

# Policy Forum 06-59A: DPRK Trip Report, July 4 - 8, 2006

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Trip Report by Paul Carroll

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### **I. Introduction**

Paul Carroll, Program Officer at the Ploughshares Fund, was one of three Americans present in the DPRK during the July 4th missile launches. He contributes this insightful trip report on what he saw there. One particularly interesting remark he notes was a statement by DPRK Vice Minister Kim Gae Gwan who made what seemed to be a reference to the DPRK-PRC relationship stating, "With respect to our missile launch, I am awaiting responses from other parties. What I hear is Big Brothers saying

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to Little Brother 'don't do that' but we are not a little boy, we have nuclear weapons."

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## **II. Trip Report by Paul Carroll**

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by Paul Carroll

Our party arrived late in the afternoon of July 4, Pyongyang time. The first few hours were spent being processed and greeted by our Foreign Ministry hosts/handlers. By the time early evening rolled around, we were worn-out and retired for the evening.

The first news of the missile tests overnight came to me by way of NHK television which I was able to view in my hotel room. The English language ticker along the bottom had early reports of perhaps two missiles launched into the Sea of Japan. We did not yet know of the extent of the launches or the reactions. When we met our hosts that morning, the first thing they asked was if we had seen CNN. They were clearly eager to discuss the event and gauge our reactions.

After some inconsequential discussion about the news, we were taken to view the birthplace of Kim Il Sung and given a tour of the Pyongyang subway upon my own request. On the afternoon of the 5th, we had our first substantive discussion about the missile tests with Mr. Chong, the Vice Director of the Institute for Peace and Disarmament of the Foreign Ministry. He laid out for us the official line of justification for why the tests were not only legal, but were the DPRK's right to perform, and not something that should evoke any concern. However Vice Director Chong also seemed to distance the Foreign Ministry's awareness and involvement in the test by describing them as a "military matter" under the authority of the KPA. We discussed among ourselves the question of how much prior information the Foreign Ministry had or didn't have about the tests, since those we interacted with seemed somewhat pre-occupied but not completely caught off guard.

On July 6 we had a more formal meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with Vice Minister Kim Gae Gwan as well as his deputy Li Gun. After going over what by now were familiar points about the North's tests (eg.- not illegal, sovereign right, normal military exercise) we discussed how the Six Party Talks might be re-started. One theme became clear: the North views the imposition of the Treasury Department sanctions in the immediate wake of the September 19, 2005 joint statement as a slap in the face of good faith negotiations and their removal is the price of their return to the Talks. Despite U.S. statements about the financial penalties being a completely separate issue, for the North this is not the case.

On the afternoon of July 6 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a colleague stated that the missile tests "weakened Pres. Roh position in the ROK, he was already weakened in polls, and this test meant that his sunshine policy would be more at risk and this would not be good for the DPRK"

Vice Minister Kim Gae Gwan responded, "I understand your points; all commitments in the 9-19-05 statement are subject to verification. This is true for all parties and all commitments. We won't insist on simultaneity of steps, but we need to reach a fundamental agreement on approach. For example: verifying DPRK abandonment of nuclear program and providing us with a LWR, all parties are obliged to provide this."

Vice Minister Gwan also made what seemed to be a reference to the DPRK-PRC relationship stating,

"With respect to our missile launch, I am awaiting responses from other parties. What I hear is Big Brothers saying to Little Brother 'don't do that' but we are not a little boy, we have nuclear weapons."

Two other comments of note were said over the next two days by their officials. One was that the tests were simply a way to strengthen their deterrent, underscoring the theme of continued vigilance against their strong perception of a U.S. posture of potential attack. Another was that such tests were a way to strengthen North Korea's strength overall so that it could contribute to the "balance of power" in the region, thus ensuring stability. This phrase from classical international relations struck us not only somewhat out of context, but also as out of touch with the reality of North Korea's "strength" vis-à-vis China, Japan, and South Korea. Did the North really believe or aspire to become a counterweight to these powerful militaries and economies?

Upon our departure, my own impression was some wonderment that not only were three Americans allowed in during this timeframe, but the level of interaction we had and its long duration - perhaps 10 hours of face time over three days? - was startling. Though there primarily as an observer, I left convinced of the need for continued engagement on many fronts, particularly in the absence of official relations.

### **III. Nautilus Invites Your Responses**

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Please send responses to: [napsnet-reply@nautilus.org](mailto:napsnet-reply@nautilus.org) . Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author's name, affiliation, and explicit consent.

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