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## Talking head urges new view of N. Korea

By Jeremy Kirk

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TOKYO -- Kim Myong Chol, 60, is perhaps the only available talking head for North Korea, one of the world's most mysterious regimes.

The gregarious writer pens papers and books in Korean, Japanese and English trying to educate the world about North Korea's political dogma. He's not an official diplomat, but he fills a vacuum for a country lacking an official spokesperson.

"When I go to Pyongyang, I am spokesman for America," Mr. Kim said with a laugh. "But in Washington, I am a spokesman for North Korea."

Mr. Kim says his writings have been designated "required reading" by North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. He received a doctorate in political science from North Korea's National Degree Examination Commission in 2001.

His business card has the North Korean and U.S. flags on it, and he is the executive director of the Center for Korean-American Peace, which he founded in 1999.

The animated writer recently summed up his mission by holding a bottle of soy sauce: "Americans and Japanese only look this way" at North Korea, he said, pointing to the label on the front of the bottle. But he shows all sides, he added, rotating the bottle completely several times.

Although he holds Japanese citizenship and lives in Japan, Mr. Kim is firmly Korean, attracted to North Korea because of its policy of self-reliance and independence from the outside world.

"Why do I like North Korea? Its political will to be independent from all foreigners -- from China, from Russia -- this is a point which attracts me," Mr. Kim said. "Which is better: hungry wolf or fat dog?"

He is full of stern words about U.S. policy toward North Korea. But, paradoxically, he also loves the United States. He travels there several times a year, speaking about speeches about North Korea.

Mr. Kim says he feels more comfortable in the United States than in Japan.

He is not without critics who question his connections with the North Korean regime. He admits he's at odds with the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, a pro-Pyongyang group, a relationship he said was strained by the fame he claims to have received because of his writings.

"They told Pyongyang I was a pro-American agent, a traitor," Mr. Kim said.

But the writer and scholar does offer a colorful, impassioned perspective on North Korea and how that country deals with the outside world.

Mr. Kim says that to make progress on the nuclear issue, the United States must sign a peace treaty with North Korea officially ending the 51-year-old armistice agreement.

The United States has shunned signing a unilateral peace treaty with North Korea, seeing it as a move

by North Korea to splinter ties between the allied countries that participated in the 1950-53 war.

"From the North Korean point of view, unless America is willing to concede on that point, North Korea has no reason to give up nuclear deterrence," Mr. Kim said.

He scoffs at the widely quoted CIA estimate that North Korea may have one or two usable nuclear weapons. He thinks the country has between 100 and 300 weapons, based on a nuclear program active since the 1960s.

He maintains that it was North Korea that aided Pakistan with its nuclear-weapons program.

Such weapons, Mr. Kim said, are the only way for a small country like North Korea to balance the scale against the United States. Nuclear weapons also are cheaper, Mr. Kim said: An army must be fed, and soldiers could be prone to dissent.

"For the moment, North Korea sees no sense in selling nuclear technology," Mr. Kim said. "But as long as America remains hostile, we have every reason to sell whatever we have."

That talk causes U.S. policy-makers to bristle: An estranged North Korea aiding terrorist groups with nuclear technology is among their worst scenarios.

Kim Jong-il is unlikely to easily give up his nuclear card, even though he wants a peace treaty and diplomatic relations with the United States, Mr. Kim insists.

"Kim Jong-il's goal is to neutralize or nullify the American military presence" on the peninsula, Mr. Kim said.

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