

**VOA Note #21**

**DATE: October 7 to 13, 1993**

**EVENT: Meeting with Kim Il Sung**

**PLACE: Pyongyang, DPRK**

**PARTICIPANTS:** Congressman Ackerman, two members of his staff and State Department Escort C. Kenneth Quinones

The US-DPRK nuclear negotiations remained stalled. Efforts to open the way to their resumption continued at the "New York Channel Talks." But North Korea was also continuing its efforts to get influential American political figures to visit Pyongyang. Prominent religious leader Billy Graham had been followed by Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Issues Co-chairman Senator Bob Smith of New Hampshire. But Carter continued to deflect Pyongyang's invitation because the Clinton Administration thought the visit could undermined the negotiations.

But New York Congressman Ackerman of Queens and chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Sub-committee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs did accept Pyongyang's invitation in early October 1993. At the Congressman's invitation and with the State Department's permission, I was allowed to accompany the Congressman.

He, two of his staff and I arrived in Pyongyang on October 9 on an Air Koryo flight from Beijing. We did not know what to expect since the North Koreans had not responded to any of the Congressman's requests to meet North Korean leader Kim Il Sung and to exit North Korea through Panmunjom to allow the Congressman's speedy return to Washington. The Congressman's purpose was to emphasize to any officials he met that it would be much better for all concerned parties, particularly the North Korean people, if the DPRK government would concentrate its energy on improving the quality of life for its citizens rather than developing nuclear weapons.

At first the visit proved quite routine except that we were housed in a splendid official guest house overlooking the Taedong River in central Pyongyang. But on the third day of the visit, we were abruptly summoned to join a small motorcade and departed the guest house for an unknown location.

After a thirty minute drive southeast of Pyongyang, we drove up to a large, contemporary style mansion high of a hill and deep in a forest. As we entered the main entrance, Kim Il Sung greeted us with a beaming smile and extended hand. We were ushered into a nearby conference room and seated opposite the "Great Leader," then Foreign Minister and now Premier Kim Yong-nam and First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang Sok-ju.. For the next hour we exchanged substantive views about the nuclear issue, US-DPRK bilateral relations and North-South Korean dialogue.

Despite everything I had heard from the South Korean government, Kim Il Sung appeared healthy for a man 81 years old, his memory was sharp and he expressed his views very clearly. He demonstrated an impressive grasp of details regarding the international situation but turned several times to Kang Sok-ju for specifics about the US-DPRK negotiations. Each time Kang would raise, bow toward the "Great Leader" and begins his remarks with the high honorific phrase previously reserved for kings in traditional Korea, "Yeeeah Kakka!"

After an hour we were ushered out of the conference room into a hallway. Kim Il Sung had given each of us a copy of his brief thesis Ten Steps for Korean Reunification. I startled him by asking him to autograph the small pamphlet which he did to everyone's surprise.

Lunch followed. For another 90 minutes we chatted with Kim Il Sung over a multi-course banquet. No breakthrough was achieved, but for the first time in history a US Congressman and a State Department official were able to share with North Korea's foremost leader specifics about US policy not only toward North Korea but all the other nations of East Asia. We also realized that South Korean intelligence was not necessarily the most reliable source of information about Kim Il Sung and other aspects of life in North Korea.

That evening after dinner Foreign Ministry official Li Yong-ho approached me in my guest house room and we talked at length about how to achieve a breakthrough in the nuclear talks. He surprised me by outlining a specific proposal for a resolution. It outlined in detail concessions both sides might give to achieve a negotiated settlement. When he asked me to convey this back to Washington, I agreed but explained that many in Washington would claim that I was making up such a proposal since it contained substantial concessions from North Korea. I urged him to put these ideas on paper. When he rejected the idea, I explained the nature of a "non-paper." His government could give me a hand written "non-paper" that outlined his proposal. Later, if it leaked to the press, his government could deny that it had anything to do with the paper.

Very early the next morning Li Yong-ho returned to my room with a hand written "non-paper." It outlined in detail the concessions both sides should exchange to achieve a settlement. I folded and tucked the into my suit jacket, ate breakfast and then joined him in his official car as the Congressional delegation was transported south to Panmunjom for the first leg of its return to Washington, DC.

Once in Seoul, I showed the "non-paper" to then Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy Chuck Kartman, my former supervisor in the Office of Korea Affairs. He immediately realized the paper's importance and had be prepare a detailed report which was immediately sent to Washington. Early the next morning I had breakfast with a South Korean foreign ministry official at the Lotte Hotel. He was stunned by the "non-paper's content" and promised to personally brief the Foreign Minister. I then flew back to Washington.

My report about the "non-paper" had caused quite a raucous in Washington. Some took the paper seriously but others labeled as a hoax. Looking back now, I can say without a doubt, the "non-paper" accurately outlined what eventually became the first ever US-DPRK signed agreement. But forging that agreement would take another year and almost lead to a second Korean War.

C. Kenneth Quinones  
December 11, 2008.