

VOA Note #17

DATE: July 15-19, 1993

EVENT: "Hamburger Diplomacy" – Round II

PLACE: Geneva, Switzerland

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

Kang Sok-ju's "magnanimous" offer had not achieved the sudden break through that Pyongyang apparently expected. On the second day of round II in Geneva, the talks continued at the DPRK Mission to the UN. The morning session had accomplished nothing except that Kang reiterated his offer. Eventually Assistant Secretary (A/S) Gallucci and Kang tried a new tactic. They separated from their delegations and had a private lunch in the DPRK's main building while the US delegates waited. After lunch, Gallucci gathered his delegation and we went outside to learn from him about his luncheon discussion with Kang. Gallucci said Kang's offer appeared earnest and invited our advice. On the one hand, Kang's offer clearly indicated that Pyongyang had "blinked" regarding its resolute decision to leave the NPT. In other words it now appeared that North Korea was willing to remain in the treaty, but for a price – two light water reactors (LWR). Several members of the US delegation found the price outrageous. We returned to the conference room without knowing Gallucci's intentions.

When the talks resumed, Gallucci told Kang that the US delegation was not in a position to respond. He then repeatedly asked Kang who would pay for the two LWRs. Kang insisted that his government would eventually pay back the full cost if the US provided a "no interest loan." Gallucci explained that US law and international agreements (the Nuclear Supply Group agreement) barred the US from providing nuclear technology to any nation unless it was a member of the NPT and in compliance IAEA nuclear safeguard requirements.

Gallucci attempted to discontinue the talks so that the US delegation could return to Washington to consult regarding Kang's "magnanimous" offer. But first, Gallucci explained, he needed North Korea's promise that it would cooperate with the IAEA, as provided for in the June 11, 1993 Joint Statement and also that Pyongyang would resume dialogue with South Korea. Kang responded with an angry no. Again the two chief delegates retired to the DPRK Mission's main building for private talks.

Meanwhile, the two delegations' other members chatted with each other in the large, nicely furnished and air conditioned conference room (greatly appreciated during Geneva's very humid and warm summer days). Eventually dinner time came and still the chief delegates did not return. Instead, the spouses of the North Korean diplomats entered the room carrying trays of "Big Mac" hamburger value meals – hamburger, fries and a drink - from a local McDonald's restaurant. We were pleasantly stunned. The atmosphere of tension and impatience evaporated as American and North Korean diplomats munched on "American food" and exchanged information about families back home.

This was the first time in history that representatives of both nations, still technically at war, engaged in such congenial chatter. Today such an experience hardly seems significant but in 1993 it was history making. One month had passed since the first

ever US-DPRK negotiations commenced. Both sides could only bring to the negotiating table a legacy of mutual hostility and distrust. But what had begun with drinking orange juice in a New York bagel shop and sipping chocolate in a Geneva chocolate shop had subsequently escalated to sharing hamburgers at the North Korea mission while the two chief delegates engaged in private discussion.

Political scientists and experts in negotiations never concern themselves with how negotiators from two hostile nations establish the common ground necessary for engaging in diplomatic talks. Such common ground is always assumed. Never before had American diplomats had to build a context of mutual trust before engaging in negotiations. Even the United States disarmament talks with the Soviet Union had benefited from the World War II alliance between the two nations against Nazi Germany.

Truly the US-DPRK nuclear talks were unique in that before negotiations could begin in earnest, individual members of each delegation first had to establish a personal basis of individual trust. This was accomplished by small individual acts: buying coffee for a North Korean diplomat, inviting the North Koreans into the US Mission to the United Nations, displaying the two nations' flags on the negotiating table, eating lunch together at the UN Plaza Hotel, and in Geneva enjoying hamburgers together.

Nevertheless, round II proved inconclusive. Not only did Gallucci have to return to Washington, DC for instructions regarding how to respond to Kang's "magnanimous" offer, but Gallucci was also under instructions to gain two concessions from North Korea. First, the South Korean government insisted that the US delegation gain North Korea's commitment to resume South-North Korea dialogue. Secondly, Gallucci needed North Korea's promise that it would permit IAEA inspectors to visit the Yongbyon Nuclear facility to ensure that Pyongyang was keeping its promise in the June 11 Joint Statement that it would "maintain full scope nuclear safeguards."

Both sides invested three long days in exchanging drafts of a proposed joint statement that addressed these issues. I shuttled back and forth between the US and North Korean missions with drafts. On the morning of the third day of shuttling, I was directed to carry a draft to the DPRK Mission at 4 AM. By this time my authority to rent a car had expired and I had had to return my rented car. But at 4 AM no taxi cabs were to be found in Geneva. Consequently the US ambassador to the IAEA headquarters in Vienna became my driver.

In the end, no joint statement was issued. Instead, each side issued its own statement. Nevertheless, North Korea, while refusing to commit to resuming dialogue with South Korea, did make a vague promise to allow IAEA inspectors to visit Yongbyon. Both delegations departed Geneva exhausted and frustrated, and without an agreement as to when they would again meet.

C. Kenneth Quinones
December 5, 2008