include the avoidance of overt threats, cessation of nuclear and missile testing, and a willingness to engage in good faith negotiations on a range of issues from nuclear weapons to human rights.

Although specific strategies, policies, and public messaging may change, ultimately all democracies prefer peace

As you embark on this path you can expect reciprocity and good faith, as the people and governments of both the Republic of Korea and United States are sincere in desiring a better future for the people of your regime.

The impeachment of President Park Geun-hye may be difficult for the people of North Korea to put into context. Perhaps it will appear to many in your society as a sign of weakness, something you can exploit: I can assure you that the opposite is true.

The developments taking place in the Republic of Korea are a validation of the strength and continuing progress of our democracy, as well as the rule of law. In the Republic of Korea, the people hold our leaders accountable and expect that their politicians will properly use our constitution, laws, and institutions to adjudicate, and if necessary address inappropriate conduct.

This is precisely what is taking place, and our nation will emerge stronger as a result. In particular, I suggest that you consider that this is taking place without violence, and with minimal disruptions to our economy or the daily lives of our citizens.

Some in your system may believe that current situation in the Republic of Korea is unstable. Possibly there are voices in your regime that believe the impeachment of President Park represents an opportunity to apply pressure to the Republic of Korea to prompt revisions in its policies toward your regime.

Perhaps there are even those who think that you should use lethal military actions and provocations in this regard. Do not listen to them: they could not be more mistaken and following their advice will detract from your ability to lead, not add to it. In extreme cases, their advice could lead to your downfall.



(<https://www.nknews.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/ObservationPostOuellette.jpg>)

"Both the United States and the Republic of Korea have shown great restraint" | Photo: Wikimedia commons

I read your statement about developing the means to "defend" North Korea from the United States, including weapons of mass destruction and intercontinental ballistic missiles. I advise you to rethink this position. The U.S. government has on numerous occasions provided security assurances to your father.

Some in your system may believe that current situation in the Republic of Korea is unstable

I know the Americans well, better than most Koreans. I am certain that they have no desire to attack your regime, let alone the people of North Korea. If such a desire existed, the United States would have long ago used its overwhelming military power against you. It has not done so out of choice and a desire for peace.

However, the United States sees your moves toward greater nuclear and long-range missile capabilities as an expression of your intentions to do harm to the American people. It is wise to recognize that those nations who have mistaken American patience and restraint as cowardice or a lack of resolve have always come to regret this.



(https://www.nknews.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/10974046264_24b71f2ac3_b.jpg)

Lt. Gen. Chun In Bum (left), presented with the Legion of Merit award at the Special Warfare Command Headquarters near Seoul | Photo: UNC – CFC – USFK

The United States is a powerful giant. It is slow to move, but when threatened directly, it has proven time and again that it will act decisively.

Both the United States and the Republic of Korea have shown great restraint in the face of violent actions carried out by grandfather and father. We have demonstrated that our preference is peace and that our security assurances of the past are backed with actual restraint in the face of violence.

As President Trump begins his tenure and once we have elected a new president in the Republic of Korea, I believe you will have a unique moment to pursue a different path from the one you are presently on, a path that will benefit you personally and bring a better life to your people.

Perhaps you are not ready yet. If so, then I only hope that you do not eliminate this option through by acting aggressively at the outset President Trump's tenure or in the lead up to the Republic of Korea's presidential election.

I spent my entire career in the armed forces preparing to defend my country against your regime, destroying your regime if necessary. However, I did this out of a sense of duty and necessity. My preference and choice is for peace and prosperity. I hope you share my preference.

Sincerely,

In-Bum Chun

Lieutenant General(R)

ROK Army

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



In-Bum Chun

Retired Lieutenant General In-Bum Chun entered the Korea Military Academy in 1977. Chun was commissioned an infantry officer in 1981 as class 37. Chun became the youngest officer in the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army history to be an aide to a three-star general with the rank of lieutenant. From April 2015, he was the deputy commander for the First ROK Army. Chun retired from active duty as of July of 2016, and is now a Visiting Fellow in Foreign Policy, at the Center for East Asia Policy Studies at the Brookings Institute.

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