

STRATEGIC IMPACT REPORT

Smart Balloons: Dismantling the Paektu Bloodline

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An official performance report on North Korea information-access operations, grounded in the geographic strategy of the 'Freedom Line' and the social-psychological theory of 'Common Knowledge'

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Core Strategy: Shifting perceptions through information infiltration and dismantling the Paektu Bloodline myth

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PART 1

Introduction: Why Information Infiltration, Why Now

서론 : 왜 지금 '정보 투입'인가

This chapter explains why the NK Reform and Opening Committee chose 'information' as its sole strategic weapon, and how that strategy was designed geographically. It examines the structure and vulnerabilities of the Paektu Bloodline myth, and summarizes over a decade of activity in figures. At the core of NKROC's information-infiltration strategy lies a single conviction: truth only becomes powerful once North Korean residents are able to see, hear, and think for themselves.

01. Freedom Line — The Geography of Freedom: Why the Southeast Line

01. Freedom Line — 정보가 독재의 성벽을 넘는 지형학적 전략

For years, information-infiltration efforts aimed at North Korea relied on balloons as the primary vehicle, but focused more on 'how many' were launched than 'how' they were launched. NKROC fundamentally reconsidered this approach. Analyzing the borders and terrain surrounding the Korean Peninsula from the standpoint of information flow reveals two lines of an entirely different character.

- Not Freedom Line (western and northwestern border): This border, adjoining China and Russia, does see the flow of people and goods, but a double layer of surveillance — North Korean authorities and the neighboring authoritarian states — filters out any truth intended for North Korean citizens. This is the 'line of unfreedom.'
- Freedom Line (eastern and southern border): This line, facing the Republic of Korea and international waters, is where liberal-democratic values and global truths cross in real time. This is the 'line of freedom.' Ground access is restricted by the Military Demarcation Line, but the air and sea remain spaces that cannot be fully controlled.



Figure 01: Freedom Line strategic map — contrasting the Not Freedom Line (west/northwest border) with the Freedom Line (east/south coast)

NKROC set its strategic base not in the controlled northwest, but in the open southeast — the 'Freedom Line.' Areas near the Northern Limit Line such as Ganghwa, Gimpo, Paju, Yeoncheon, and Gangwon Province see westerlies and southwesterlies cross seasonally, and at specific altitudes (3,000–7,000m) stable air currents form that can carry payloads deep into North Korean territory. NKROC began launching early-model Smart Balloons in 2017, and from 2021 began fitting them with GPS trackers, using the accumulated trajectory data to refine optimal launch conditions by season and altitude. This has enabled leaflets and broadcast devices carried by Smart Balloons to reach deep into the North Korean interior — including Pyongyang, Tokchon, Singye, and Wonsan — areas where information access is severely restricted.

The goal of the Smart Balloon strategy is not simply confirming that something 'reached North Korea,' but ensuring that 'a large number of people across a wide area actually see it.' Using automated release devices, leaflets are dropped across areas ranging from 50km to 300km. Early on, NKROC suffered many failures — balloons falling into the Han River, being lost at sea, or dropping too early near the border — but as data accumulated, the success rate improved steadily from 10–20% to 45–50%. (Detailed flight trajectories are covered in Part 2.)

Terrain Data Summary — Why the Southeast

The northwestern border has the highest density of ground surveillance and patrols, forming a double perimeter of the Korean People's Army and border guards. By contrast, while the southeastern Freedom Line has strong ground control along the Military Demarcation Line, its airspace is comparatively open. NKROC's launch sites (Ganghwa, Gimpo, Paju, Yeoncheon, and the Gangwon Province area) were selected to exploit this asymmetry to the fullest.

02. The Invisible War — A War Without a Single Shot Fired

02. 보이지 않는 전쟁 (The Invisible War)

The North Korean regime is surrounded by a border far thicker than any physical one — a border of information. Missiles and troops cannot cross it. Only truth can. NKROC calls this the 'Invisible War' — there is no gunfire, no explosion, yet the outcome strikes directly at the foundation of the regime's legitimacy.

In this war, the weapon is not a bullet but a fact. Delivering, in verifiable form, what North Korean residents already suspect but cannot confirm — South Korea's real level of development, the privileged lives of the ruling family, a falsified history — is the war's only tactic. And victory is decided not by battle, but by how many people witnessed the same truth at the same time.

03. The Mission — Beyond Venezuela, Iran: Toward a Free Korean Peninsula

03. 위원회의 사명 (The Mission)

From Venezuela to Iran to Cuba, expanded information access and citizen awakening have cracked open closed authoritarian systems around the world. NKROC applies the same principle, in the same tradition, to the most closed country on Earth. Our mission is clear — to deliver to 25 million North Koreans the basic information they need to judge for themselves.

NKROC is not a political force but a civilian organization focused on information access. We do not claim to be bringing down the regime on anyone's behalf. Our sole focus is creating the minimum conditions under which information, long suppressed, can begin to function within North Korean society on its own. What North Koreans choose to do once they can see, hear, and think for themselves is always, and only, their own decision.

04. The Wall of Myth — The Fabricated Bloodline and Its Structural Weakness

04. 백두혈통이라는 성벽 (The Wall of Myth)

The 'Paektu Bloodline' is a governing ideology that began with the myth that Kim Il Sung led an anti-Japanese armed struggle from Mount Paektu, and expanded into the claim that only his bloodline is qualified to inherit the Korean revolution. Repeatedly instilled through school education, literature and the arts, and even childcare materials, it has functioned as the sole basis of legitimacy for the three-generation succession from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un.

The core justification for the three-generation succession is this very Paektu Bloodline myth itself — the narrative that Kim Il Sung led the anti-Japanese armed struggle, liberated Korea, and defeated the United States in the Korean War has served as the sole logical foundation legitimizing the Kim family's hereditary dictatorship. The regime's most fatal weakness, therefore, lies in this same bloodline. NKROC identified that Kim Jong Un himself — who does not fully possess the 'purity' of the Paektu Bloodline — is the system's greatest vulnerability, and made this the central target of its information-infiltration strategy.

But cracks already run through this wall. The regime has recently put forward the young daughter 'Kim Ju Ae' in public appearances, preparing for a fourth generation of succession. This is evidence that the Paektu Bloodline myth has reached a contradiction it cannot sustain even within its own Confucian value system and internal logic. The moment a female successor is put forward, the narrative of 'legitimate heir to the revolutionary cause' confronts questions it cannot easily answer.

NKROC's information infiltration targets precisely this point of contradiction. Myths cannot survive verification. We are not the ones putting a hole in this wall of myth — we simply help residents confirm, for themselves, that the wall never had any substance to begin with. (The concrete unfolding of this logical fracture is covered in detail in Part 4.)

05. Executive Summary

NKROC was formally founded in 2014, but individual members had been carrying out information-infiltration activities well before that. Kim Seung-chul, president of North Korea Reform Radio until 2025, began sending DVDs and leaflets into North Korea in 2010, and from 2013 focused on delivering USB drives and microSD cards.

To formalize these efforts, NKROC was established in 2014, and sent into North Korea a pocketbook titled Why Is Kim Jong Un Purging the 'Paektu Bloodline'? — a work dismantling the Paektu Bloodline myth that provoked a fierce reaction from the regime. This booklet, which came to be known as the 'Red Book' after making headlines in South Korean media, was distributed by balloon in partnership with Lee Min-bok, president of the Committee for Helping North Korean Refugees Directly, with roughly 20,000 copies delivered into North Korea by 2015.

From 2016, NKROC decided to develop its own independent means of leaflet delivery. This marked the beginning of the Smart Balloon — the device that would go on to play a decisive role in dismantling the 'Paektu Bloodline,' the ideological core of the Kim Jong Un dictatorship.

Development of the Smart Balloon began in 2016, and an early model was first used to deliver leaflets in 2017, though the initial success rate was low. As GPS trackers were fitted, data on leaflet dispersal began to accumulate, and success rates rose to roughly 30% by 2019, roughly 40% by 2021, and over 50% from 2022 onward. The fully completed Smart Balloon was finalized in late 2021, and from 2022, North Korean authorities began referring to it using terms such as 'leaflet-scattering device' and 'unusual object.'

For security reasons, NKROC does not publicly disclose the detailed metrics of its activities in full, releasing specific figures only selectively when appropriate. Even without disclosing precise numbers, however, the North Korean regime's own response speaks to the scale of the impact. The fact that, from July 2022, North Korean authorities issued a nationwide surveillance and reporting system targeting 'unusual objects' is itself evidence that NKROC's activity had reached a scale and precision capable of provoking a national-level, not merely local, response.

Detailed flight records and regional analysis of NKROC's Smart Balloon information-infiltration operations are covered in Part 2, and the North Korean regime's responses are examined in detail in Part 4.

Technology's Triumph: Smart Balloons and Speakers

기술의 승리 : 스마트 풍선과 스피커

This chapter covers NKROC's technical differentiation. It shows how a simple vinyl balloon evolved into a 'strategic information-warfare weapon' combining GPS, timers, and precision parachute-release systems, and how years of trial and error translated into technical progress — illustrated with actual flight records.

The Smart Balloon grew out of a problem North Korean defectors identified in the early 2010s: the limitations of balloon-based information delivery. Because it releases leaflets individually from an altitude of 3,000 meters or higher, it achieves even coverage across a vast area. A single payload of roughly 2,500 leaflets, released mid-air, is scattered across an area at least 3km wide and 50–300km long. In terms of density, that works out to roughly one leaflet per 10,000 square meters at minimum, and one per 25,000 square meters at most.

North Korean authorities react with such sensitivity that the discovery of even a single leaflet in one county (North Korea has roughly 200 counties) can trigger an emergency-level response. Paradoxically, this has only helped rumors of the leaflets' contents spread further. And despite all this, North Korea has never once formally protested to South Korea over the Smart Balloons — instead choosing to control its own population through terms like 'leaflet-scattering equipment' or 'unusual objects.'

NKROC's strategy centers on letting North Korean residents see and hear the truth directly. To this end, it developed two types of speaker balloons — a large speaker balloon that broadcasts to the ground while airborne, and a small speaker balloon that lands and continues broadcasting for days. The airborne large speaker (500–800W) is suspended from a balloon and broadcasts as it passes over North Korean territory, while the small speaker balloon lands by parachute and broadcasts the truth to residents on an On/Off cycle for 3–5 days.

06. Precision Influx — GPS, Timers, and the Science of Precision Delivery

06. 정밀 타격의 실체 (Precision Influx)

Since the 1990s, most leaflet operations targeting North Korea relied on simple vinyl balloons at the mercy of the wind. This method could not target a specific location, suffered a high loss rate, and left no data whatsoever on when or where leaflets were actually released. NKROC's Smart Balloon was designed to directly overcome these fundamental limitations.

To do so, the Smart Balloon is equipped with the following four devices.

- Altitude control device — Prevents the balloon from rising to an excessively high altitude, avoiding rupture from rapid ascent or battery failure from extreme cold, and improving the efficiency of leaflet release.
- Timer — Controls the timing of leaflet release based on GPS and time settings. In addition to the satellite GPS tracker, a backup timer activates upon reaching pre-set coordinates; this dual system was used mainly in early operations and, as accuracy improved over time, was gradually replaced by a simpler timer alone.
- Leaflet-release mechanism — Operates on an On/Off basis according to pre-entered target coordinates, activation timing, and calculated wind speed and altitude, scattering leaflets across a wide area.
- Real-time GPS satellite tracker — Collects and analyzes altitude, speed, and position in real time, providing data proof that leaflets landed precisely within North Korean territory; the accumulated data is then used to improve the success rate of future flights.

Beyond these, a range of auxiliary devices — including small parachute systems — were developed to ensure the accurate delivery of standard balloons carrying Bibles, USB drives, pocketbooks, and microSD cards.



Figure 02: Smart Balloon core components — field photos of the altitude-control device, timer, leaflet-release mechanism, and GPS tracker

The idea for the Smart Balloon was first proposed in 2016, and after numerous rounds of innovative upgrades, the final version was completed by late 2021.

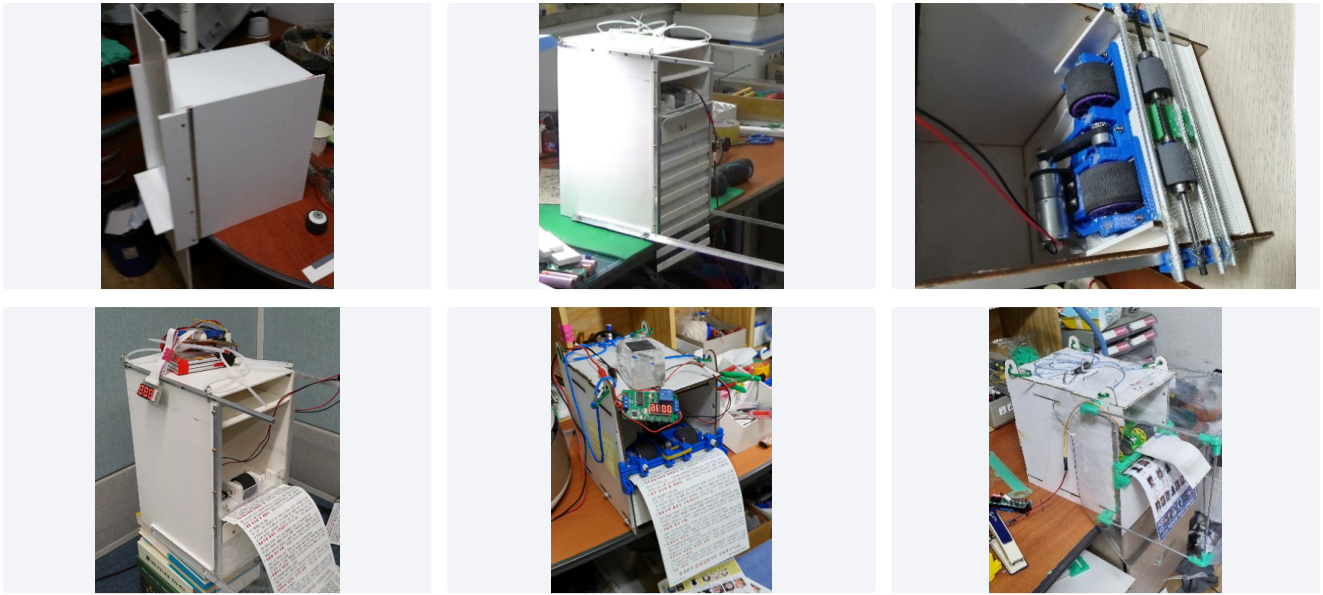


Figure 03: Smart Balloon development process — prototype and field-testing photos, 2016–2021

07. Voices from the Sky — Aerial Broadcasting: Big and Small Speaker Systems

07. 하늘의 목소리 (Voices from the Sky)

Balloons do not carry printed material alone. To ensure information reaches residents who cannot read or who are afraid to pick up a leaflet, NKROC operates two aerial speaker systems in parallel.

- **Big Speaker Balloon (Sky):** Fitted with an 800W high-output amplifier and speaker, it broadcasts audible content across a radius of several kilometers on the ground from a stable flight altitude. By repeating short, clear messages — on the contradictions of the Kim family's hereditary rule, South Korea's development, and more — it ensures an entire village hears the same content at the same moment.
- **Small Speaker Balloon (Ground):** After landing by parachute, this ground-based unit uses a 30W speaker and a large-capacity battery to broadcast continuously for five days or more. Soldiers, security agents, and fishermen who come to retrieve the device end up hearing the broadcast directly themselves, extending its influence even into the internal security apparatus.

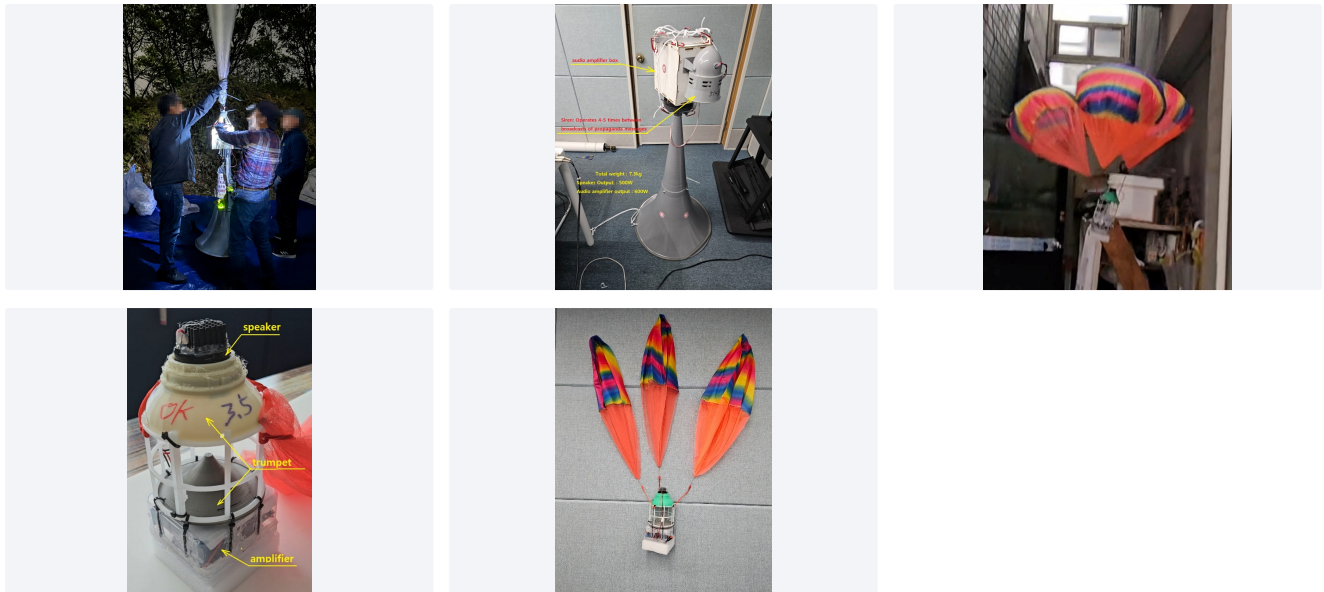


Figure 04: Big and small Smart Speaker units — manufacturing and field-deployment photos

The shared goal of both systems is the realization of the 'Common Knowledge' theory described in Part 1 — not information secretly overheard by an individual, but the creation of the fact itself that an entire village heard the same thing at the same moment.

08. Operational Innovation — From Failure to Precision: The Evolution of the System

08. 혁신적 운용 (Operational Innovation)

NKROC's technology has been refined through a vast record of field operations and failure data. Though formally founded in 2014, its members had been engaged in information-infiltration activity since around 2010. In the early days of the Smart Balloon, the team endured setbacks — crashes into the Han River, losses at sea, GPS signal dropouts — but through a feedback loop in which every failure was immediately incorporated into the next flight's design, NKROC continuously refined its altitude settings for different weather conditions, improved the balloon envelope itself, and developed techniques to evade radar detection.

This approach stands in stark contrast to the 'trash balloon' provocation North Korea began in 2024. Trash balloons have no target, no data, and no recoverable information — they are scattered at random, a crude form of retaliation. NKROC's Smart Balloons, by contrast, represent a 'designed operation,' with every flight recorded and verified through trajectory data. This distinction alone fundamentally separates the character of the two activities.

09. Field Notes — 2021–2024 Flight Log and Trajectory Analysis

09. 현장 기록 (Field Notes)

The following are key cases from the actual flight log directly executed and confirmed by NKROC through GPS tracking. The idea for the Smart Balloon was proposed and the decision to build it made in 2016. Early models were produced and tested from 2017, and the final version was completed by late 2021. Since then, the Smart Balloon has successfully delivered leaflets across wide areas of North Korea dozens of times, inflicting substantive damage on the regime.

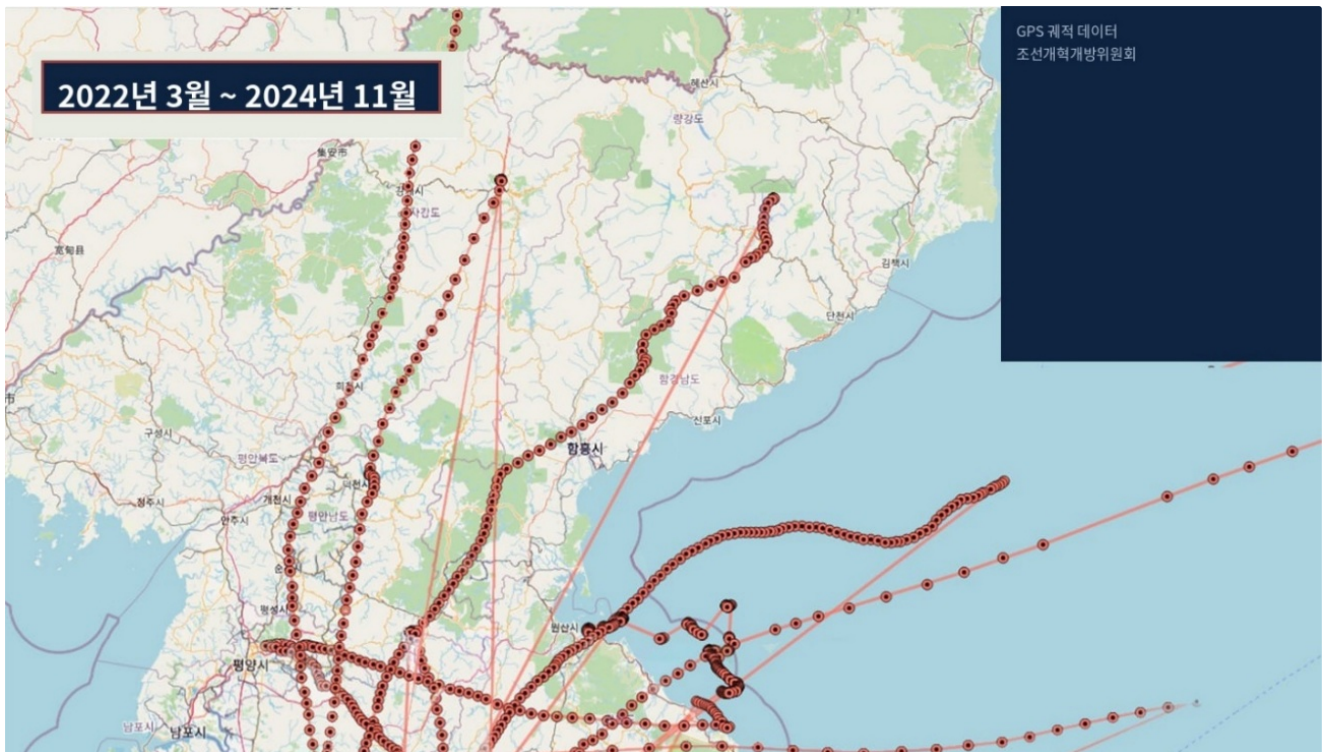


Figure 05: Full GPS flight trajectory map, 2021–2024

PART 3

The Power of Content: The Red Book and Information Infiltration

콘텐츠의 힘 : 빨간책과 정보 투입

Where the previous chapter covered how information is delivered, this chapter covers what is delivered. It outlines how printed and digital content was each designed, and what kind of response this content actually produced inside North Korea.

10. The Red Book — Fact-Checking the Myth, One Pocketbook at a Time

10. 진실의 기록 '빨간책' (The Red Book)

The pocketbook *Why Is Kim Jong Un Purging the 'Paektu Bloodline'?* directly dismantles the legitimacy of the 'Paektu Bloodline' that the Kim Jong Un regime claims for itself. It traces, with concrete facts, dates, and personal relationships, why senior officials with genuine anti-Japanese-resistance lineage — Choe Ryong Hae, Jang Song Thaek, Ri Yong Ho, and others — were purged one after another, and why their positions were filled instead by figures connected to Kim Jong Un's maternal side. By laying bare, in full detail, how the Paektu Bloodline myth was constructed — and how it falls apart under scrutiny — the book lets readers see for themselves just how fragile the ideological foundation of Kim Jong Un's personality cult truly is.

The Red Book borrows the pocketbook format most familiar to North Korean readers and is written in narrative style, designed to be read without triggering resistance.



Figure 06: The Red Book — cover and sample interior pages, and 2014 media coverage

11. Digital Freedom — USB, SD Cards, and Shortwave: Reaching the Next Generation

11. 디지털 자유 (Digital Freedom)

For audiences that printed material alone cannot reach — particularly the younger generation — NKROC delivers digital content alongside its printed materials.

- K-pop and trot USB drives / SD cards: Digital media carrying South Korean popular culture, dramas, and news, using entertainment appeal to naturally lower resistance to outside information.
- Shortwave radios bundled with Bibles: Receiving devices that allow direct, repeated access to news of the outside world, turning a one-time exposure to information into ongoing access.

12. Internal Impact — What We Know, and What We Don't, About Change on the Ground

12. 주민의 반응 (Internal Impact)

This section addresses the question donors and the international community ask most often — "Is this information actually changing how people think?" NKROC is clear about its limits here: it cannot directly measure shifts in perception inside a closed society. What follows is confirmable circumstantial evidence, which we do not overstate as definitive conclusions.

Circumstantial Evidence — The Nampo Case (June 2023)

According to multiple sources inside North Korea, around June 26–28, 2023, large quantities of GPS-equipped leaflets and USB drives were scattered across the Chollima and Kangso districts of Nampo. The Ministry of State Security, the Ministry of Social Security, and militia units were mobilized for a two-day collection operation. Even during the collection process, word of the leaflets' content reportedly spread among residents by rumor. This is an individual case, and NKROC does not claim it is representative of North Korea as a whole.

The more structural evidence lies in the North Korean regime's own response. The fact that, from July 2022, the Korean Central News Agency and Rodong Sinmun repeatedly emphasized a nationwide surveillance and reporting system targeting 'unusual objects,' and that Kim Yo Jong labeled the activity a "real war" in a strongly worded statement, shows that the regime views this not as a localized incident but as a systemic, regime-level threat. (A detailed timeline of these reactions is covered in Part 4.)

NKROC plans to continue converting this circumstantial evidence into systematic data through future defector interviews and its internal source network. What can honestly be said at this point is this: the information is getting through, and the regime is afraid of it.

The World Bears Witness: Global Media and Recognition

세계가 목격하다 : 글로벌 미디어와 평판

This chapter shows that NKROC's activities do not rely solely on the testimony of domestic sources. Leading international media coverage, alongside the North Korean regime's own official reactions, together serve as independent evidence supporting the real-world impact of NKROC's work.

13. Global Media Exposure — Reuters, NYT, CNN, and RFA on the Balloon War

13. 외신의 눈 (Global Media Exposure)

Some of the world's most credible news organizations have covered information-infiltration efforts targeting North Korea, including NKROC's work, in considerable depth.

- Reuters: Covered GPS-enabled precision balloon operations in an in-depth graphics feature, describing it as a 'balloon war.'
- The New York Times (NYT): Published a feature on cross-border balloon activity and North Koreans' right to information.
- CNN & RFA (Radio Free Asia): Provided in-depth coverage framing the information-infiltration work of defector and activist groups, and North Korea's response, as an international human-rights issue.



Figure 07: Screen captures and logos from Reuters, NYT, CNN, and RFA coverage

<https://www.reuters.com/graphics/NORTHKOREA-SOUTHKOREA/BALLOONS/zdvxxrnzmvx/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/card/2024/06/29/world/asia/balloon-south-korea>

<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/06/26/asia/north-south-korea-balloons-defector-activist-group-intl-hnk/index.html>

https://www.rfa.org/korean/news_indepth/nk_leaflet_balloon-06142024102326.html

14. Pyongyang's Fear — State Media Reactions as Evidence of Impact

14. 평양의 공포 (Pyongyang's Fear)

Ironically, the clearest evidence of NKROC's real-world impact is the North Korean regime's own response.

- Nationwide surveillance and reporting system issued (July 2022–): Immediately after Smart Balloon leaflet drops, the Korean Central News Agency and Rodong Sinmun began referring to them as 'unusual objects,' while surveillance posts and mass-reporting rules were strengthened nationwide.
- Kim Yo Jong's statement at the Emergency Anti-Epidemic Meeting (August 10, 2022): Kim Yo Jong labeled the leaflet drops a "real war" and "intense class struggle," warning of a forceful response.

전 사회적인 방역 분위기
더욱 고조, 높은 경각심 견지

우리 나라에 전파된 악성비루스의 류입 경로가 과학적으로 해명된데 맞게 전국적 범위에서 최대로 각성분발하여 방역안전에 위협으로 되는 모든 요소들을 철저히 제거하며 전사회적인 방역분위기를 고조시키기 위한 적시적인 대책들이 세워지고 있다.

국가비상방역사령부는 주민들이 섣다른 물건과 절대로 접촉하지 말고 발견 즉시 통보하는 전인민적인 감시 및 신고체제와 비상방역대들에서 엄격히 수거, 처리하는 방역학적대책을 더욱 강화할데 대한 비상시기를 발령하였다.

모든 부문, 모든 단위와 지역의 근로자들과 주민들이 색다른 물건뿐 아니라 야생동물철축의 위험성, 엄중성을 자각하고 고도의 경각심을 항상 견지하면서 방역대전에서 국민적본분을 다해나갈데 대한 교양자료들을 각급 비상방역단위들에 신속히 배포하고 사업단위, 생산단위, 생활단위별로 집중선전용 공세적으로 벌려도록

감시동보조들의 역량울 보강하고 임무를 보다 구체화, 세분화하였으며 신속기동방역조, 신속진단치료조, 신속협의진단조를 창설하여 감시지역인 양양군을 순회하며 관리하고 있다.

바람을 비롯한 기상현상에 의하여 날려
온 색다른 물건과 바다가와 강기슭에 밀
려온 쓰레기 수거, 처리에 동원되고
원들에 대한 안전대책을 강구해 세우며
방역정주를 엄수하도록 요구성을 높이고
있다.

전국적으로 동물보호구, 월새 보호구들과 서식지주변에 감시지점들이 보강되고 월새와 야생짐승의 이동경로에 대한 감시가 강화되고있으며 죽은 원인이 불명확한 조류, 야생동물들에 대한 소독처리가 엄격히 진행되고있다.

장마철기상조건에 맞게 새로운 변이비
루스의 류입통로로 될수 있는 모든 고리
와 공간들을 과학적전지에서 따져보면서

규정과 세치트호 스킴안비하느 취피 편아

시와 연선 **2022. 07. 02**

도시경영부문에서는 생활오수와 오물
들에 대한 소독처리를 비롯하여 오염원천
을 제거하는 사업을 짜고들고있으며 각지
축산단위의 수의방역초소들에서는 동물
들에 대한 역학감시를 강화하고 방역학적
대책을 빈틈없이 세움으로써 악성비루
스전과공감가를 철저히 제거하고있다

당과 국가의 방역정책과 조치들을 실행함에 있어서 행동의 일치성을 보장하며 나라의 방역보루를 철골같이 다지기 위해 호상 방조하고 통제하는 강도높은 투쟁으로 전사회적인 방역분위기는 더욱 고조되고있다.

【조선중앙통신】

Figure 08: Rodong Sinmun coverage referring to Smart Balloon leaflets as 'unusual objects' (July 2, 2022)

- Direct targeting of an individual activist (late 2023): In a leaflet dropped into South Korea in late 2023, North Korean authorities named NKROC president Kim Seung-chul directly — even though he had never publicly disclosed his involvement in Smart Balloon operations. This is read as evidence that the regime now recognizes the Smart Balloon activity not as the work of an anonymous organization, but as being led by a specific, identifiable individual — and that it regards the activity as a significant threat.



Figure 09: North Korean leaflet naming an NKROC activist by name (dropped in late 2023, recovered in the field)

- The 'trash balloon' provocation (May 2024–): With no coherent means of countering sophisticated information infiltration, North Korean authorities resorted to an asymmetric retaliation — sending trash back across the border — widely read as an admission of defeat in the information war.

These reactions are not coincidental. North Korean authorities' shift to an official policy of non-response toward leaflets from November 2022 onward is likewise interpreted as an attempt to minimize exposure of an issue the regime considers too sensitive to acknowledge publicly.

15. Humiliation and Silence — A Timeline of Fact, and the Committee's Own Interpretation

15. 굴욕과 침묵 — 정권이 감당할 수 없었던 것 (Humiliation and Silence)

The confirmed facts, laid out in chronological order, are as follows.

- In 2023, NKROC deployed large numbers of both sky-based and ground-based Smart Speakers, repeatedly broadcasting content across North Korea that directly challenged the legitimacy of the Kim Jong Un regime. These broadcasts included material on the privileged lives of the Kim family, as well as content targeting a bloodline weakness the Paektu Bloodline narrative conceals — the fact, quietly taboo inside North Korea, that Kim Jong Un's mother, Ko Yong Hui, was born in Japan to a Zainichi Korean family.

- In February 2023, at a military parade marking the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Korean People's Army, North Korea unveiled the slogan 'Defend the Paektu Bloodline to the Death' — a phrase that had never before appeared in North Korean state media — in a direct show of defiance.
- From May 2024, North Korea began launching large numbers of 'trash balloons' toward the South. With no logical rebuttal or means of information control available, the regime's chosen response was an asymmetric retaliation of sending back garbage.
- In late 2023, North Korean authorities directly named an NKROC activist (President Kim Seung-chul) in a leaflet dropped into the South.
- In January 2024, Kim Jong Un ordered the demolition of the Arch of Reunification (Monument to the Three Charters for National Reunification), built by his father Kim Jong Il, calling it an 'eyesore.' He subsequently declared the 'two hostile states' doctrine, beginning to erase the very concepts of reunification and shared ethnicity.
- Since 2024, the term 'Paektu Bloodline' has effectively disappeared from North Korean state media.

NKROC interprets this sequence of events as follows: broadcasts repeated across sky and ground created the fact itself that residents 'heard the same closely guarded truths at the same time' — a humiliation the regime could neither quietly ignore nor openly rebut. In NKROC's assessment, this led to the trash-balloon retaliation, the unusual act of naming an individual activist, and ultimately to the regime abandoning the Paektu Bloodline and reunification narratives altogether. This causal interpretation, however, is based on NKROC's own field experience and has not been independently verified by any outside institution.

16. A Six-Year Solo Effort — No Organization, No Foreign Funding: Just Evenings and Weekends

16. 홀로 걸어온 6년 (A Six-Year Solo Effort)

NKROC's activities are not the product of a large organization or an international funding network. While serving as president of North Korea Reform Radio, Kim Seung-chul built the Smart Balloons in his time outside work — weekday evenings and weekends — funded entirely by small donations from a handful of individual supporters. Building when funds were available and pausing when they ran out, it took six years to complete the development of the Smart Balloon.

The UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Human Rights in North Korea recognized access to outside information as a universal human right in its 2014 report. NKROC cites this international norm as the basis for the legitimacy of its work, but has not yet secured any organized international partnership to support it. With the recent shift in South Korea's domestic political landscape and tightening restrictions on information-infiltration activity, the resources available to sustain this work have, if anything, further declined.

The Road Ahead: What Expanded Information Access Can Do

앞으로의 과제 : 정보 자유화가 여는 길

This chapter looks ahead. NKROC does not presume to predict or design any specific political outcome. What we can do is widen access to information; what follows from that is entirely a matter for North Korean society itself.

17. How Information Changes a Society — A Principle, Not a Prescription

17. 정보가 사회를 바꾸는 방식 (How Information Changes a Society)

The changes that occur when outside information continuously reaches a closed society have already been observed across many countries. As access to information widens, the gap between the narrative a regime monopolizes and the reality residents actually live gradually becomes something they come to share among themselves — a process that, over time, tends to become an internal driver of change within society. This is precisely what the 'Common Knowledge' theory described in Part 1 points to: the moment people confirm that a truth they each privately knew is also known by others, silence stops being the only option.

NKROC does not attempt to predict or design when or in what form this change will take place. Our role is confined to one clear task — creating the minimum opportunity for access to information that has long been suppressed. What comes after that — every judgment and every choice — belongs entirely to the people of North Korea, and to no one else.

18. A Call to Action — Join a Global Effort for Information Freedom

18. 지원 촉구 메시지 (A Call to Action)

From Venezuela to Iran to Cuba, expanded access to information has already planted the seeds of change around the world. The same opportunity must be given to the 25 million people north of the Korean Peninsula's dividing line. This is not a matter of any particular political line, but a matter of the universal principle that everyone has the right to access the truth.

Drawing on nine years of accumulated technical precision and field experience, NKROC is ready to sustain and expand this work. What it requires is the resources to keep going. NKROC asks for the international community's attention and participation in this effort.

PART 6

How to Engage, and Supporting Evidence

함께하는 방법 및 부록

This chapter sets out the principles of engagement and support, and lists the source materials cited throughout this report.

19. How to Support — Engagement in Principle: Details via Official Channels

19. 함께하는 방법 (How to Support)

This work began with one person's evenings after his day job, and has continued through the cooperation of fellow activists and the small donations of a handful of supporters. It took six years to refine the Smart Balloon into its finished form through hundreds of iterations, and just three years after it was put into full operation, North Korea began abandoning the Paektu Bloodline, the goal of reunification, and even the legacy of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. The results are the achievements documented in this report. With organized resources behind this work, several times more information could be delivered to the people of North Korea. Access to information is a basic right that belongs to all 25 million North Koreans, and realizing it requires your attention and participation. Sustaining this work requires not only attention, but the real resources to carry it forward.

NKROC welcomes individuals and organizations willing to join this effort. Those interested in partnership are invited to reach out via nkopen2014@gmail.com or Signal (nkopen2014.18).

20. Appendix — Source Materials and Image Index

20. 증거 자료 (Appendix)

- Full NKROC Smart Balloon Operations Assessment Report (June 2024)
- Full-spread map of major leaflet-dispersal routes
- List of original links to international media coverage (Reuters / NYT / CNN / RFA)

Image Index

Figure 01 — Freedom Line strategic map (Part 1)

Figure 02 — Smart Balloon core components, field photos (Part 2)

Figure 03 — Smart Balloon development process photos (Part 2)

Figure 04 — Sky and ground Smart Speaker field photos (Part 2)

Figure 05 — Full GPS flight trajectory map, 2021–2024 (Part 2)

Figure 06 — The Red Book: cover, interior samples, and media coverage (Part 3)

Figure 07 — International media coverage screen captures and logos (Part 4)

Figure 08 — Rodong Sinmun coverage of "unusual objects" (Part 4)

Figure 09 — North Korean leaflet naming an activist (Part 4)
