

Memorandum of Conversation

President Clinton and Chairman Kim Jong Il

5:05-6:05 P.M., Tuesday, August 4, 2009

Conference Room, Paekhwawon State Guest House, Pyongyang, DPRK

U.S.

President Clinton

John Podesta, Center for American Progress

Douglas Band

Justin Cooper

Roger Band, Physician

Minji Kwon, Interpreter, U.S. Embassy Seoul

David Straub, Associate Director, Korean Studies, Stanford University

DPRK

Kim Jong Il, Chairman, National Defense Commission

Kang Seok Ju, First Vice Foreign Minister

Person TBD

Interpreter

Fifth Person TBD

=====
=====

Relationship between Chairman Kim and President Clinton

Chairman Kim said he warmly welcomed President Clinton and said he had always wanted to meet him. Reading from talking points on several cards, Kim noted that President Clinton had made a bold decision to visit the DPRK during a time of high tensions between their two countries. Although it was their first actual meeting, they had had a long relationship. Fifteen years ago, President Clinton had sent him a letter expressing condolences on the death of his father. President Clinton was the first world leader to do so, demonstrating that he was a leader of etiquette, confidence, and loyalty. Kim recalled that he and President Clinton had also exchanged several communications during President Clinton's time in office.

President Clinton was the first sitting American president to express a desire to visit the DPRK while in office and he was also the first American president to have invited him to visit the United States. The President had received Kim's special envoy, Vice Marshall Jo Myong-rok, in the White House, and Kim had then received Secretary of State Albright. Vice Marshall Jo reported that he had received a very good impression of President Clinton from their meeting.

Amnesty for the Journalists

Nine years had passed [since the Albright visit], Kim continued. President Clinton was visiting the DPRK with a mission. The issue of the two journalists stemmed from the hostile relationship between the United States and the DPRK. The incident had occurred when the feelings of the Korean people toward the United States were at their worst. The United States had asked that the DPRK treat the journalists leniently from a humanitarian point of view, and Secretary of State Clinton had recently expressed the United States' regret and apology. Subsequently, the DPRK had begun to seriously consider the U.S. request for a pardon. During your presidency, Kim said, the United States had provided humanitarian aid—rice—to the DPRK for the first time. When the U.S. administration offered to send one of several high-ranking people to the DPRK, the DPRK had agreed only on President Clinton. When the United States confirmed that President Clinton would come, Kim said, the National Defense Commission decided to grant special amnesty to the two journalists. So that this would not happen again, efforts were needed for better relations and the elimination of mistrust between the two countries.

Kim's Views on Bilateral Relations

Kim said he would next discuss his views of the relations between their two countries. Frankly, he said, bilateral relations had begun to open up under President Clinton's leadership. The joint Agreed Framework was signed. Kim said he vividly recalled that President Clinton, when he decided he would not be able to visit the DPRK, had sent him a letter in which he explained that the U.S. president election recount would not allow him to make the visit. In the letter, President Clinton had expressed the hope that such a high-level exchange of visits could occur even after his administration.

With the advent of President Bush, however, the bilateral relationship had gone back to square one due to the neo-conservatives in the United States. The DPRK had expected better relations with the United States, but Bush had immediately begun using harsh language against the DPRK. Thus, the emotions of the two peoples had run high against each other, and we found ourselves missing the earlier, better relationship with the previous administration. The world situation became increasingly noisy. The invasion of Iraq and abusive U.S. language about

the DPRK seemed quite arbitrary. U.S.-DPRK agreements were systematically negated and destroyed.

After Bush affixed the “axis of evil” label on the DPRK, the nuclear issue worsened. Kim added his personal view that if the Democrats had won in 2000 the situation in bilateral relations would not have reached such a point. Rather, all agreements would have been implemented, the DPRK would have had light water reactors, and the United States would have had a new friend in Northeast Asia in a complex world.

Kim said that the DPRK remained unhappy. Although the United States now had a new administration, the DPRK’s first impressions of it were not very good. President Obama said publicly he was willing to talk even with hostile countries, but he was obstructing the DPRK’s right to send satellites into orbit. Thus, the feelings of the DPRK people and military against the United States were rising again.

DPRK as a Strategic Partner of the United States

Kim commented that some in the West misunderstood the DPRK’s military-first policy as one of hostility. This was indeed a misunderstanding—the policy had nothing to do with hostility. The DPRK was a small country surrounded by giants. The Korean nation had suffered Japanese occupation during the colonial period. Koreans had a strong sense of national pride. With this historical background, the purpose of the military-first policy was not to attack others but to prevent other countries from attacking the DPRK. The United States had never suffered occupation by a foreign power and so Americans probably found it hard to understand the Korean people’s feelings.

Kim said he had no intention of seeing the United States as a sworn eternal enemy. Global power relationships were changing. The United States should consider what was or was not in the strategic interests of the United States. If the bilateral U.S.-DPRK relationship developed, it would lead to many better relationships in Northeast Asia.

Again, Kim continued, he wished to stress that the U.S.-DPRK nuclear issue had arisen because of the hostile relationship. If the bilateral relationship developed for the better and if a world free of nuclear weapons were realized, as President Obama advocated, a denuclearized Korean Peninsula would be realized and many Northeast Asian issues could be addressed.

DPRK Openness to a Missile Launch Moratorium

When President Clinton was in office, Kim said, the United States and the DPRK had agreed on a DPRK missile launch moratorium while bilateral talks continued. The DPRK had unilaterally respected the moratorium, even after Bush’s inauguration, for

seven years. If the Obama administration took a sincere and constructive attitude, the DPRK could make such a promise again.

Problem with Six Party Talks

Concluding his opening remarks, Kim recalled that during the Clinton presidency the United States and the DPRK had had bilateral talks. Under President Bush, the two countries had had the Six Party Talks. During the bilateral talks, the DPRK had frozen its nuclear activities, but during the Six Party Talks the DPRK had conducted nuclear tests. Kim said he had just received a telephone call from President Kim Yong Nam, briefing him on President Kim's meeting earlier in the afternoon with President Clinton about the two American journalists.

Kim closed his opening remarks by saying he hoped that President Clinton would give attention to U.S.-DPRK relations, which had improved during his presidency, so that bilateral relations would progress again in the interests of both countries. He reiterated that he hoped the President would pay attention to the Korean issue. Putting aside his talking points, Kim commented, "These are personal views that I had on my mind."

Appreciation for Amnesty for Journalists

President Clinton expressed appreciation to Chairman Kim for welcoming his visit to the DPRK, even though his visit had come a few years late. First, he wished to express appreciation for the special amnesty for the American journalists. They had told him privately [during their meeting immediately preceding the meeting with Kim] that they felt deep remorse for their mistake. The Secretary of State had also officially expressed regret about the incident. Personally, President Clinton said, he was grateful for the amnesty. Second, he appreciated Chairman Kim's comments about their relationship during his time in office. While the United States and the DPRK had had some difficulties then, he believed that they had had seven-plus years of genuine progress toward peace for the people of North Korea and the Korean Peninsula. Credit should also be given to then-President Kim Dae-Jung and his sunshine policy for the improved U.S.-DPRK relations at the time. Clinton said he was glad that the Kaesong industrial park project [begun under Kim Dae-Jung] survived to this day.

President Clinton also expressed appreciation for Chairman Kim's comments about Secretary Albright's visit and the missile moratorium and Clinton's letter. One thing not in the letter that he must tell Chairman Kim: Yasser Arafat had promised him that, if he remained in Washington during the final two months of his presidency, Arafat would reach a peace agreement with Israel. Thus, Clinton said, he did not make the visit to the DPRK. Unfortunately, the agreement with Israel did not work

out. Clinton said he had always regretted his decision not to visit the DPRK, for the DPRK, the United States, and our peoples.

General Observations on U.S.-DPRK Relations

Now, President Clinton continued, Chairman Kim would have to make a decision about where to go from here. Stressing that he must be careful—he was in the DPRK on a mission of mercy and had no authority to negotiate on behalf of the United States—Clinton said he would like to make some general observations. First, President Obama was serious when he said that he wanted peaceful relations with all nations on the basis of mutual respect. Second, President Obama, the Secretary of State, and Special Representative Bosworth had all made clear that the United States did not take a hostile approach toward the DPRK and did not seek to threaten the regime. Third, as the Secretary of State had made clear in her recent speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, President Obama was attempting to create a network of partnerships that would help each other to bring economic growth and peaceful cooperation.

As Chairman Kim had noted, Clinton said, the two of them had had good relations. They had made progress and built mutual trust. They had trusted each other to keep their word. Chairman Kim had mentioned the visit to Washington of Vice Marshall Jo. Vice Marshall Jo had sat in the chair in the White House reserved for visiting heads of state. He was a very impressive man and he had represented the DPRK well. Clinton said he did not know Jo's position now or even if he was still alive or well, but when Jo left their meeting, Clinton had turned to his own staff and told them he would be proud to have such a man in his own government.

President Clinton said that over the past six months he had read detailed accounts of bilateral U.S.-DPRK developments. President Obama wanted him to tell Chairman Kim personally that he was very appreciative of the release of the two young women. President Clinton stressed his own desire for a better relationship with the DPRK.

President Clinton reiterated that he was not negotiating for the United States but simply offering Chairman Kim his personal observations. We wanted better bilateral relations. Chairman Kim had said that after the "axis of evil" statement—which neither President Obama nor Clinton had endorsed—he had felt it necessary to resume nuclear development. Meantime, before the Obama presidency, the Six Party Talks had begun and agreement was reached there on the September 2005 joint statement of principles for a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.

President Clinton continued that both the United States and the DPRK desired better relations. The problem, as he saw it, was that President Obama had inherited the Six Party Talks. For reasons having nothing to do with the DPRK, Russia, China, Japan,

and South Korea liked President Obama's approach to the world better than they had President Bush's. President Obama needed strong, cooperative relations with those countries. If the DPRK held bilateral talks with the United States in the Six Party framework, the DPRK could use the United States' relations with those countries to its advantage. Those other countries could either help the DPRK or undermine the DPRK's efforts.

President Clinton pointed to the fact that the Secretary of State, with the support of the President, had appointed Ambassador Bosworth as the United States' Special Representative for North Korea Policy and had asked Bosworth to visit the DPRK to talk with the appropriate people. He had received neither a "no" nor a "yes" response from the DPRK. President Clinton said he hoped that the DPRK would give Special Representative Bosworth permission to visit and find a way forward. The United States and the DPRK should rekindle the relationship they had had when he served as president and find a way forward.

Request for Release of South Korean Detainees and Re-investigation of Japanese Abductees

President Clinton said he would add another point about the DPRK's neighbors. In Chairman Kim's opening remarks, he had implied he knew that President Obama and he [Clinton] had been criticized by hardliners in the United States for his trip to Pyongyang. However, when the American people see the two women journalists step off the plane in the United States, criticism of the trip will vanish and the American people will want U.S. dialogue with North Korea.

President Clinton said that the DPRK should consider also the context of South Korean and Japanese elections. Meanwhile, President Kim Dae-Jung was older and frailer, but he continued to speak up for reconciliation. As for the ROK businessman arrested at Kaesong for his alleged remarks and for the South Korean boat that had recently been taken into custody by the DPRK after it crossed into DPRK waters, apparently by mistake, their release would engender the same popular reaction in South Korea as the release of the American journalists would have in the United States.

President Clinton said that politics in Japan were in great flux, and major changes were coming. When Prime Minister Koizumi visited the DPRK, he had been trying to change Japan from the LDP out, but he was not quite able to accomplish his goal. Chairman Kim had been very forthcoming when he released five Japanese citizens and gave an accounting of the others. If that issue could be wrapped up, President Clinton said he believed it might have a real impact on the election.

President Clinton said that brought him to his final point. He was requesting that the DPRK release the detained South Koreans and resume the investigation of the

Japanese abductees. South Korea and Japan had wanted him to raise the issues, also because they want a better relationship with the DPRK. With the right efforts, it would be possible to achieve a final peace treaty, pledges of non-aggression, and help for the DPRK from all Six Party partners, beginning with a non-aggression pledge. However, South Korea and Japan must first believe it is possible [that the DPRK will accommodate their concerns]. Again, President Clinton stressed, he was speaking as an observer. But he believed that the DPRK had an enormous opportunity.

In closing, President Clinton said, we hoped for a cooperative relationship with the DPRK as during his own presidency. If the DPRK denuclearized, it could also insist that its security concerns also be addressed, as called for in the September 2005 joint statement. But under the present circumstances, the President could not walk away from the Six Party Talks. Not only was the United States committed to Six Party talks, but the participating countries could be of potential help and the United States had interests with them that extended far beyond the Korean Peninsula. The issue, then, was whether the DPRK would find a way to do bilateral and Six Party Talks frameworks simultaneously.

President Clinton expressed appreciation to Chairman Kim for allowing him to raise the issues of the South Koreans and Japanese. He reiterated that, if Chairman Kim observed the U.S. reaction to the return of the American journalists, he would be able to see just how powerful the reaction to humanitarian measures could be. President Clinton thanked Chairman Kim for allowing him to speak at such length and say what was on his heart. The United States and the DPRK could not afford another such eight years.

Chairman Kim's Response

Chairman Kim expressed appreciation for President Clinton's wonderful remarks. He noted that President Kim Yong Nam had briefed him on his meeting with President Clinton earlier in the day. President Kim had already given President Clinton enough on the DPRK position on the Six Party Talks. Chairman Kim said that, either with or without the Six Party Talks, the United States and the DPRK should do away with their hostile relationship. He wished to repeat what he had told Secretary Albright during her visit to the DPRK: the United States and the DPRK need not inherit the relations that history had given to them. It was a new century. There was a need to open up a new relationship. The two countries need not be responsible for relations from the 1950s. The two countries should work together to build a new world with common goals. [At this point, Kim paused in silence for about a minute.]

Asked by Chairman Kim if he had visited the ROK twice while president, Clinton replied that that was correct. President Clinton said he had also recently visited the ROK and had taken the occasion to have dinner with former President Kim Dae-Jung.

Chairman Kim said he had heard that President Kim was in critical condition. President Clinton responded that when they had shared dinner, President Kim's mind was alert but his body was weak. We must rekindle feelings in the ROK about a shared future and supporting each other. [Note: At several points in the latter part of the meeting, Kim engaged in aside exchanges with First Vice Foreign Minister Kang, barely listening to the interpretation of President Clinton's remarks into Korean.]

Call for DPRK to Return to Six Party Talks

President Clinton said that whenever he had the honor of meeting a foreign leader—even though he himself no longer held office—he sought to understand his interlocutor's perspective, as he had with Chairman Kim. In his meeting with President Kim Yong Nam, President Clinton said, he had received a very clear statement of the DPRK position on the Six Party Talks. He had always understood—and continued to do so to this day—why it was in the DPRK's strategic interests to have strong bilateral relations with the United States and to demonstrate such a relationship to others. President Clinton reiterated that he did not make U.S. policy and certainly not DPRK policy, but he asked Chairman Kim to consider that President Obama and the Secretary of State wanted strong bilateral relations with the DPRK, but they could not abandon other countries, with which the United States had many ties, ties that went beyond the nuclear issue and the Korean Peninsula. For example, the United States needed China's cooperation on climate change, and Russia's cooperation regarding relations with countries bordering it. Thus, President Clinton said, he requested—as someone who believed in the possibility of a common future between the United States and the DPRK—that DPRK leaders debate among themselves whether it would be possible both to pursue bilateral U.S.-DPRK talks and rekindle the Six Party Talks to take advantage of the relations that the new Obama administration had built with China, Japan, the ROK, and Russia. He reiterated that the DPRK must not make President Obama pick between a bilateral relationship and the Six Party Talks. He concluded by noting that as a boy growing up, he had learned the saying that there is more than one way to skin a cat.

Concluding Remarks

Chairman Kim said he hoped that this meeting would not be the last between the United States and the DPRK. It was possible to have better understanding in the future. He said he hoped that President Clinton would convey the DPRK's positions to his government to assist the United States in formulating a new DPRK policy. President Clinton responded by promising that he would exactly convey Chairman Kim's remarks to President Obama, and any other messages Chairman Kim might have. Chairman Kim reiterated that he hoped that President Clinton would convey his views regarding U.S.-DPRK relations to President Obama. Regarding the

American journalists and other issues, there was much speculation, sometimes contrary to the facts, so it was important for the United States and the DPRK to meet and know each other's position. President Clinton said he agreed and hoped there would be many more meetings.

Kim said that the DPRK would have to think about ways to save the Six Party Talks while pursuing bilateral talks. The Six Party Talks should be pursued in a way that did not violate mutual relations. Pursuing Six Party Talks and neglecting bilateral talks would not resolve hostilities. The DPRK would have to see how to pursue Six Party Talks and bilateral talks. If bilateral talks went well, cooperative relations within the Six Party Talks would be possible.

President Clinton said he believed that President Obama would help things work for the DPRK if the DPRK gave him a chance. He said he knew the Secretary of State felt that way, too. That was why she had appointed Ambassador Bosworth, a strong believer in better U.S.-DPRK relations, as Special Representative. President Clinton reiterated his appreciation for the amnesty for the American journalists.

Regarding a visit by Special Representative Bosworth, Chairman Kim said that there were many visits at issue, including by Senator Kerry, Special Representative Bosworth, and President Clinton. [Interpreter's addition: At first, the DPRK was at a loss as to how to proceed.] All were welcome to visit, but on the basis of good feelings toward President Clinton, the DPRK had invited him first. It was good to have many officials from the United States to visit the DPRK.

President Clinton responded that Senator Kerry was committed to a U.S.-DPRK relationship and really wished to visit. He could be helpful in Congress.

Chairman Kim expressed appreciation for a very useful discussion. President Clinton said he agreed and he expressed the hope for another meeting someday. Chairman Kim agreed, and asked that President Clinton return often, officially and unofficially. He suggested that President Clinton visit again to tour someday when there were no problems in bilateral relations. President Clinton said he would like someday to visit the beautiful seaside location depicted in the painting in the entry hall of the Paekhwonwon Guest House. Chairman Kim said he would show him a much more beautiful place, and that President Clinton should come back to the DPRK on holiday. Chairman Kim then invited President Clinton and his party to dinner. Talk over dinner could be much warmer, he added. As host, he said, he apologized: President Clinton must be very tired due to his long journey and the time difference.

Drafted: WDStraub

8/5/09