



**Assessing North Korea's '20×10 Regional Development Policy':
Political Recalibration and Economic Feasibility**

Wednesday, April 15, 2025

9 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. (EDT)

10 p.m. – 11:30 p.m. (KST)

Virtual Event via Zoom

◆ Event Description

In February 2026, the Ninth Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea marked what Pyongyang described as a “new era of comprehensive development” in socialist construction. In his report to the Congress, Kim Jong Un declared that the past five years had opened a transformative phase in which all regions, sectors, and institutions of the state would advance simultaneously. At the center of this vision stands the “Regional Development 20×10 Policy,” which mandates the construction of local industrial factories, hospitals, and leisure facilities in 20 cities and counties every year, alongside accelerated rural modernization.

Framed as a strategic shift toward balanced national growth, the policy is presented domestically as proof of the regime’s commitment to improving living standards, strengthening Cabinet-centered economic management and reinforcing the Party’s leadership at the county level. At the same time, the Congress reaffirmed the primacy of self-reliance, technological modernization, and an expanded national defense posture, underscoring the interconnection between economic development, political control, and security strategy.

This event brings together leading experts from the United States and Korea in two paired dialogue panels. By examining both the political logic and economic feasibility of the 20×10 initiative, the discussion will assess whether North Korea’s regional development drive represents structural transformation, intensified mobilization, or a recalibration of state authority in an era defined by sanctions, strategic rivalry, and shifting inter-Korean relations.

◆ Event Schedule

Time	Content
	Welcoming Remarks
9:00 AM - 9:05 AM	<p>Celeste Arrington (Director, GW Institute for Korean Studies)</p> <p>Bumsoo Kim (Director, Institute for Peace and Unification Studies, Seoul National University)</p>
	Panel Discussion
9:05 A.M. - 10:05 A.M.	<p><u>Moderator:</u> Yonho Kim (Associate Director, GW Institute for Korean Studies)</p> <p><u>Speakers:</u></p> <p>I. Political Logic and Governance Reconfiguration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ken Gause (Analyst and Senior Advisor, Institute of Defense Analyses) ○ Hojye Kang (Freie Universität Berlin) <p>II. Economic Sustainability and Industrial Structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Illiana Ragone (Research Associate, 38 North) ○ Ji-Young Choi (Senior Research Fellow, Korea Institute for National Unification)
10:05 A.M. - 10:15 A.M.	Roundtable Discussion (10 min)
10:15 A.M. - 10:30 A.M.	Q&A (15 min)

◆ WELCOMING REMARKS

CELESTE ARRINGTON is Korea Foundation Associate Professor of Political Science and



International Affairs at the George Washington University. She is the Director of the GW Institute for Korea Studies and Co-Director of the East Asia National Resource Center. She is also a Visiting Research Scholar at Princeton's School of Public and International Affairs. Her comparative research examines public policy, law and social change, lawyers, and governance, with a regional focus on the Koreans and Japan. Other research interests include Northeast Asian security, North Korean human rights, and transnational activism. Her first book was *Accidental Activists:*

Victim Movements and Governmental Accountability in Japan and South Korea (Cornell, 2016). She has published numerous articles and, with Patricia Goedde, she co-edited *Rights Claiming in South Korea* (Cambridge, 2021). Her newest book, published in 2025 in Cambridge's Studies in Law and Society series, is entitled *From Manners to Rules: Advocating for Legalism in South Korea and Japan*. It analyzes the legalistic turn in Korean and Japanese regulatory style through paired case studies related to tobacco control and disability rights. She received a PhD from UC Berkeley, an MPhil from the University of Cambridge, and an AB from Princeton University. She has been a fellow at Harvard, the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, and the Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich. GW's Office of the Vice President for Research awarded her the 2021 Early Career Research Scholar Award. Her article with Claudia Kim won the 2023 Asian Law and Society Association's distinguished article award.



BUMSOO KIM is Professor of Political Science and Dean of the College of Liberal Studies (CLS), and Director of the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS) at Seoul National University (SNU). At SNU, he previously served as Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, and Associate Dean of Student Affairs of CLS, and as Deputy Director of IPUS. In academia, he was elected as President of the Korean Political Science Association (his term will begin in 2025), and already served as Vice President of the Korean Political Science

Association, Executive Secretary of the Korean Association of International Studies, President of the Korean Society for Governance Research, and Secretary General of the Korean Society for Political Thought. He also previously taught at the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington as the Y.T. Shim Endowed Visiting Professor and was a Foreign Research Scholar at the Institute of Social Science at the University of Tokyo. In the public sector, he currently serves as a committee member of the Korean Government's Policy Committee for Overseas Compatriots. His main academic research areas include justice, human rights, identity politics, nationalism, multiculturalism, and many other issues of contemporary political theory. His articles have appeared in many academic peer-reviewed journals such as the Journal of Korean Studies, Ethnic and Racial Studies, and the Social Science Japan Journal. He has also published a number of books (in Korean), which include *What Is Fairness in the Korean Society?* (2022) and *What Is Peace Studies?* (2022). He received his M.A. in Political Science from the University of Chicago and Seoul National University and Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Chicago.

◆ SPEAKERS

JI-YOUNG CHOI is a senior research fellow at the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU). She earned her Ph.D. in Economics from Korea University in 2011 and worked at the Bank of Korea from 2011 to 2019. Her research focuses on North Korea's financial system, economic management policies, and the informal economy. Her recent publications include *Crises and Responses of North Korea as a Social System: 2021–2025* (2025), *Research on the North Korean Economy Using Text Mining Methodologies: Trends and Challenges* (2025), *Shifts in Food Access and Recent Grain Distribution Policy in North Korea* (2025), *Product Advertising and Consumption Patterns in North Korea* (2024), *Consumer Goods Production and Distribution in North Korea Since the Kim Jong Un Era* (2023), and *The Impact of Reinforced Sanctions on the Korean Economy: Focus on the Ripple Effects from Trade Shock* (2020).



KEN GAUSE is an Analyst and Senior Advisor of the North Korea Program at the Institute of Defense Analyses. He holds a MA in Soviet and East European Studies from George Washington University (1987) and a BA in Political Science and Russian from Vanderbilt University (1982). Before joining IDA, Mr. Gause was an Analyst, Research Director, and Director of the Adversary Analytics Program at the CNA Corporation (1996-2024). Before that, he was a research assistant at the Brookings Institution and RAND Corporation. After beginning his career as a Sovietologist, he shifted his focus to North Korea in 1988. He is the author of numerous articles and several books on the North Korean leadership apparatus and the Kim family, including *US-North Korea: A Case Study of Asymmetric Relations* (2021); *The North Korean House of Cards: Leadership Dynamics Under Kim Jong-un* (2015); *Coercion, Control, Surveillance, and Punishment: An Examination of the North Korean Police State* (2012); and *North Korea under Kim Jong-il: Power, Politics, and Prospects for Change* (2010).



HOJYE KANG is affiliated with the Institute of Korean Studies at Freie Universität Berlin, where he focuses on research and teaching related to North Korea. With a background in both Physics and History, Kang approaches North Korean studies from an interdisciplinary perspective. Kang's work involves analyzing North Korea's strategies in fields that require scientific and technological expertise, such as innovation, economy, and defense science, while examining their historical context and long-term developments. Kang is rewriting the history of North Korea, viewing it not merely as a series of power struggles but as a process of building and refining the national system. Recently, Kang has been focusing on the Regional Innovation System. Kang received his B.A. in Physics, M.A. and PhD in History and Policy of Science and Technology in North Korea from Seoul National University.



ILLIANA RAGONE



is a Research Associate at the Stimson Center and Managing Editor of 38 North. Her research interests include North Korea's WMD developments, US-ROK extended deterrence, and broader Northeast Asia regional security issues. Her key publications include, "US-ROK Strategic Dialogue: Recalibrating Deterrence Against An Evolving DPRK Nuclear Threat," "Good Practices in the area of Border Security and Management in the context of Counterterrorism: The Republic of Korea Model," and a variety of satellite imagery analysis pieces both on 38North.org and through 38 North's partnership with the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency's Tearline initiative. As part of her role with 38 North, she oversees the publication process, including satellite image processing and graphic creation, produces templates for reports, and manages media relations for imagery analyses, and maintains the 38 North website. Prior to joining Stimson, she was a Program Assistant at the Foreign Service Institute, a part of the Department of State. She holds a B.A. in International and Area Studies and Chinese Language and Culture from Washington University in St. Louis.

◆ **MODERATOR**



YONHO KIM is the Associate Director of the GW Institute for Korean Studies and an Associate Research Professor of Practice. He oversees GWIKS's Korea related policy programs—Korea Policy Forum, North Korea Economic Forum, and GWIKS North Korea Program—fostering knowledge-sharing and network building among experts and policymakers in Washington, Seoul, and beyond. As part of his broader portfolio, he serves as the editor for GWIKS's flagship publication, NKEF Policy and Research Paper Series, and the US-ROK Policy Brief. He specializes in North Korea's mobile telecommunications and U.S. policy towards North Korea. Kim is the author of *North Korean Phone Money: Airtime Transfers as a Precursor to Mobile Payment System* (2020), *North Korea's Mobile Telecommunications and Private Transportation Services in the Kim Jong-un Era* (2019) and *Cell Phones in North Korea: Has North Korea Entered the Telecommunications Revolution?* (2014). His research findings were covered by various media outlets, including Wall Street Journal, The Atlantic, Yonhap News, and Libération. Prior to joining GWIKS, he extensively interacted with the Washington policy circle on the Korean peninsula as Senior Researcher of the U.S.-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, Senior Reporter for Voice of America's Korean Service, and Assistant Director of the Atlantic Council's Program on Korea in Transition. He holds a B.A. and M.A. in International Relations from Seoul National University, and an M.A. in International Relations and International Economics from Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies.



◆ BACKGROUND

The North Korea Economic Forum (NKEF) is part of the policy program at the George Washington University's Institute for Korean Studies (GWIKS). The Forum aims to promote understanding of North Korean economic issues, to spread in-depth and balanced analyses of the North Korean economy from diverse perspectives, and to expand networks among various North Korean economy watchers. The Forum is mostly a closed and off-the-record meeting where participants can freely and seriously discuss the critical issues. Rachel Minyoung Lee and Troy Stangarone are currently the co-chairs of the NKEF and have been leading the meetings. The NKEF also organizes special conferences made public throughout the academic year. The Forum is made possible by a generous grant provided by the KDI School of Public Policy and Management.

This event is on the record and open to the public.

The event will be recorded and made available on GWIKS' YouTube channel.