

It is time to bring North Korea out of the cold

16th February, 2013

Author: Emma Campbell, ANU

It might seem that the passing resemblance of Canberra to Pyongyang sealed the decision by the DPRK to reopen its embassy to Australia, but the real motivations behind the move are unclear.



The announcement was greeted with a cautious acceptance on the part of the Australian government. It should be welcomed as an [opportunity to re-engage](#) ^[1] with the isolated nation.

North Korea has a number of serious and continuing challenges that if left unchecked will destabilise the region, with implications for the economic and security interests of Australia. These include a worsening humanitarian situation, the ongoing nuclear crisis, and instability in South Korea — one of Australia's key trading partners.

The policy of isolation has not worked. The United States, once the North's largest aid donor, has given [almost no aid](#) ^[2] since 2009. South Korea froze its relations with the North in early 2008. Since then we have seen continued provocations by North Korea, [the continuation of its nuclear program](#) ^[3] and a perpetuation of its population's humanitarian woes.

[The North Korean system](#) ^[4] is based on seclusion from 'foreign influences'. Contact with foreign governments, aid groups, training institutions and trading organisations brings only the 'corrupting ideas' of negotiation, compromise, debate, technology and co-operation. Isolation serves only to promote the goals of the regime.

Australia's normalised relations with the North place it in a special position to provide a neutral ground for North Korean delegates to attend educational or training programs. There is a precedent for Australia's involvement in similar work. The [Crawford School of Public Policy](#) ^[5] at the Australian National University once ran an economics program for North Korean bureaucrats for example.

The most important support comes in the form of granting visas to North Korean visitors. It is a

shame that Australia has chosen to take a rather prohibitive attitude to the few opportunities for cultural exchanges that have recently opened up. In 2009, the Australian government denied visas for a [group of North Korean artists](#) ^[6], citing a visa ban that is part of the government's response to the DPRK's missile and nuclear weapons programs. It is regrettable that such a wide net has been cast in the implementation of sanctions and controls. Few experts on North Korea believe that the exclusion of artists might promote de-nuclearisation but many believe in the importance of cultural and interpersonal exchanges.

Australia does not need to act independently of its allies. Australia's position on the UN Security Council and its oft-stated desire to be a middle power means that it is in a position to proactively counsel and encourage its allies, including the United States, to soften their position. Australia can be used as a conduit for pursuing common security goals through less traditional routes. No problem was ever resolved without negotiations and Australia has a lot to lose if serious unrest or instability grips the Korean peninsula.

[Dr Emma Campbell](#) ^[7] is a postdoctoral fellow at the [Strategic and Defence Studies Centre](#) ^[8], the Australian National University.

This article was first published [here](#) ^[9] in the Australian Financial Review.

Article from the East Asia Forum: <http://www.eastasiaforum.org>

URL to article:

<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/02/16/it-is-time-to-bring-north-korea-out-of-the-cold/>

[1] opportunity to re-engage:

<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/01/05/the-north-korean-satellite-launch-engagement-is-the-way-forward/>

[2] almost no aid: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40095.pdf>

[3] the continuation of its nuclear program:

<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/01/05/the-north-korean-satellite-launch-engagement-is-the-way-forward/>

[4] The North Korean system:

<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/01/18/north-korea-in-2012-and-future-challenges/>

[5] Crawford School of Public Policy: <http://crawford.anu.edu.au/>

[6] group of North Korean artists:

http://www.artdaily.org/index.asp?int_sec=2&int_new=34813#.URLT3lqDQXw

[7] *Dr Emma Campbell*: <https://researchers.anu.edu.au/researchers/campbell-elg>

[8] *Strategic and Defence Studies Centre*: <http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/sdsc/>

[9] *here:*

http://www.afr.com/p/opinion/australia_should_show_diplomacy_FkZj1MtR3vhkXQSYxFObaK