

VOA Note #16

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PLACE: US and DPRK Diplomatic Missions in Geneva

PRESENT: US and DPRK Chief Delegates Robert Gallucci and Kang Sok-ju, and their delegations

Kang Sok-ju's Magnanimous Offer

Round two was more like a collision of wills than a negotiation. The two delegations took turns hosting each other at their diplomatic missions between July 14 and 18, 1993 in Geneva. Two major hurdles now impeded progress: Pyongyang's initially refused to permit any more IAEA inspections despite its promise in the June 11 Joint Statement to maintain "full scope nuclear safeguards" which Washington interpreted to include IAEA inspections. Seoul presented the second hurdle. Unhappy that the US and DPRK had issued a joint statement, President Kim Yong-nam insisted that the nuclear negotiations proceed in tandem with South-North Korea dialogue. In other words, President Kim demanded that Washington link progress in the nuclear negotiations with progress in South-North Korea dialogue.

Pyongyang promptly seized on the opportunity Seoul had inadvertently presented. Kang Sok-ju on the one hand claimed he could convince Pyongyang to consider cooperation with the IAEA, but on the other hand his government could not ensure that South-North dialogue would resume. In other words, Kim Yong-sam had unwittingly presented North Korea a diplomatic wedge to drive between Washington and Seoul. Pyongyang would demonstrate a conciliatory attitude toward Washington regarding the IAEA but Washington, in Pyongyang's view, would have to pressure Seoul to re-engage Pyongyang in dialogue. President Kim then inadvertently played into Pyongyang's hands by adamantly refusing to demonstrate any flexibility toward Pyongyang, and instead continued to insist that Washington must force Pyongyang to talk to Seoul.

But Pyongyang quickly realized that Washington's priority was to achieve the "global" goal of keeping North Korea in the Treaty on the Non-proliferation and of maintaining IAEA monitoring of North Korea's nuclear programs. For Washington, South-North dialogue was of secondary importance, something President Kim Yong-sam could not accept. Eventually this problem contributed to the talk's collapse in the spring of 1994 and a serious clash between Washington and Seoul that the United States unilaterally resolved in August 1994.

The morning that the talks resumed, July 14, Gallucci directed that I greet Kang Sok-ju and his delegation as it arrived at the US Mission in Geneva. As Kang stepped out of his black Mercedes, I extended my hand in greeting. Unknown to both of us, the international press was recording the event. President Kim Yong-sam wanted the US delegation to be tough but I was being diplomatic, as ordered. Such relatively small gestures greatly frustrated President Kim.

That first day the talks ended in complete frustration for both sides.

On day two the US delegation was scheduled to go to the DPRK Mission in Geneva – the first time ever that US diplomats would visit a North Korean diplomatic mission.

Even during my December 1992 visit to Pyongyang I had not been admitted to North Korea's Foreign Ministry. This was a matter of diplomatic reciprocity. In other words, what I do for you, you do for me. But finally, half a century after the Korean War had been discontinued on July 27, 1953, American diplomats would finally visit a North Korean diplomatic mission.

But there was a problem. How would the US delegation travel from the plush Intercontinental Hotel in Geneva to the DPRK mission? Bureaucrats at the State Department had told us to take taxi cabs. But how would it appear in the international mass media if a taxi cab dropped the chief US delegate in front of the North Korea mission after the entire North Korean delegation had arrived at the US mission in big black chauffeured sedans bearing diplomatic license plates?

This highlighted the gap in thinking between Washington's bureaucrats and US diplomats abroad. The State Department is run by bureaucrats who live and work in Washington, DC. They view US representatives abroad as being pampered by living in plush quarters, hosting receptions and riding around in chauffeured sedan. Bureaucrats generally ignore the fact that the international community measures power and influence based on images and appearance. Chauffeured cars and receptions are thus essential images to convey the United States' power and influence.

Fortunately for the national honor of the United States, representatives from US government agencies other than the Department of State had cars already assigned to them. The deputy director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), an entity attached to the Department of State, had a large sedan and invited Chief Delegate Gallucci and the National Security Council Adviser to ride with him. Then the representative of the US military's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) volunteered to take a couple of other delegates in his car. The US Mission in Geneva managed to lend us a van to carry some delegates. Finally, I had my small rented Opel and gave the interpreter and two others a ride to the DPRK mission. The entire US delegation avoided humiliating the United States by arriving at the DPRK Mission in "official cars," each one different but at least without any taxi cabs.

The North Korean delegation later told me how relieved they were to see the US delegation arriving in a mixed motorcade of official cars without taxi cabs. Otherwise, the North Koreans feared, the world would conclude that the US delegation commanded so little support in Washington that it could not even get official cars committed to the delegation.

Prior to our arrival, the North Koreans had admitted journalists into their diplomatic compound and positioned them so that they could see and photograph Kang Sok-ju greeting Robert Gallucci as he arrived in front of the main mission building. It was a historic moment – the first time that a North Korean diplomat greeted his American counterpart at a DPRK diplomatic mission.

The delegates then gathered in a nearby conference room where immediately the two sides clashed. Kang accused the US of manipulating the IAEA and claimed IAEA inspections infringed on North Korea's sovereignty. He claim trilateral cooperation between Washington, Seoul and Tokyo was designed to 'strangle' the DPRK. Gallucci in his usual calm manner rejected all of Kang's allegations.

But then Kang stunned the US delegation. His tone of voice became subdued and his attitude conciliatory. He said he wished to make a “magnanimous offer.” North Korea would comply with Washington’s demands if the United States halted his annual joint US-South Korea military exercise “Team Spirit,” normalize relations with North Korea and build it two nuclear light water reactors. The entire US delegation was so surprised that Gallucci asked for a recess.

Outside, the US delegation gathered behind a small building out of sight of the international press that had been seated in lawn chairs supplied by the DPRK mission. (I took a picture of the gathering.) At first we laughed and joked about Kang’s “magnanimous” offer. How could Pyongyang ever think that the United States would build North Korea two modern nuclear light water reactors (LWR)? Few on the US delegation knew that the Soviet Union had promised to build North Korea two LWRs if it joined the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and joined the IAEA. The deal fell through when the Soviet Union collapsed. Now Pyongyang was asking Washington to do what Moscow had failed to do.

Gallucci responded tactfully by asking Kang for more details which he promptly supplied.

We then broke for lunch. Kang hosted Gallucci for a special lunch inside the main mission building while the other American diplomats ate in the meeting room. We feasted on a very tasty variety of Korean dishes that included barbequed beef, summer style cold noodles (*naengmyon*), *chapche* and of course kimchi. The DPRK Mission’s spouses had prepared and served the meal.

After a lengthy meal and discussion with Kang, Gallucci returned to the meeting room to announce that the day’s negotiations had ended. We returned to the US Mission but our day was not done. First Gallucci gathered the delegation in his temporary office to compare notes on the day’s discussions. He then called Washington to brief the Department of State while the National Security Council representative briefed his counterparts at the White House. Others called their home offices while I arranged for ambassadors in Geneva who represented the UN Security Council’s permanent members and the South Korean ambassador to meet Gallucci for a personal briefing. Our day usually ended around 2 PM.