

**SOUTH KOREA'S APPROACHES TO NORTH KOREA
- A GLACIAL PROCESS -**

by **Dr. C. Kenneth Quinones**

Published in:
Kyung-ae Park and Dalchoon Kim,
Korean Security Dynamics in Transition.
New York: Palgrave, 2001.

An old Korean adage proclaims, "The beginning is half the journey." The epic meeting of Korea's two leaders, South Korea's President Kim Dae Jung and North Korea's Supreme Commander Kim Jong Il on June 15, 2000 in Pyongyang took fifty years to accomplish. If the Korean adage is accurate, reconciliation between the two Koreas could require another half century. We would do well to look back now and recall the long, arduous journey to the Pyongyang summit. Such awareness should enable us to accept the reality that we have just reached the mid-point in the journey to reconciliation. Without this awareness tempering impatience will be impossible. The price of impatience could be frustration that might convince either or both Korean governments to revert to their earlier practices. The result could be renewed confrontation and heightened tension that once again might lead to war on the Korean Peninsula.

We should further broaden our perspective with an awareness of the potential geo-political consequences if the Koreans' efforts at reconciliation fail. The Korean Peninsula's role as a flash point in the intense superpower rivalry of the Cold War has undergone profound alteration since the Soviet Union's demise in 1990. The once highly unstable intersecting of superpower interests at the Korean Peninsula between the United States and Japan, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union and China is gradually giving way to an increasingly sturdy détente. The diminished tension has benefited the process of Korean reconciliation.

Looking back, it is indeed obvious that the pace of reconciliation has quickened since 1990. The two Koreas amazed the world in 1991 by committing themselves to making the Korean Peninsula free of nuclear weapons and by signing the Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression and Exchanges and Cooperation. Only a year later, mounting distrust fostered by evidence of North Korean attempts to conceal the extent of its previous production of nuclear weapons grade plutonium under cut the process of reconciliation. By June 1994, the crisis had escalated to one of virtual war that would certainly have involved the United States and possibly even China. Peace was preserved, but not by the conventional means long utilized on the Korean Peninsula

Making an accurate assessment of inter-Korean relations also necessitates discarding many assumptions we normally apply to relations between other nations. For example, we assume diplomacy between nations is essential for the resolution of disputes. Not so in the case of the Korean Peninsula. The institutions of diplomatic communication were not formally instituted until 1991 between Seoul and Pyongyang. They still are not in place for Seoul's primary supporters, i.e. the United States and Japan. In Korea's case, the only institutionalized, politically accepted and

functioning channel of communication for many years between the two Koreas was the Military Armistice Commission (MAC).

The purpose of the dialogue between representatives of hostile armies still technically at war was to perpetuate the military stalemate, not to resolve the conflict's underlying causes nor to promote reconciliation, or to pursue a durable peace. To describe the dialogue at Panmunjom as negotiation would be a gross inaccuracy. The MAC became the stage upon which two armies berated and belittled one another. In short, Seoul and Pyongyang equally distained diplomatic contact and dialogue between their citizens and foreign supporters. Washington and Moscow, Tokyo and Beijing readily aligned themselves with this perspective to demonstrate their unwavering support for the Korea of their choice.

Within this ideologically rigid and politically stark reality, the pursuit of reconciliation was foremost a futile exercise in rhetoric, at least until after 1990. Before then, the language of reconciliation was distorted and tainted with negative connotations. Reconciliation was affiliated with wavering disloyalty, even treason. Compromise, the essence of diplomacy and democracy, was associated with appeasement. Inducements and concessions, the key elements of international accords, were berated as signs of weakness.

Only after several long-term obstacles had been dismantled and replaced with new practices and perceptions has it been possible for the process of reconciliation to commence in earnest. This change dates from 1971 with the first tentative official contacts and exchanges of official visits between Seoul and Pyongyang. The period of mutual exploration waxed and waned for two decades, restrained by the dynamics of continuing superpower rivalry and domestic political instability in South Korea. The Cold War released the two Koreas from their ideological strait jackets. The 1991 North-South Prime Ministerial Talks institutionalized and expanded the channels of communication between Seoul and Pyongyang. Compromise and cooperation for the first time in North-South dialogue acquired positive connotations. The US-DPRK nuclear negotiations from June 1993 to October 1994 pre-empted the war of words long waged in Panmunjom, shifted the resolution of bilateral issues to diplomatic channels, and restored compromise as a legitimate approach to resolving differences with North Korea. Here we examine South Korea's varying approaches to North Korea over the past half-century.

CONTAINMENT – A QUESTION OF LEGITIMACY

A cornerstone of South Korean policy toward North Korea since 1948 has been its claim that as the Republic of Korea it is the sole legitimate government on the Korean Peninsula and that the regime in Pyongyang (i.e. the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) is illegitimate and unworthy of diplomatic recognition and communication. This policy was forged in the heated rivalry between the former Soviet Union, which championed Kim Il Sung as the leader of all of Korea, and the United States, which preferred a long time resident of Hawaii, Dr. Syng Mann Rhee.

When North Korea in May 1947 refused to permit the United Nations to conduct a plebiscite in the northern half of the Korean Peninsula, the United States declared on August 12, 1948 that the

government in Seoul was “the Korean Government” and established formal diplomatic relations with it. ¹

Long ignored has been the United Nations Resolution on Korea adopted by the General Assembly on December 12, 1948 regarding the situation on the Korean Peninsula. The pertinent section referring to the May 1948 plebiscite conducted in South Korea reads:

Declares that there has been established a lawful government (the Government of the Republic of Korea), having effective control and jurisdiction over that part of Korea where the (UN) Temporary Commission was able to observe and consult and in which the great majority of the people of all Korea reside; that this Government is based on elections which were a valid expression of the free will of the electorate of that part of Korea and which were observed by the Temporary Commission and that is the only such Government in Korea ... ²

The resolution’s wording does not specifically address, thus leaving ambiguous the issue of whether the ROK is the sole legitimate government on the entire Korean Peninsula. Rather, the statement clearly indicates that the United Nations General Assembly recognized the government in the Seoul as being “lawful” and having jurisdiction over the southern half of the peninsula.

Subsequent action by the United States and its allies in the United Nations firmly defined the basic parameters of ROK-US policy toward North Korea in the half century after the Korean War. The ROK came to be viewed by most of the nations allied with the US as the sole legitimate government on the Korean Peninsula. Prompted by the US, the UN Security Council on June 25, 1950 condemned North Korea for its invasion of South Korea. Pyongyang’s grievous misconduct earned it the label of international outlaw and for many nations confirmed its illegitimacy. The United States Congress imposed on North Korea strident economic sanctions as provided for in the Trading With the Enemy Act of 1918. The Korean War Armistice halted hostilities on July 27, 1953, but the war’s legacy of distrust and hostility continued unabated. The ROK-US alliance was affirmed by the signing of a mutual defense treaty on October 1, 1953. The essence of the treaty, as approved by the US Senate, obligates the US to the ROK’S defense only in the event of external armed attack. The treaty has remained unaltered since the date it entered into force, November 17, 1954. ³

Until the early 1990’s, Seoul and Washington worked in tandem to apply a policy of containment to North Korea while working simultaneously to make South Korea a showcase for democracy and capitalism. The two allies’ intertwined policy provided that the US would follow the ROK’s lead regarding the formulation and implementation of policy involving Pyongyang. Seoul established, and Washington accepted a list of “sticks and carrots” to be applied to or withheld from the North depending on whether its conduct was deemed good or bad.

Any official, diplomatic contact between Washington and its allies with Pyongyang was absolutely taboo. Nor was there to be any commercial intercourse. The aim was to diplomatically and commercially isolate Pyongyang from the mainstream of international society. For some people in both South Korea and the US, the policy of containing and isolating Pyongyang nurtured the expectation that Korea’s unification would someday bring about the northern regime’s collapse. Such an expectation ignored the fact that Pyongyang found ample military and economic benefit in its alliance with the so-called Communist Bloc nations. At the same time, Seoul linked its economy

to that of the US. From 1954 to 1976, the Seoul government absorbed large amounts of foreign aid from the US. Eventually the endeavor reaped spectacular results as South Korea's economic dynamism finally burst forth in the later 1970's. The establishment of democracy took longer.

The ROK-US policies of containing and isolating the DPRK during the three decades following the Korean War fell short of their intended goal. Pyongyang grew stronger from its association with the Communist Bloc. The estrangement between the two Koreas, on the other hand, rigidified and their rivalry intensified. Tension on the Korean Peninsula was heightened and sustained. Their contest projected itself far beyond the Korean Peninsula, and often turned violent. They competed militarily not just along the DMZ in Korea, but also in Vietnam. South Korea, with US help, prevented North Korea from gaining diplomatic respectability and entrance into markets outside the Communist Bloc. None of this was conducive to reconciliation. Gradually but steadily, South Korea achieved diplomatic ascendancy over the North on the international stage. North Korea, on the other hand, made impressive strides in building economic and military prowess, both largely dependent however on the Soviet Union's continued viability.

North-South rivalry infected all aspects of communication between the two societies. Under South Korea's now notorious National Security Law, citizens of South Korea were not permitted to have contact of any kind with North Koreans, including kinsmen, without explicit written permission. Possession of any materials, especially printed literature from or even about North Korea and communism was similarly outlawed. Early on, even the exchange of mail with relatives in North Korea was considered a subversive act. North Korean television and radio broadcasts were jammed. Disobeying the law was punishable by execution. Conditions in the North were even harsher.

To demonstrate its loyalty to the ROK, the US government took great pains to prevent any conduct by its officials that might make the South Korean government uncomfortable or which might imply a softening attitude toward the North Korean regime. US diplomats were forbidden to speak to North Korean and even to attend social and diplomatic functions where North Koreans were expected to be present unless prior, explicit written permission was obtained from the State Department in Washington, D.C.

Not until 1984 were these rules relaxed slightly when Washington instituted so-called "Smile Diplomacy." Thereafter, US diplomats could attend diplomatic functions where North Koreans were present. If approached by a North Korean, an American diplomat could respond politely about the weather or some similarly innocuous topic. Any discussion of substantive issues was strictly banned. Only after 1988 were American diplomats able to engage North Korean diplomats on substantive issues, but all such encounters were limited to specific, brief engagements at a social club in Beijing. Each meeting was carefully scripted and the American diplomat was limited to exchanging letters and talking points. No American diplomat was allowed to visit North Korea until December 18, 1992 when then Department of State North Korea Affairs Officer Kenneth Quinones accompanied Senator Bob Smith (R. New Hampshire) to discuss future cooperation regarding the recovery of the remains of US military personnel who died and were left behind during the Korean War.

DETERRENCE

Another cornerstone of ROK-US policy until 1991 was deterrence. The goal of this policy was to perpetuate the status quo, i.e. a military stalemate. The pursuit of a durable peace and reconciliation was not part of the equation. Effective deterrence relies on a balance of terror manifested through the amassing of armies and weapons. In the case of Korea, both sides amassed huge armies backed by modern air forces and navies. Neither side possessed nor had any need for its own nuclear arsenal, at least not until the fall of the Soviet Union. Instead, both Koreas relied on their respective superpower allies' "nuclear umbrellas" to reinforced their deterrence capability. Such an arrangement, however, created the possibility that failure of deterrence could escalate rapidly into a nuclear holocaust both on and far beyond the Korean Peninsula.

Deterrence was actually designed to ensure that at least one of the superpowers, specifically the US, would be drawn into any resumption of hostilities. A division of US infantry has straddled the main avenue of attack from north to south since 1953. Supporting the division are elements of the US Air Force and a carrier battle group stationed near Tokyo, Japan. Additional land, sea and air reinforcements are posted on Japan's southern island of Okinawa. Neither Russian nor Chinese combat units are present on the peninsula but both nations' proximity to Korea make quick deployment from either or both nations possible.

Deterrence is a double-edged sword. It has restrained each side's impulses to resume hostilities, while at the same time making the peninsula one of the world's most volatile places. Upwards of one million heavily armed men backed by large numbers of tanks, artillery, combat aircraft, ballistic missiles and war ships stare at each other day after day anticipating a resumption of combat. Tens of thousands of soldiers, sailors and airmen stand ready elsewhere throughout Northeast Asia to rush to the Korean Peninsula to wage war. The Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 reduced Moscow's ability to project its military might toward the Korean Peninsula, diminishing its ability to rush to North Korea's defense as provided for in their mutual defense treaty. This significantly altered the balance of terror on the peninsula. No longer could then North Korean leader Kim Il Sung rely on Soviet military might to deter US military might. To restore the balance while also keeping his options open, Kim appears to have pursued a dual track policy. On the one hand, he engaged Seoul in dialogue while at the same time hastening the development of an indigenous nuclear capability. The policy of deterrence, in short, did nothing to deter such a pursuit. On the contrary, Kim Il Sung's determination to perpetuate the balance of terror as required by deterrence appears to have contributed to his decision to build a nuclear arsenal.

Deterrence is a highly risky arrangement, one that obstructs rather than promotes reconciliation and a durable peace. Nevertheless it remains a fundamental element of ROK-US policy toward North Korea. If anything, Seoul has taken steps over the past decade to reinforce deterrence by engaging in increasing levels of military cooperation with Japan.

BEFORE DIALOGUE - THE MILITARY ARMISTICE COMMISSION (MAC)

The ban on diplomatic contact with Pyongyang required reliance on some other mutually agreed upon channel of communication. Given the narrow range of options, responsibility for preventing war on the peninsula was placed in the hands of military men who represented two intensely hostile

armies. The Military Armistice Commission or MAC assumed this role immediately after the Armistice had been signed. Initially, the MAC was established primarily to resolve disputes over implementation of the Armistice and arising from clashes along the 151-mile DMZ that bisects the Korean Peninsula from east to west. It conducted its business in the neutral Joint Security Area (JSA) located mid-point within the DMZ, due north of Seoul and south of Kaesong in North Korea.

Membership in the MAC consisted of officers of the North's Korean People's Army (KPA) and the Chinese People's Volunteers (as the People's Republic of China (PRC) referred to its army in North Korea), plus the United Nations Command (UNC). The UNC was established at the beginning of the Korean War to oversee the armies allied against North Korea and its supporters. Eventually it engaged the Korean People's Army (KPA) in the negotiations that led to the signing of the Korean War Armistice. The UNC maintains its headquarters in Seoul in the same compound across the street from the headquarters of US Forces Korea (USFK). The same US army general serves concurrently as the Command in Chief of UN Forces (CINUNC) and commander of US Forces Korea. Until 1993, the UNC staff, except for a ceremonial honor guard, consisted primarily of members of the United States armed forces.

The MAC shared responsibility for the Armistice's implementation with its "neutral" counterpart the Neutral Nations Supervisory Council (NNSC) – Sweden, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, also established by the Armistice. The NNSC's theoretical role was to serve as a board of arbitration between the two intensely antagonistic armies. Early on it became apparent to the NNSC's representatives that it would be best for them not to project themselves and their views into the almost perpetual verbal crossfire between the KPA and the UNC. The NNSC, its assigned role effectively blocked, early became a ceremonial adjunct to the MAC.⁴

The Armistice, like deterrence, has outlived the Cold War, but not without changes. The MAC's role as the sole channel of communication between North and South Korea has lessened significantly. Since 1972, the Korean governments have gradually expanded the number of officially sanctioned channels of communication. In 1993, one of the NNSC's original members, Czechoslovakia, split into two nations. When neither sought to fill the vacant NNSC seat, no other nation sought to occupy it. The Korean People's Army (KPA) pressured the then recently democratized Poland to vacate its seat on the NNSC, effectively disbanding the commission.

Membership on the MAC has also changed significantly. The Chinese People's Volunteers, as the People's Republic of China preferred to call its military forces assigned to the Korean Peninsula, pulled out of the MAC in 1994. Meanwhile, South Korea succeeded in claiming a position on the MAC although not a party to the Armistice. ROK President Syng Man Rhee (Yi Sung-man), South Korea's ruler during the Korean War, adamantly refused to sign the armistice in 1953. The KPA declared the ROK's eventual acquisition of a position within the MAC to be illegal under the terms of the Armistice and unilaterally proclaimed the MAC dysfunctional. Pyongyang announced its withdrawal from the MAC and began urging the adoption of a new "peace mechanism." To draw attention to its claim, the KPA in April 1996 alarmed the world by dispatching a heavily armed infantry platoon into the Joint Security Area. The situation has since stabilized and KPA personnel do occasionally meet their US counterparts when the situation requires.

The UNC continues to profess its conventional role, but in reality it functions less and less as a crucial entity for preventing hostility on the Korean Peninsula and increasingly as an oddity of Cold

War politics. Direct dialogue between Seoul and Pyongyang via their respective liaison offices at Panmunjom and increasingly frequent contacts in Beijing and elsewhere have diminished greatly the MAC's former role as the conduit of North-South communication. Although the US and North Korea have yet to establish formal diplomatic relations, they maintain several channels of communication outside the MAC, including regular communication between the DPRK Mission to the United Nations and the Department of Defense's Office of Missing In Action Affairs. As for the process of reconciliation, the UNC has not and does not now play a constructive role.

DIALOGUE'S FALTERING START: 1970-1979

In spite of the impressive obstacles described above, South and North Korea have been able to gradually build a dialogue that has become increasingly substantive and productive. They have focused on reconciliation rather than reunification. Their dialogue has alternated between protracted stalemate and spurts of progress. But the general trend is one of shortened hiatus between periods of dialogue and longer periods of increasingly intense engagement. Each new start has built upon the accomplishments of the previous phase, gradually broadening the common ground between the two Koreas. The range of issues has gained in substance, moving from procedural concerns toward the political neutral areas of separated families and cultural and athletic exchanges. Economic cooperation, particularly in the areas of trade, tourism and investment by the South in the North, continues to expand and gain momentum. The level of the dialogue has also climbed, beginning with intelligence officials conducting secret meetings through the exchange of prime ministerial visits to the June 2000 summit meeting. Matters of security and reunification have yet to be broached.

Seoul's softening of its stance toward Pyongyang dates from 1971. The United States' disengagement from Vietnam and the pursuit of détente with Beijing appear to have influenced the ROK's third president, former general Park Chung Hee, to initiate secret contact with his northern counterpart soon after President Nixon visited Beijing in February 1971. The swiftness and secrecy of the two superpowers' rapprochement surprised North Korea's Kim Il Sung and South Korea's Park Chung Hee. When the first round of North-South dialogue occurred at Panmunjom in August 1971, détente between "Red" China and a still staunchly anti-communist America was well underway.

Precisely why the two Korean leaders decided to commence direct dialogue remains unclear. One possible explanation is their shared distrust of the superpowers. After all, both Koreas held the common conviction that their respective champions, the United States and the Soviet Union had agreed at the end of World War II to divide the Korean Peninsula without regard for the wishes of the Korean people. Possibly to check against another secret that might adversely affect Korea's interests, the two Korean leaders opted to communicate with one another. This is also to suggest that the avowed purpose of the initiative, the pursuit of reunification, was more rhetorical than actual.

Progress in the Korean dialogue initially appeared promising. On July 4, 1972, the two sides issued the first South-North Joint Communiqué. Item one of the agreement has since become a pillar of North-South dialogue, "First unification shall be achieved through independent efforts

without being subject to external imposition or interference.” These were oblique references to foreign, particularly superpower intervention in the dialogue between the two Koreas.⁵

The first round of dialogue quickly sputtered into an impasse. Neither side, after all, had taken any steps to defuse their mutual hostility and to foster an attitude of reconciliation. Both Koreas persisted in insulting the other, of belittling one another’s legitimacy and alleging barbaric conduct. At no time did inter-Korean rivalry – military and diplomatic- abate. Still the commencement of inter-Korean détente after a brutal war and two decades of total estrangement excited the Korean people, at least south of the DMZ. They were consumed in an emotional tidal wave of hope. Their yearning for national reconciliation and unification blinded them to the harsh political realities of the time. But there was no common meeting ground. Each ruler firmly stood his ground, confident in themselves and their allies. Each had successfully reconstructed their war-torn economies, built a huge armed forces and established firm alliances with their respective superpower champions. Neither Korean leader had anything to gain by striving to cooperate and compromise with one another.

Yet the rigid mold set in place by the Korean War had at last been cracked. The legitimacy of dialogue between the two Korean governments had been established. So too had been the principle that the two sides should pursue reconciliation without regard for foreign concerns. During the brief period of dialogue, the two sides had also cautiously sought to broaden their channels of communication beyond the formal, rather rigid dialogue conducted at Panmunjom. President Park in a speech on August 15, 1972 commemorating Korea’s 1945 liberation from Japan urged, “the north Korean Communists” to “... exhibit their fraternal love by beginning the humanitarian task of reducing the pains of the separated families.” Almost one year later, on June 23, 1973, Park in special announcement stated, “We shall not object to our admittance into the United Nations together with north Korea, if the majority of the member states of the United Nations so wish, provided that it does not cause hindrance to our national unification.” Within hours of the announcement, Kim Il Sung summarily rejected Park’s proposal regarding the UN.⁶

More than a decade would pass before Korea’s separated families could begin meeting one another. Two decades passed before both Koreas simultaneously entered the United Nations in 1991. Given the still intense estrangement between the two Koreas in the early 1970’s, not to mention the Cold War rivalry between their respective superpower champions, such proposals were indeed bold. Though they achieved nothing at the time, both identified common ground for future dialogue and cooperation.

In the subsequent decade, 1973-82, the two Koreas resumed their mutual hostility. By 1974, President Park was convinced of the futility of pursuing engagement with North Korea. A year earlier, in 1973, North Korean agents planted a bomb at the entrance to South Korea’s national cemetery, apparently in an attempt to assassinate Park who was scheduled to visit the site the next day. The bomb’s premature explosion during its installation killed the North Korean agents, but fortunately spared Park’s life. A year later on August 15, 1974, a Korean resident of Japan sympathetic to North Korea attempted to shoot Park during a ceremony at the national theater in Seoul. Tragically, Park’s highly respected wife was killed instead. Thereafter, Park demonstrated increasing signs of paranoia, not only toward his foes in the north but critics in the south. For Park, any criticism of his rule was equated with pro-communist subversive activities. He made extensive, ruthless use of the anti-communist National Security Law to torture and imprison any and all critics.

Even contact between kinsmen in the two halves of Korea was suspect and forbidden. President Park rationalized his oppressive authoritarian rule by repeatedly pointing to the threat of North Korea and its communist ideology. Given this stance, any effort at national reconciliation, much less reunification was futile.

After 1975, South Korea was preoccupied with its own internal political problems. President Park's intensified oppression of dissent created a police state, arguing criticism of his administration weakened the nation and invited invasion from North Korea. Park's paranoia and ruthless mistreatment of his critics tarnished his substantial accomplishments regarding South Korea's post war reconstruction and pioneering efforts regarding dialogue with Pyongyang. As the Western adage proclaims, "He who lives by the sword also dies by the sword." Park was assassinated by the man he had appointed director of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA).⁷

DECADE OF DIALOGUE AND TERRORISM - 1980-1989

Before inter-Korean dialogue could resume, Seoul had to put its house in order. Chun Doo Hwan, South Korea's new ruler emerged from the same mold as his predecessor Park Chung Hee. Chun was an ambitious army general who forcefully seized power on December 12, 1979, three months after Park's assassination. Over the next six months, Chun carefully consolidated his power base within the military and the Korea's intelligence bureaucracy. He struck decisively, ruthlessly in May 1980 against his primary opponent – Kim Dae Jung, another man destined to become president of the ROK. Chun imprisoned Kim on charges of inciting pro-communist riots in his home province and then ordered the brutal suppression of the demonstrators who were also described as pro-Pyongyang communist sympathizers.

For the next seven years, Chun ruled South Korea with an iron hand. Anyone who criticized him or his policies exposed themselves to the possibility of imprisonment under the National Security Law for undermining national "harmony" and making the nation vulnerable to invasion from the north. Thousands of professors, students, journalists, politicians and other professionals were imprisoned, black listed, denied employment or fled the country. A small number like Kim Dae Jung were labeled pro-communists and sentenced to death for having challenged Chun's rise to political power.

The new US Administration headed by President Reagan struck a "gentleman's agreement" with the Chun administration. Washington promised to ensure South Korea's safety from invasion by North Korea if Kim Dae Jung's life was spared. Also, Washington promised not to intervene in South Korea's internal political affairs if Chun would actively pursue dialogue with Pyongyang. Kim Dae Jung's life was eventually spared and he was allowed to travel to the United States.

In retrospect, Chun's confidence in US support for his administration and iron fisted rule at home enabled him to achieve remarkable progress when recasting Seoul's approach to the Communist Bloc and its communist neighbors, North Korea and China. He was able to launch a comprehensive policy of engagement with communist nations despite still vivid memories of the Korean War, three decades of intense anti-communist sentiment and education in South Korea, plus two horrendous acts of violence against South Koreans by Moscow and Pyongyang in the fall of 1983. In the first incident on September 1, 1983, a Soviet combat fighter blew out of the air, killing

all aboard including a US Congressman, Korean Airlines Flight 007, a civilian passenger Boeing 747 which had mistakenly flown into Soviet air space. The second incident occurred in October 1983 when North Korean commandoes exploded a bomb in Rangoon, Burma where members of Chun's government ministers had gathered for a ceremony. Half of the South Korean cabinet was killed. Korean television crews filmed the explosion and its aftermath, but the government banned the film from being shown on Korean television for fear of the South Korean people's reaction.

South Koreans were understandably outraged, even without having viewed the film. They were willing to risk war to get revenge. Chun shared similar sentiments. After both incidents, he sought to launch retaliatory raids against North Korea. The US quietly and firmly restrained Chun by reminding him the US controlled all the military assets – ammunition, bombs and fuel – needed for such raids. After the Rangoon bombing, the US bluntly told Chun if he launched a retaliatory raid against North Korea, which he intensely wished to do, the US-ROK defense treaty would not apply and the US could not act to defend South Korea since the ROK would have initiated the attack on the north.

Washington's restraint of Chun's basic impulses enabled the ROK to perpetuate its engagement policy toward the Communist Bloc. The US attempted to keep Chun's attention focused on the bigger picture, i.e. Seoul's hosting of the entire world at the 1988 Olympiad. Washington applied a "carrot and stick" policy to the situation. Frequently and repeatedly Chun was reminded of the "carrots" for pursuing engagement and reconciliation with communist nations - the possibility of a bountiful harvest of international respect, diplomatic recognition and economic gain. The sticks on the other hand were painted in bleak terms – a failed Olympiad and embarrassment before the entire world.

By 1984, the Chun Administration had developed a comprehensive new foreign policy designed to engage all the communist nations of the world, including Pyongyang. The outward aim was to ensure full and safe international participation in the Seoul Olympiad. The underlying objective was less apparent but equally important – to reinforce the Seoul government's stature as the sole, internationally recognized legitimate government on the Korean Peninsula, while at the same time further isolating North Korea from the international community and expanding the market for South Korean goods into the Communist Bloc. Simultaneously, the Chun Administration would engage and pursue reconciliation with Pyongyang to defuse its hostility toward South Korea and hopefully deter it from committing terrorist acts that could greatly reduce participation in the Seoul Olympiad.

The effort was successful beyond everyone's expectations. Within three years of its initiation, Chun's policy of "nord politik" enabled South Korea to establish athletic and cultural ties with almost every nation in the Communist Bloc. Commercial ties were also established with several former enemy nations, including China and the former Soviet Union. South Korea's stature in the eyes of the international community soared to new heights, along with its foreign trade because of its rapidly broadening access to new markets.

The inter-Korean dialogue seemed to make parallel progress. In September 1984 North Korea stunned South Korea and many of its allies by offering humanitarian assistance to the victims of devastating floods in South Korea. With some nudging from the United States, South Korea accepted the goods – mostly rice and cloth. The frequency of contacts at Panmunjom increased.

Communication via both sides liaison office at Panmunjom became routine, eliminating any need to communicate via the Military Armistice Commission. The exchange of mail and arrangement of meetings between members of families separated during the Korean War by the DMZ were accomplished. Discussions about economic cooperation commenced in the fall of 1984, but ultimately faltered. Nevertheless, the frequency of contacts increased in 1984 and 1985, and the range of issues discussed was broadened.

Progress toward reconciliation, however, was blunted on November 29, 1987. Two North Korean espionage agents planted a bomb on Korean Air flight 878, a South Korean civilian airliner, when it stopped in the Middle East while en route to Seoul via Bangkok. The agents, an elderly man and a young woman, deplaned at the next stop but left the bomb behind in a radio. Over the Gulf of Thailand, the bomb destroyed the aircraft, killing everyone on board. Tracing the terrorist act back to Pyongyang would have been impossible except that the two agents were captured while attempting to return to Pyongyang. The elderly man succeeded in killing himself but the woman was capture alive and subsequently revealed that Pyongyang had master minded the entire misdeed.

The international community justifiably responded with outrage. North Korea's terrorist act cost it condemnation around the world at a time when South Korea was winning accolades for its efforts to host the Seoul Olympiad, while also making impressive economic progress and persistent efforts to democratize its political process.⁸

TOWARD RECONCILIATION – 1988-1992

The balance of power on the Korean Peninsula reversed in the 1980's. Pyongyang began the decade out in front. Its grain production soared to all time highs while Seoul still sought food aid from the US. The North Korean army was rapidly modernizing its enormous fleet of armored vehicles and launched missile and nuclear development programs while South Korea's generals pursued political power and lined their pockets with gifts from prosperous businessmen. Pyongyang was a picture perfect city of two million well-feed and clothed people. In the South, Seoul's streets were narrow and chaotic. The poor and unemployed rioted in government built slum. Tear gas filled the area around campuses where students spent most of their time in the street demonstrating against the government. Frequent labor disputes were harshly suppressed, journalists jailed and politicians corrupted. South Korea's export and light industry oriented economy was depressed by mounting competition from Taiwan, Hong Kong and other newly awakening economies in East Asia. While Kim Il Sung proudly proclaimed his society "a workers' paradise," Chun was severely criticized at home and abroad for his heavy-handed rule.

By 1990, the situation was completely reversed. South Korea's drive to host a successful Olympiad had thrust the entire society to amazing accomplishments in all fields. Politically, military dominated authoritarianism had given way to democracy. Economically, South Korea had become a power in the world market, a producer of goods for export that ranged from the world's most advanced computer chips to seaweed. Seoul had become a city of parks, colorful nightlife, cultural diversity and a rapidly expanding middle class. Problems persisted, but increasingly South Koreans were acquiring the material means and political practices to deal with their society's shortcomings. A modernized, apolitical South Korean army focused on its primary mission – the ROK's defense.

Pyongyang by 1990 was on the brink of decline. Excessive use of chemical fertilizers had depleted the soil's fertility, undermining grain production. Aid from Moscow and Beijing had dwindled as the Soviet Union moved toward bankruptcy and China focused on its own economic development. Pyongyang, having invested too heavily for too long in building a highly modern and mobile war machine, had allowed its transportation and industrial infrastructures to fall into disrepair. Pyongyang by 1990 had lost its markets in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Seoul's engagement of the Communist Bloc in the 1980's had gradually introduced its superior quality goods into these societies. The lower quality goods from North Korea simply could not compete. Then disaster struck – the Soviet Union collapsed. North Korea in 1990 stood on the edge of a prolonged and severe economic depression.

Roh Tae Woo, South Korea's first democratically elected president, launched his administration in 1988 determined to see a successful and peaceful Seoul Summer Olympiad. One of his first steps was to resume his predecessor Chun Doo Hwan's "nord politik" policy of engaging communist nations. Roh coordinated a parallel effort with the US designed to defuse Pyongyang's hostility and estrangement from the international community that followed the Korean Air 878 incident. In July 1988, two months before the Seoul Olympiad, Noh formally proposed to Pyongyang that the two capitals set aside their animosity and embrace a new era of reconciliation. The US confirmed the sincerity of Roh's offer with its own gesture, the so-called "modest-initiative" which provided for the beginning of bilateral US-DPRK trade in "basic human needs" and opened the way for the so-called "Beijing channel" that facilitated the first formal diplomatic contacts between Washington and Seoul. Roh bracketed his approach to Pyongyang with major policy statements aimed at restarting North-South Dialogue. The short-term goal of a safe, peaceful Seoul Olympiad was achieved.⁹

President Roh, much more so than his predecessor, had a vision of a peaceful, prosperous and unified Korea. His overtures of reconciliation with North Korea continued after the Seoul Olympiad. Roh's proposals became increasingly moderate in tone and specific in formulation. Gone from his several public statements in 1989 about reconciliation and reunification was the harsh Cold War rhetoric of President Park's pronouncements. In his August 15, 1989 commemorative address, Roh urged, "It is ... imperative that we establish an interim stage toward unification in which the South and North should, first of all, seek co-existence and co-prosperity on the basis of mutual recognition."¹⁰

As always, Pyongyang's initial responses to Seoul's overtures were cautious. Before engaging in dialogue, Pyongyang always seems intent upon first assessing its potential dialogue partner in terms of his political prowess, the earnestness of all public rhetoric, whether the US supports the initiative and, naturally, the extent to which a positive response might benefit the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Early on the US had confirmed its support for Noh's overtures to Pyongyang with the "modest initiative." The consistency in Roh's public statements suggested earnestness in trying to restart dialogue. Pyongyang's hesitancy may have been because of uncertainty over Roh's political prowess.

Only a politically strong leader with the support of his political party and the general public can follow through on any agreements that might be reached during inter-Korean dialogue. Both Presidents Park and Chun were politically strong because they headed authoritarian regimes only moderately sensitive to the ebbs and flows of opposition politicians' criticism and public opinion.

But Noh was a new species of politician – the product of a democratic election, which made him highly sensitive to public opinion, and the concerns of the National Assembly.

Pyongyang's growing uncertainty about its future – the collapse of the Communist Bloc, bankruptcy of the Soviet Union, Chinese flirting with capitalism accompanied by South Korea's impressive diplomatic and commercial gains around the globe - may have proved decisive in convincing Kim Il Sung to engage in dialogue with Roh Tae-woo. What ever the case may have been, once Kim decided in 1990 to deal with Roh, North-South dialogue lunged forward.

Seoul and Washington's teaming up in a coordinated program of economic and diplomatic inducements for Pyongyang pushed North-South dialogue to previously undreamed of heights in 1991 and the first months of 1992. All the while, the two allies maintained a highly visible and audible policy of deterrence. Seoul excelled in holding forth economic inducements – inter-Korean trade and investment, and technology transfer. Washington loosened its grip on its long time diplomatic embargo on Pyongyang. The conventional rhetoric condemning North Korea as an international outlaw and illegitimate state was shelved, at least temporarily. Beyond opening the "Beijing channel," Washington sanctioned Japan's diplomatic approach to the DPRK. France made its own unilateral overtures to Pyongyang. The major diplomatic breakthrough in the ROK-US campaign was the simultaneous admission of both Koreas into the United Nations in October 1991.

North-South dialogue by the fall of 1991 had broadened to include security issues, an area previously unexplored by the two sides. Here too, Seoul and Washington pursued a carefully crafted and jointly implemented program of inducements and disincentives. With deterrence firmly in place, President Bush announced in September the withdrawal of US tactical nuclear weapons from around the world. President Roh followed with a call to turn the Korean Peninsula into a nuclear free zone. Kim Il Sung's response was prompt and positive. The South-North Declaration on the De-nuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression and Exchanges and Cooperation followed in December 1991. By the spring of 1992, North Korea had allowed the International Atomic Energy Agency to begin inspections at the DPRK's once top secret Nyongbyon Nuclear Research Facility, the US-ROK annual joint military exercise Team Spirit had been discontinued, and Seoul and Pyongyang had established several joint commissions to formulate implementation accords for their earlier, basic agreements. Reconciliation and reunification suddenly seemed realistic possibilities in our time.

What made the dialogue so successful in 1991? Pending study by future historians, we can only conjecture now about what was responsible for the North-South détente. North Korea's sense of insecurity after the demise of the USSR must have been a major factor. No longer could Pyongyang secure its survival, economically and militarily, with a balancing act between Beijing and Moscow. Kim Il Sung's diplomatic dancing with these two partners had gained him the essentials for building a prosperous economy and a mighty army. Without the Soviet Union to rely on, and a China more interested in pursuing capitalism than preserving communism, Kim Il Sung had little choice but to turn outward away from the collapsing Communist Bloc and begin to do as Seoul had begun doing a decade earlier – embracing the enemy.

Equally important must have been South Korea's tremendous gains – economically, diplomatically and politically – between 1980 and 1990. South Korea had within a decade become attractive to Kim Il Sung. It had everything he needed – capital, technology, access to the world

market, and at long last political stability. Additionally, South Korea's political leadership had moderated its stance, and rhetoric toward Kim Il Sung and his domain. Roh Tae-woo was publicly and convincingly urging dialogue and co-existence. Kim was prepared to engage in dialogue if he gained diplomatic parity and co-existence with the South.

If these considerations got the dialogue restarted, what kept it going and propelled it to new heights? The impressive array of inducements tabled by Seoul, Tokyo and Washington certainly contributed. Prior to each substantial agreement, Seoul and Washington held up the possibility of significant inducements. Both Koreas shared some of these. Their dialogue and cooperation won them accolades around the world. Both were admitted to the United Nations. Increased stability and the improvement of prospects for peace on the Korean Peninsula attracted impressive amounts of investment from abroad. For North Korea, this translated into Japanese investment in its newly established free trade zone, Najin-Sonbong. Meanwhile, South Korea's trade with the world continued to boom. Both halves of the Korean Peninsula benefited from improved security arrangements. For the first time, North Korea began the process of making its nuclear program more transparent in exchange for an end to the annual US-ROK joint military exercise Team Spirit. Pyongyang also received assurances that there were no nuclear weapons in South Korea, a major concern for the North.

DIALOGUE DISSOLVES INTO CRISIS – 1992-1994

Within a year of both Koreas' admission to the United Nations, the process of dialogue and reconciliation had halted, and the process swiftly slid backward toward the Cold War patterns of confrontation and hostility. The immediate causes have been amply scrutinized. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections suggested the possibility that North Korea had not reported fully its inventory of fissile nuclear material. Then US intelligence revealed that North Korea had concealed beneath camouflage a nuclear waste site. When North Korea repeatedly denied the IAEA access to the site, the nuclear crisis of 1993-94 was born.

History allows us the luxury of looking back and placing developments into a broader perspective. Several additional explanations for the rupture of dialogue late in 1992 become apparent. Underlying the progress of 1991-92 was the legacy of intense mistrust that has pervaded both Koreas' perceptions of one another since 1950. This distorted and emotionally charged misunderstanding was intensified and perpetuated during the Cold War as both Koreas strived to please their dueling superpower champions with exaggerated effort to project absolute loyalty to either Moscow or Washington.

In short, the process of dialogue got out in front of the ability of either society to sustain the implementation of agreements reached by small teams of negotiators. The staff of each side's bureaucracy shared similar misgivings about the other side, particularly those in the military responsible for national defense. Possibly this was less a problem in Pyongyang because of its authoritarian government. There the leader could direct his subjects to follow his lead. Nevertheless, there were indications that this may not have been entirely the case. Kim Il Sung was aging. His son and successor had long been groomed to succeed his father but the transition could not begin until after the father's death. It is possible that the more assertive and conservative elements of North Korea's government sought to slow, even halt the pace of opening the nation to

the outside world and to pursuing reconciliation with South Korea. These elements could have been responsible for the faltering implementation of North Korea's agreements, particularly with the IAEA. A more certain explanation, however, must await future study by historians.

One thing is for certain, the process was much more complicated in the increasingly democratic South. President Roh constantly had to nurture a political coalition that would support his dialogue and methods with the North. As his presidential term drew to an end in September 1992, criticism of his approach to Pyongyang intensified. Elements of South Korea's bureaucracy, particularly the conservative Agency for National Security Planning, moved to halt the dialogue with Pyongyang until a new president could be elected.

Actions by the United States in September and October 1992 likewise disrupted the dialogue. Washington, DC appears to have expected too much too soon. Washington's natural preoccupation with domestic US politics tends to diminish the impact of foreign reality on the formulation of foreign policy. In the fall of 1992, American policy makers responsible for North Korea policy were increasingly concerned with the US Presidential election. Domestic political priorities surmounted those of foreign policy. It was more important to the incumbent Republican Administration headed by President Bush that he appear tough on rogue nations like Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Perpetuating North-South dialogue was subordinated to projecting a hard line. This manifested itself at the October 1992 annual US-ROK Security Consultative Meeting at which the US agreed with South Korea to resume their annual joint military drill Team Spirit unless North Korea cooperated with the IAEA.

Given the choice between asserting its sovereignty and sense of independence verse submitting to pressure from the US-ROK alliance, Pyongyang naturally opted to demonstrate its sense of national self-esteem and self-determination by rejecting the US pressure. On March 12, 1993, Pyongyang announced it would withdraw from the Treaty on the Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Once again, dialogue had dissolved into crisis.¹¹

THE ROUGH ROAD BACK TO DIALOGUE

North-South Korea dialogue has become a persistence progression of disrupted encounters. Each has gradually broadened the common ground between the two governments and societies, better defined and prioritized the issues of mutual concern and confirmed each side's willingness to co-exist with the other. Despite the process' relatively significant gains in this regard, still the common, intense mistrust between the people of North and South Korea persists virtually unabated. In other words, the dialogue's mounting accomplishments continue to be built upon an unsteady platform of mistrust. For two years, between the fall of 1992 and of 1994, mistrust not only disrupted North-South dialogue, it almost led to war on the Korean Peninsula.

Fortunately for all concerned, the United States intervened diplomatically for the first time. Washington's assumption of dialogue with Pyongyang was unsettling to the South Koreans, but it accomplished what their political leadership was hesitant to pursue – a negotiated resolution of the nuclear crisis. The US-DPRK Agreed Framework of October 21, 1994 set the stage for the pursuit of a durable peace on the Korean Peninsula. The risk of superpower rivalry over the peninsula had already diminished. Now the risk of a nuclear war was also reduced significantly.

The process of reconciliation between Washington and Pyongyang, like that between Seoul and Pyongyang in 1991, also proved short-lived. Just two months after its commencement, the US and North Korea were once again on the verge of war. The apparent cause was the North Korean People's Army downing of a US Army helicopter that had mistakenly flown across the DMZ into North Korea. A less obvious but more fundamental cause of the renewed tension was the profound mistrust the Korean War still aroused between Americans and the people of North Korea. The North Korean soldiers made no effort to communicate with either the helicopter or the US Army. They assumed it was on a spy mission and fired a shoulder-mounted missile at it, killing the pilot and destroying the helicopter. Fortunately, however, diplomacy was put into practice and peace was perpetuated. Nevertheless, the incident's resolution did nothing to assuage the two sides' mutual mistrust. Ever since, official US-DPRK relations have languished in a diplomatic limbo characterized more by pervasive mistrust and less by growing cooperation.

Looking beyond the Agreed Framework's apparent shortcomings, the accord nevertheless helped set the stage for the Korean Summit of June 2000. The collapse of South-North dialogue and reconciliation in the fall of 1992 had excited serious doubts about their effectiveness. Had efforts to forge a diplomatic solution to the 1992-94 nuclear crisis failed, the policy of diplomatic engagement and economic inducement, first initiated by South Korean President Noh Dae-woo in 1991, would have been totally discredited. A return solely to deterrence would have once again escalated tensions just as it had been the case in May and June 1994. Another possible consequence could have been North Korea's decision to respond in kind by attempting to preserve the balance of terror which deterrence requires by quickening the development of nuclear warheads for its arsenal of ballistic missiles. Had that occurred, the dynamics of deterrence without diplomatic engagement surely could have brought the Korean Peninsula to the brink of war. Fortunately for all the concerned parties, the Agreed Framework confirmed diplomatic engagement and economic inducement as effective methods for dealing with the peninsula's crises as well as with North Korea.

At the time, however, an intense debate ensued from 1995 to 1997 regarding the utility of pursuing a policy of balancing deterrence with diplomatic engagement accompanied by economic inducements. The champions of deterrence found vocal advocates both in Seoul and Washington, D.C. In Seoul, they tended to cluster around then ROK President Kim Young-sam. They argued that the Clinton Administration's extension of economic inducements such as heavy fuel oil, the construction of nuclear reactors and food aid verged on appeasement. Pyongyang, in their view, was on the verge of collapse. Korea's reunification could be hastened, the champions of deterrence contended, if only Washington would restore Seoul's leadership in the formulation of policy toward Pyongyang and end its alleged appeasement. In Washington, Republican Congressmen and their supporters in some of the think tanks along Massachusetts Avenue voiced similar criticism. They too argued that the Clinton Administration had usurped Seoul's traditional leadership in the forging of policy toward North Korea, undermining President Kim's ability to deal decisively with Pyongyang. Japan was belatedly drawn into the debate when North Korea on September 1, 1998 launched a multi-stage ballistic missile across northern Japan. The enraged Japanese public intensely challenged the wisdom of diplomacy and economic inducements as tools for dealing with North Korea.

Paradoxically, as the debate raged in Seoul, Washington and Tokyo, war was twice averted and the freeze on North Korea's nuclear program preserved by diplomatic engagement and economic

inducements. Because of the Agreed Framework, the International Atomic Energy Agency was able to maintain a comprehensive regime of monitoring North Korea's nuclear facilities. When an intelligence leak in Washington, D.C. aroused suspicions about the possibility that North Korea was building a secret underground nuclear facility at Kumsongni, diplomacy and economic inducements gained access to the site. The suspicions were soon confirmed as being groundless. Tensions on the peninsula also peaked when twice North Korean submarines intruded into the territorial waters of the ROK, apparently to off load heavily armed espionage agents. Deterrence prevented war, but it took diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang to defuse the crises.

Seoul and Washington in April 1996 teamed up to propose "Four Party Talks" with Pyongyang. China, the fourth party, withheld its response to the proposal pending Pyongyang's reaction. Only after considerable diplomatic dueling, and the offering of sizable amounts of food aid, did North Korea finally agree to join the talks. The process yielded little progress toward restarting substantive North-South dialogue. Implementation of the Agreed Framework floundered in Washington and Seoul as efforts in both capitals focused on promoting the Four Party Talks. All the while, the critics of engagement and economic inducements pointed to the lack of results as proof these techniques were ineffective when dealing with North Korea.¹²

By the spring of 1997, the policy of engagement was under severe, sustained assault in Seoul and Washington. There was ample reason to question its effectiveness as a policy to win concessions from North Korea. Pyongyang's participation in the Four Party Talks seemed designed to obtain maximum economic benefit in the form of food aid in exchange for minimal concessions on substantive issues. At the same time, it gained the regime time to head off collapse as it quietly courted China and exported ballistic missiles to acquire oil and other essential commodities. Beijing responded positively to Pyongyang's overtures and quietly moved in the spring and summer of 1997 to shore up the Kim Jong Il regime with large amounts of food aid plus some credit and investment.

The chorus of protest against engagement intensified. For a time, the distinction between the policy and its faltering implementation were blurred. In Seoul, domestic scandals early in 1997 discredited Kim Young-sam's presidency. His perpetual vacillation between "soft" and "hard" lines toward North Korea disrupted policy coordination with Washington and Tokyo. In Washington, Republican control of Congress gave opponents of engagement a highly visible forum from which to proclaim the policy ineffective.

Belatedly, the Clinton Administration reacted by naming former Secretary of Defense William Perry coordinator of US policy toward North Korea. Candidly speaking, the move appears to have been primarily a political device aimed at stilling Republican criticism of the Clinton Administration, less as an effort to enhance the effectiveness of the engagement policy. Perry more or less confirmed this in private conversation in Seoul in March 1998. The White House had just delayed release of his report critiquing engagement and its implementation regarding North Korea. His visit to Pyongyang in June 1998 produced nothing substantive. The so-called Perry Process ultimately proved ineffective in terms of improving implementation of engagement. President Clinton's domestic political problems and eventual impeachment, far more than the Perry Report, deflected the focus of criticism away from engagement and toward the personal character of the President.

Meanwhile, the Asian Financial Crisis that enveloped South Korea in December 1997 shifted the focus of concern among Koreans away from Pyongyang and back to their own domestic situation.

The debate over engagement verse deterrence was stilled, at least for the duration of the period of “conditionality” imposed on the Korean government’s management of the economy by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). For South Korea’s new president and the policy of engagement with North Korea, the preoccupation in South Korea with the economy was very fortunate.

South Korean voters in December 1997 elected Kim Dae Jung, the aging champion of Korea’s democratization and favorite son of prominent politicians and human rights advocacy groups around the world. He was very likely elected more because of the electorate’s disgust with his predecessor than because of a conviction that he would make an excellent president. Certainly public opinion regarding his formula for dealing with North Korea was ambivalent at best. In any event, he assumed the presidency in the midst of economic turmoil and intense uncertainty about South Korea’s future. Lurking in the background was a fear that North Korea might exploit South Korea’s vulnerability in some unsavory fashion.¹³

ENCOUNTER IN PYONGYANG

Change on the Korean Peninsula persists at a glacial pace, despite the recent appearances projected by images of the two Korean leaders embracing one another at Pyongyang International Airport. The June North-South Summit was indeed of epic proportions, but nothing accomplished at the meeting or since was unprecedented other than the meetings between the two men. As we have seen, all the accords leading to the summit, as well as those since, continue a process that commenced in 1972 and that reiterate previous agreements. For example, the South-North Joint Declaration of June 15 article one reiterates the July 4, 1972 accord. Articles 2, 3 and 4 refer to items agreed upon in the December 1991 Basic Agreement on Reconciliation, Peace, Social Exchange and Economic Cooperation. As for the final item, the exchange of visits between the two leaders to each other’s capital, this was agreed upon in principle in June 1994 between the now deceased Kim Il Sung and retired former ROK President Kim Yong Sam, but was not implemented until June, 2000.¹⁴

Possibly the summit’s most important aspect is that the two key participants represent a new generation of leadership in both halves of the Korean Peninsula. Unlike his predecessors, Kim Dae Jung is less burdened than his predecessors by the concerns of generals and businessmen. Chun Doo Hwan discredited military interference in politics and Roh Tae-woo’s garnering of an enormous fortune in bribes discredited the *chaebol*. Nor does Kim owe his political legitimacy to the US-ROK security alliance. The source of his political success is the electorate of South Korea. Political reconciliation and co-existence are Kim Dae Jung’s priorities, not preserving deterrence’s balance of terror or the legitimacy of the UN Command. His plan of economic cooperation is motivated more by a desire to defuse North Korea’s insecurity and hostility rather than to promote profitable trade and investment. Kim Dae Jung, nevertheless, does not necessarily have a wider range of flexibility than his predecessors. Bracketing Kim’s flexibility are political realities in South Korea and Pyongyang.

Political reality in South Korea encompasses an enormous reservoir of mistrust for the North Korean regime. Already this mistrust is being manifested in an increasingly audible debate over how much and how soon South Korea should accommodate North Korea’s economic needs. This

economic argument is certain to spill over into the area of security. The debate is beginning to address the issue of whether engaging Kim Jong Il will enhance South Korea's security or strengthen North Korea's ability to assault the South. As the debate intensifies, the pace of progress toward reconciliation is certain to slow. How Kim Dae Jung's intends to deal with these dynamics, and the extent to which he is successful, remains to be seen.

In Pyongyang, Kim Jong Il's current dealings with South Korea are a continuation of his father's legacy, not a pioneering venture. Kim Jong Il has made this amply clear in his publications on unification. As the Kim Dae Jung Administration was organizing itself in Seoul, Kim Jong Il published a major essay on reconciliation and unification, *Let Us Reunify the Country Independently and Peacefully Through the Great Unity of the Entire Nation* (Pyongyang: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1998). In establishing his position on these issues, Kim Jong Il carefully linked his views to those of his father, "The Juche-oriented idea of great national unity elucidated by the respected Comrade Kim Il Sung" The younger Kim proclaims his father formulated the "original idea" on this topic (page 4). He asserts that, "it is inconceivable to talk about national unity apart from the principle of national independence." (p. 10). Kim Jong Il urges that, "All the Koreans in the north, south and abroad must unite closely under the banner of patriotism." (p. 11). He claims, "successive south Korean authorities (i.e. previous presidential administrations in Seoul) have obstructed harmony between the north and the south with their anti-North confrontation policy" (p. 13). Nevertheless, like Kim Dae Jung, Kim Jong Il advocates co-existence of each side's "different ideologies and systems." (*Ibid.*)

To confirm his faithfulness to the "great leader," Kim Jong Il ties his views to the corner stone of Kim Il Sung's position as presented in the essay, *The Ten Point Programme of the Great Unity of the Whole Nation for the Reunification of the Country.*" Kim Il Sung's essay cited above appeared at the beginning of former South Korean President Kim Yong Sam's administration early in 1993. At an October 1993 meeting with US Congressman Ackerman, then the chairman of the US Congress' House Foreign Affairs Committee Sub-committee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Kim Il Sung autographed a copy of his essay on reunification. He asked the Congressman to deliver the essay to Kim Yong Sam with the message that a North-South summit was in order. Unfortunately, Kim Yong Sam chose to ignore the invitation. It was not until the two Koreas were on the verge of war that Kim Yong Sam finally accepted Kim Il Sung's offer of a summit. Former US President Carter conveyed the invitation to Kim Yong Sam as part of a deal to resolve the nuclear crisis. Kim Il Sung died before the meeting could take place. When Kim Yong Sam described the deceased Kim Il Sung as a "war criminal" in public remarks, Kim Il Sung's heir Kim Jong Il refused to meet the South Korean leader. For Kim Jong Il, participation in a summit with Kim Dae Jung is the fulfillment of his father's wishes, not a major new breakthrough in North-South dialogue.¹⁵

CONCLUSION – BACK TO THE FUTURE?

The Korean summit caused the world to sigh with relief, but forging a durable peace on the Korean Peninsula remains more a dream than a reality. Over the past half century, there has been tremendous change in Northeast Asia. Détente between the superpowers has reduced their rivalry and thus eased tensions in Northeast Asia, specifically on the Korean Peninsula. Russia's military commitment to North Korea is now significantly restrained relative to the past. China is more concerned with economic development that countering the military might of the US and Japan.

The Korean War Armistice and the policy of deterrence remain in place, but not without alteration. Although the Military Armistice Commission is more or less dysfunctional and certainly no longer the sole channel of communication between the two Koreas, the Armistice backed by deterrence's balance of terror continues to prevent war. But now both are accompanied by North-South dialogue and US-DPRK diplomatic contact. The Agreed Framework of 1994 has effectively prevented a nuclear arms race not only on the Korean Peninsula, but also throughout East Asia. As a consequence of these changes, and the pattern of increasing reliance on dialogue and diplomacy rather than just deterrence, the world is a much safer place.

On the Korean Peninsula, there has been a fundamental shift of goals and the balance of power. Both Koreas, for differing reasons, appear intent on pursuing co-existence rather than mutual destruction. South Korea, now a prosperous economic power in Northeast Asia, prefers peace to the risk of war that would only disrupt its prosperity. North Korea at the same time is equally intent upon survival. Weakened by its loss of allies, particularly the Soviet Union, and subsequent economic decline, Pyongyang in recent years has been preoccupied with leadership succession and famine. For North Korea, its survival as a political entity requires that it pursue peace with South Korea.

All of this augers well for the long-term prospects for continuing co-existence and dialogue. But we must keep in mind the legacy of mutual mistrust that haunts both Korean leaders as they strive to bring their societies closer together. The dynamics of mistrust in Seoul and Pyongyang are certain to slow the pace of reconciliation, probably even disrupt it as happened in 1992. Yet each round of dialogue displaces distrust with more trust. Time also favors resumption of dialogue and further progress toward reconciliation. The generation of Koreans who fought and killed one another in the Korean War is slowly being replaced by a less hostile and more conciliatory generation.

Having looked backward, we can now better see the future. The generation of Korean leaders who survived national division and civil war managed to initiate and improve a process of dialogue that has taken both Koreas half way to their shared goal of national reconciliation. The journey ahead remains equally long and arduous. The June Summit, however, recharged Koreans' hope and determination to achieve national reconciliation. The goal remains distant, almost dreamlike. But the Summit made the process real and exciting for the new generation of Korean leaders. Consequently, prospects will continue to improve for further reconciliation and a durable peace in Northeast Asia.

END NOTES

1 United States Policy Toward New Korean Government,” *Department of State Press Release 647, August 12, 1948*. Reproduced in: George McCune, *Korea Today*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950. Pp. 302-304.

2 *Ibid.* Pp. 306-308.

3 US Department of State, *A Historical Summary of United States-Korean Relations*. Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1962.

4 United Nations Command, *The Longest Armistice*. Seoul: Military Armistice Commission.

5 *A White Paper on South-North Dialogue in Korea*. Seoul: National Unification Board, 1988. p. 55.

6 Park Chung Hee, *Major Speeches of Korea's Park Chung Hee*. Seoul: Samhwa Publishing Co., 1974. p. 23, p. 46.

7 One of the more readable and comprehensive discussions of recent South Korean politics and international relations since the Korean War can be found in: Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas, A Contemporary History*. Indianapolis: Basic Books, 1997. A comprehensive discussion of North Korea's response to South Korea, together with very helpful chronology and bibliography, is available in: Doug Joong Kim, editor, *Foreign Relations of North Korea During Kim Il Sung's Last Days*. Seoul: Sejong Institute, 1994.

8 For an official rendering of the events between 1980 and 1987, see: National Unification Board, *A White Paper on South-North Dialogue in Korea*. Seoul: National Unification Board, 1988. The author experienced much that occurred in South Korea between 1981 and 1987 while serving as the US Embassy officer responsible for monitoring National Assembly and political party developments. He was present at the National Assembly when President Chun formerly launched his engagement policy toward the Communist Bloc and conveyed US government advice to South Korean officials shortly after the KAL 007 incident and just before they met Soviet officials in Seoul, the first time the USSR sent its officials to Seoul. The author also conveyed US government advice to ranking ruling party officials at the National Assembly shortly after the Rangoon Incident when retaliation was under discussion in the National Assembly. For a review of the general situation during the 1980's, see Oberdorfer, *op.cit.*

9 C. Kenneth Quinones, “From Containment to Engagement,” in Dae-sook Suh and Chae-jin Lee, editors, *North Korea After Kim Il Sung*. Boulder, Colorado and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998. Pp. 101-22.

10 *South-North Dialogue in Korea*. Seoul: International Cultural Society of Korea, 1989. p. 9. This small book contains English translations of President Noh's major statements on reconciliation and unification made in 1988 and 1989.

11A growing library of books assesses the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula. For further reading see:

Chong Ok-im, *Pukhaek 588! Clinton Haengjongbu ui taeung gwa chollak*. Seoul: Seoul Press, 1995.

Peter Hayes, *Pacific Powder Keg – American Nuclear Dilemmas in Korea*. Lexington and Toronto: Lexington Books, 1995.

James Clay Moltz and Alexsandre Y Mansourov, editors, *The North Korean Nuclear Program*. New York: Rutledge, 2000.

C. Kenneth Quinones, *Hanbando unhyong*. Seoul: M&B Publishers, 2000. Also available in a Japanese language version published by *Chuokorensensha*.

Mitchell Reiss, *Bridled Ambition*. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1995.

David Sigel, *Disarming Strangers*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

12 For official discussions of the ROK's policy toward North Korea during the Kim Yong Sam Administration see: Ministry of National Unification, *Peace and Cooperation – White Paper on Korean Unification*. Seoul, ROK Government, 1996. Office of South-North Dialogue, *South-North Dialogue in Korea. No. 65*. Seoul: Ministry of Unification, 1998.

13 Kim Dae-jung, *Three-stage Approach to Korean Reunification*. Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1997.

14 For a more extensive assessment of the June 15, 2000 Summit statement see: Lee Jong-seok, "Achievements and Future Tasks of North-South Summitry," *Korea Focus* (July-August, 2000) Volume 8, Number 4, pp. 1-15. For the summit's particulars and atmospherics, see: Choi Won-ki, *Nambuk chongsang huidam 600 il*. Seoul: Kimyongsa, 2000.

15 The author accompanied the Congressman to Pyongyang and participated in the meeting with Kim Il Sung.