



Korea: (Unsolicited) Advice for President-elect Bush

by Ralph A. Cossa

Koreans are openly nervous about what the election of George W. Bush portends for the Korea peace process, but many also seem privately hopeful that the incoming President might, as one security analyst put it, "save us from ourselves."

The anxiety is based on the assumption – in my view, grossly exaggerated – that a Republican administration will take a more hardline, combative approach toward North Korea that could somehow undermine the South's policy of engagement with the North. No one in South Korea wants to see this happen. But, there are many who are nonetheless concerned about the current fast pace of rapprochement and especially about what they perceive to be its one-sided nature. They are therefore hopeful that a firmer U.S. approach might have a sobering effect on Seoul while also encouraging, if not compelling, Pyongyang to be more forthcoming in dealing with the South.

It is important for Mr. Bush to send an early signal to both Koreas that his administration is committed to the process of engagement and fully supportive of ROK President Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy. This includes signaling continued support to the U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework under which the North froze its earlier nuclear research activities in return for heavy fuel oil deliveries today and the eventual construction of two less proliferation-prone light water nuclear energy reactors. Construction is underway with Seoul (and Tokyo) scheduled to pay the lion's share, although U.S. financial obligations remain considerable. America's commitments to its allies and agreements with others do not change when administrations change; the guiding principle is U.S. national security interests. Support for the Sunshine Policy and continued adherence to the Agreed Framework (as long as Pyongyang continues to honor its promises) are in our national interest.

I have argued (PacNet 46) that a last minute trip to North Korea by President Clinton would be counterproductive to the broader Peninsula peace process and should not occur; President-elect Bush should privately urge President Clinton not to go. However, Mr. Bush should be prepared to continue high-level contacts to signal (to Seoul as well as to Pyongyang) America's continued commitment to the peace process and to more fully ascertain the North's perspectives while ensuring that the North also understands Mr. Bush's views. A general timetable and set of milestones should also be set for continued high-level interaction between the two countries, to include an eventual meeting between Chairman Kim and President Bush.

A significant breakthrough in ongoing missile negotiations is not sufficient to justify such a meeting. Nor should these talks detract from the broader Peninsula peace

process. Many South Koreans have also expressed concern that they might be asked to shoulder the costs of a missile deal, as was the case with the Agreed Framework. Mr. Bush needs to provide assurances in advance that this will not be the case.

I would recommend the following game plan. As they are today, the missile talks should be aimed at accomplishing a variety of objectives. First is a halt to the North's destabilizing missile export program – this should be the easiest to deal with since, from Pyongyang's perspective, only money and not national security is involved. On a very good year, Pyongyang can only hope for about \$100 million in revenues for its missile sales. Demands for one to three billion dollars to terminate exports are therefore ridiculous, but at least show North Korea's willingness, if not eagerness, to bargain on this point.

More sensitive are the issues of continued research and development and actual deployment of medium and long range missiles which impact on sovereignty and national security, since Pyongyang, rightly or wrongly, sees its limited missile capability as some sort of insurance policy against U.S. attack or intimidation. The U.S., wisely, has reportedly insisted that negotiations deal with medium range missiles capable of threatening Japan (and U.S. bases in Northeast Asia) as well as the longer range system theoretically capable of threatening portions of the U.S. itself. One has to wonder, however, why Tokyo is not an active participant in these negotiations, since Japan's security interests are also at stake.

A significant missile breakthrough could warrant a visit by a very senior U.S. official, but only if it paralleled intensified North-South cooperation on security matters. To date, North-South cooperation has been primarily in the economic and social spheres, and this is certainly a logical and politically less sensitive place to start. However, true peace will not be achieved on the Peninsula unless and until Pyongyang acknowledges Seoul as its primary interlocutor on the issue of peace on the Peninsula (amazingly, the historic June Joint Declaration issued at the North-South summit meeting in Pyongyang does not mention this word), to include serious dialogue on security issues and the initiation of North-South military confidence building measures.

In its own high level dealings with the North, Washington must be careful not to reinforce the long cherished DPRK view that the U.S., not South Korea, is the only legitimate negotiator on issues of peace and security. For example, the North, even after the historic leaders' summit and mountains of assistance from the South, still insists that any peace treaty officially ending the Korean War be signed between Pyongyang and Washington, not Seoul. Mr. Bush must reaffirm President Clinton's firm assertion that there will be

no separate U.S.-DPRK deal when it comes to the issue of peace on the Peninsula.

Another important milestone necessary to demonstrate North Korea's commitment to the peace process is fulfillment of North Korean leader Kim Jong-il's promise to visit the South this coming spring. Simply put, no U.S. President should visit North Korea until Chairman Kim visits the South and serious North-South security dialogue commences.

If these milestones are achieved, then a Bush-Kim Jong-il meeting would be appropriate but, even then, it would make more sense for their first meeting to be in Washington or on neutral territory. China can play a useful role here. Mr. Bush is scheduled to be in Shanghai in September 2001 for the annual APEC Leaders Meeting. President Kim Dae-jung will no doubt urge the Chinese to invite Kim Jong-il to the meeting as an observer (he made a similar request to Brunei in advance of the 2000 APEC meeting which was not further pursued). This would provide a good opportunity for Bush and Chairman Kim to meet. It would also provide an opportunity for the two Kims to have a third face-to-face meeting, but this should be kept separate and distinct from any meeting with Bush.

It should go without saying that any meeting between George W. Bush and Kim Jong-il can only occur after Bush has met with Kim Dae-jung, preferably in Seoul. It would also be a serious blunder for Mr. Bush to step foot in China without having first visited both South Korea and Japan. Mr. Clinton, in July 1993, made his first Asia visit to Japan and Korea well in advance of that year's inaugural APEC Leaders Meeting in Seattle. Mr. Bush can do no less without sending the wrong signal about America's commitment to its two key Asian allies.

Ralph A. Cossa is Executive Director of Pacific Forum CSIS and Editor of Comparative Connections.