Policy Forum 98-01: Kim Jong-il’s Peace Policy

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KIM JONG-IL'S PEACE POLICY
Essay by Kim Myong Chol
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I. Introduction

The following essay, " Kim Jong Il's Roadmap to Peace and Security on the Korean Peninsula: Prospects of 4-Party Peace Talks," was written by Kim Myong Chol, an ethnic Korean born and living permanently in Japan. Mr. Kim's studies include graduate work in US foreign policy at Tokyo University. Mr. Kim worked as a reporter and editor at "The People's Korea" and has written extensively on DPRK perspectives on Korean and international relations. Mr. Kim previously contributed to NAPSNet Policy Forum Online #4, DPRK Perspectives on Ending the Korean Armistice.

Mr. Kim's essay examines DPRK Kim Jong-il's policy toward peace and security on the Korean peninsula in general, and the four-party peace talks in particular. Mr. Kim argues that, whereas the US lacks a clear strategy for the four-party talks, Kim Jong-il has a well-mapped out policy. According to Kim Myong-chol, Kim Jong-il continues to regard a peace treaty for the Korean Peninsula as a matter to be decided between the DPRK and the US, with the ROK and the PRC playing only supporting roles. Mr. Kim argues that recent events have demonstrated that the ROK remains a client state of the US, and thus lacks the independence necessary to serve as a legitimate negotiating partner with the DPRK. While the DPRK still seeks the withdrawal of US troops from the Korean Peninsula, it is likely to settle for a treaty which will "legitimize" and "neutralize" their presence, thus removing any justifications for Japanese rearmament. Finally, Mr. Kim dismisses the possibility of a DPRK collapse, arguing that historical and cultural factors preclude the type of domestic opposition necessary to overthrow the Kim Jong-il regime.

On January 12, NAPSNet issued a discussion on this essay consisting of commentary by Whee Gook Kim, President of the East-West Research Institute in Washington, DC and Kim Myong Chol's response.

II. Essay by Kim Myong-chol

"Kim Jong Il's Roadmap to Peace and Security on the Korean Peninsula: Prospects of 4-Party Peace Talks"

By Kim Myong Chol

1. Introduction

The first two-day plenary session of the Four-Party Peace Talks ended on December 10 in Geneva with a second round slated for March 16, 1998. As it turned out, the result was exactly what the DPRK Supreme Leader Kim Jong-il expected. He is far from disappointed and is upbeat. The conference was nothing more than another preliminary session whose job it was to determine the order of subsequent chairs for future talks. The session scheduled the next round of talks with the US as the first Chair and organized an ad hoc subcommittee for intersessional consultations in mid-February in Beijing, but did not set any fixed agenda. On December 11, US Assistant Secretary of State Stanley Roth commented that the talks "successfully inaugurated the negotiating process to achieve a permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula." The following day in Pyongyang, the DPRK's Foreign Ministry spokesman observed, "Avoiding addressing the heart of the matter by the Americans and South Koreans and seeking to disperse the focus of discussion would leave its solution an elusive goal." So far, the Olympic spirit of participation alone is the sole positive aspect of the Geneva gathering, which is not so bad, given the continuing state of belligerency on the Far Eastern peninsula. A critical look at why Kim Jong-il consented to his country showing up for the conference and what scenario he has reveals his road-map to peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and to its eventual reunification.

2. Uncharacteristically Un-American Lack of Road-map

What is highly uncharacteristic of American behavior in the Korean question is the extraordinary unavailability of any satellite-aided navigator or road-map, which the North Koreans expected to pop out of the American hats. Are the American satellites and computers flawed beyond repairs? Or, are the Americans simply marking time to complete a crash program to work on a next-generation GPS device to help the negotiators negotiate the rough Korean terrain? Or are the Americans just flirting with the idea of a peace treaty to torment the North Koreans in the hopes of seeing the Pyongyang regime collapse along the way?

This strange absence implies the guilty conscience of the Americans, which may go a long way to explaining their behavior. This guilty conscience matters most in the proposal to call a four-way conference, partial evidence that the Korean question is an international issue involving North Korea and the United States. This contradicts the long-standing American position that the Korean question is an internal affair of the Korean people, to be discussed only between North and South Korea. Inclusion of China in the list of participants is a typical American ploy to alleviate the guilty conscience and cover up the public image of South Korea as a mere American client state. America hopes that China will exert a restraining influence on North Korea.

It should be kept in mind that North Korea will remain true to its own advice without consulting with any country. Whether either Moscow or Beijing will support its action does not make any difference to the North Korean Government of Kim Jong-il. Take the case of the 1968 Pueblo, the 1969 EC-121, and the 1976 Poplar Tree incidents, and the 1993-94 nuclear crisis. In the stark absence of stated support from Russia and China and with Moscow totally backing down in the Cuban crisis, North Korea single-handedly forced the mobilized 7th Fleet and a formation of B-52s to quietly leave the scene over a series of standoffs with the Americans. The Government of Kim Jong-il successfully coaxed the United States into bilateral talks.

As predicted, the three rounds of preliminary contacts and the first plenary session of the Four-Party Peace Talks in Geneva highlighted the conspicuous failure of the United States, with all its stated commitment to the quest for a permanent peace in the divided country, to come up with any specific, coherent scenario for peace and security in Korea. An emerging impression is that the United States has no proper understanding of the Korean question nor consequently any workable recipe for its solution, short-term or long-term.

This picture is a far cry from what American policy behavior is supposed to be like. No specific detail or clue is to be detected in the remarks of Clinton, Albright, Stanley Roth, and Mark Minton. In the idea of Kim Jong-il, the United States should have a clearly-defined American version of the situation, its cause and effect, and a detailed prescription for its negotiated settlement.

In a typical case in point, all the Americans had to offer at the December 9-10 meeting was to urge implementation of the December 30, 1991 North-South Korean Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression and Exchange, which does not require any international conference. Their behavior is beating about the bush. As the Americans are well aware, whether the landmark non-aggression agreement is to be implemented entirely depends on the South Korean authorities. Kim Young-sam should be held responsible for stalling the execution of North-South negotiations. There is no room for either an American or Chinese role, because the matter is purely an internal affair between North and South Korea. Is the non-aggression agreement something to be replaced with a peace treaty which will end the hostilities in Korea? If so, the United States ought to have demanded that the Americans and the Chinese be involved in the 1990 91 North-South premier-level negotiations on the agreement and be among its signatories. No convincing explanation or reason was produced. Is this what occupied the mind of Clinton two years go, on April 16, 1996, when he went out of his way

to make a two-hour stopover at Cheju Island on his Far Eastern trip to Japan and Russia? The answer is an obvious NO. To be blunt, he had nothing in mind. Nor did the State Department.

While Bush was in office, the non-aggression pact was hammered out. Its signing did not prevent the then newly-elected South Korean President, Kim Young-sam, from preaching possible use of force against Pyongyang. Instead of calling for talks with the North, Kim Young-sam went as far as attempting to oppose the Clinton bid for peace and improved ties with Pyongyang. He back-stabbed Carter by calling the late Kim Il-sung "a war criminal," despite his earlier pledge to attend the projected summit with the North Korean leader that was arranged by the former Democratic President. Kim Young-sam was so out of sync with American policy in Korea that he ended up being branded as "a spoiled brat" and "more of a problem than the North Koreans" by American officials. The Americans responded by taking a series of steps that rather served to demonstrate that South Korea is not a sovereign entity but is nothing but a U.S. client state. The Washington Post on October 13 openly called for an opposition victory in the South Korean presidential election, suggesting that South Korea is a virtual second-class ally. In an act which constituted a flagrant violation of Seoul's sovereignty, the United States, refusing to acknowledge that the Kim Young-sam administration had any competence to continue to handle the September 18, 1996 North Korean submarine incident, held marathon talks with the DPRK and defused the crisis on December 30, 1996.

In other words, the 20 months that preceded the December Geneva session witnessed the Americans betraying the client-state nature of Seoul, which is incompetent to deal with Pyongyang on an equal footing. In the final analysis, Seoul needs American backing to play any role in the settlement of the Korean question: the four-way talks serve this purpose.

3. North Korean Motives

Then, what led the Government of Marshal Kim Jong-il to show up for what the Americans termed the Four-Party Peace Talks in Geneva? Three factors may account for the North Korean action: (1) Confucian courtesy to Bill Clinton; (2) the American promise to focus the Peace Talks on the American military presence in South Korea, with prospects of eventual cozy tete-a-tetes between the North Koreans and the Americans; (3) American commitment to increased food assistance and improved confidence-building measures.

Firstly, the North Korean Confucian style of courtesy and moral obligation counted significantly in the decision of Kim Jong-il to send a delegation to Geneva for the proposed four-way talks. In traditional Confucian North Korean values, the expression of proper remarks to the person concerned on the four vital occasions--birth, marriage, promotion, and death--matters most. This is the North Korean code of conduct which may be called Confucian or outdated. Kim Jong-il feels morally obliged to the Clinton Administration and the American people. Despite lack of diplomatic relations and the continuing technical state of war, Clinton expressed deep sympathy over the passing away of North Korea's founder, Kim Il-sung, and the State Department expressed congratulations on Kim Jong-il's official assumption of the post of WPK Secretary General. Not South Korea nor Japan, but the USA, is the largest Western food donor to the flood-stricken North Korean victims.

When Cambodian King Sihanouk was deposed in a US-engineered Lon Nol coup, Kim Il-sung provided him with a jetliner, a troop of reliable bodyguards and other personnel, plus a palace, in deep appreciation of his earlier action taken to make his country the first in Southeast Asia to give diplomatic recognition to Pyongyang. Kim Il-sung did not care what the Western world thought of his action. In the wake of the Berlin wall collapse, Erich Honecker was taken prisoner in Moscow with no country offering to help him, when Kim Jong-il decided to accept him in defiance of Western

criticism. The North Koreans knew that the East Germans offered extensive assistance to their country in postwar reconstruction. A North Korean jetliner was sent to Moscow. Influential Jews in the Western world joined him in the quiet campaign to get the former East German leader released. They remembered that he was one of the few Germans that worked to protect the Jews from Nazi Germany. As a result, he was released and flown out to Chile, where he died.

The second consideration is the American promise to focus the Geneva conference on the discussion of the stationing of US troops in South Korea. This is an epochal development in the search for a peaceful solution of the question as its resolution has proved elusive in North Korean engagements with the Americans. This is the heart of the matter in the thinking of Kim Jong-il. The North Koreans are duly confident that debate on the American military presence will bring full public attention to its illegality and flagrant violation of the armistice agreement and discredit the client state status of the Seoul regime in the eyes of the world public. The Chinese will grow more and more quiet and the South Koreans will be sidelined as discussion of the heart of the matter will proceed, leaving the North Koreans and the Americans to emerge as star players on the stage.

In the view of Kim Jong-il, the Korean question has a double structure: outer crust and inner core. The hard outer crust is American and military, while the inner core is intra-Korean and domestic. There is no reaching the inner core without peeling off the outer layer. Kim Jong-il finds it his job to remove the outer crust so that the inner core may come to light: to create an external climate for an indigenous South Korean nationalism to reassert itself and form a national-unity coalition of democratic nationalist forces in Seoul.

The September 2, 1945 American landing in South Korea, which originated in the August 10-12, 1945 recommendation of US Colonels Bonesteel and Rusk, is the root cause responsible for the division of Korea, which had remained a single nation for some 1,000 years. In other words, the American military presence is the cause and the division of the Land of Morning Calm and the North-South Korean confrontation the effect. Besides, the Americans will always find themselves charged with illegally stationing their combat troops in South Korea so long as the July 27, 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement is in force. The American military presence in that part of Korea poses the most serious perceived national security threat to the Government of Kim Jong-il and his people. Kim Jong Il remembers: "There is no greater regret in my life than to turn down the request from the late President Kim Il-sung for increased funding for people's livelihoods. We cannot afford to cut defense spending so long as the American troops remain hostile to us."

The most fundamental provision of the Korean armistice agreement is the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Korea. The Chinese Volunteers went home long ago, leaving the US troops the sole foreign contingent remaining in Korea. In other words, unless the Korean Armistice Agreement is replaced with a peace treaty that will end the technical state of war between Pyongyang and Washington and unless the American forces are withdrawn from Korean soil, the Government of Kim Jong-il finds itself constantly at serious risk of resumption of war with the United States, the sole superpower on earth, nuclear-armed to the teeth. Kim Jong-il is well aware that his country is no match for the United States in every respect--population, territory, economic and technical potential, and military prowess--except moral integrity and inner strength. He would be the last statesman and military strategist to decide to go to war with the United States. Without a peace agreement with the United States, Kim Jong-il concludes that there is no chance for any negotiated settlement of the Korean question. Nor will his government be able to divert much funds for economic purposes.

Thirdly, a friend in need is a friend indeed. The US was the first major Western country to positively respond to the WFP appeal for emergency food aid to the disaster-stricken North Korea. The Seoul regime of Kim Young-sam threw cold water on the international community's effort to help North Korea. However, the American behavior is viewed as a great act of goodwill and sympathy,

considering the continuing hostile relations between the two countries and the absence of normalized bilateral relations. From October 25 to November 4, the U.S. Government sent its first official team of experts to north Korea on a food needs assessment mission. Its findings were contained in the DPRK situation report issued by the Agency for International Development on December 2. The findings led the US Government to confirm the need for continued assistance, referring to the WFP estimate of the North Korean food shortage of 1.5 million tons. The Americans expressed readiness to supply additional food aid. European countries and Japan are expected to follow suit. The Kim Jong-il Administration took note of American commitment to increased food aid and better relations with North Korea, including a possible lifting of the nearly half-century economic embargo on North Korea. Whether or not the proposed Four-Party Peace Talks go anywhere, Kim Jong-il concludes that the Americans are probably sincere enough to trust and work with.

4. Legalization of US Military Presence

What is crucial to Kim Jong-il's scenario for peace and security on the Korean Peninsula is legalization of the American military presence in South Korea--tantamount to its practical disengagement. How to legalize the American presence is a foremost strategic concern of the north Korean leader, provided that the United States has not decided to resume hostilities in Korea. Found on the desk of Kim Jong-il in his Pyongyang office are two scenarios for a final settlement of the Korean question: one is by war to force the American troops to quit South Korea and to reunify the whole land, and the other is by negotiations on their withdrawal before North-South talks on reunification. Only with the American military disengagement from Korea can North and South Korea safely talk about reconnecting the bisected national knot and ties. Kim Jong-il has carefully weighed one scenario against the other. His conclusion is this: Unless the Americans launch a blitzkrieg on North Korea, he will not order his forces to strike American forces. Otherwise, the probable immense casualties and havoc wrought on Korea could not be justified. He compares the American military presence to a malignant tumor found in the human body. A Western doctor, who has diagnosed a patient with a malignant tumor, will decide to undertake surgery to remove it, although cutting open the human body in its affected part is most likely to leave a lasting aftereffect. The North Korean leader, noting that traditional Korean herb medicine provides an effective alternative medicinal therapy, hopes that the administration of ginseng to the patient carries a better chance of boosting the natural healing power and immune system to the point where the malignant tumor will turn into a benign one. In short, Kim Jong-il expects that negotiations with the United States under whatever pretext will change the fundamental nature of the American forces from that of aggressor to neutral or sympathetic status, if not friendly. The long-illegal American military presence will be vested with a mantle of legitimacy. All Kim Jong-il has to do is develop a formula under which the Korean Armistice Agreement is to be scrapped: to craft a peace agreement to end the state of war between the DPRK and the United States.

To all intents and purposes, Kim Jong-il has opted out of the best approach; that is, an immediate withdrawal of American forces, in favor of the second best approach, in which he will settle for the continued but legalized, neutralized presence of American troops in South Korea A key question is how to go about this. His legitimacy strategy rests on the ending of the state of war with the United States while preserving its status and clout. This event can come only with a peace treaty to replace the cease-fire accord which provides for the withdrawal of American forces from South Korea. In the view of Kim Jong-il and his policy planners, the neutralization and legitimization of the American presence will produce practically the same effect as its withdrawal--the long awaited halt to the interventionist, aggressive, and divisionist role of the Americans. The neutralized American forces will assume a new role as a peace keeping force in the Far East and will not give the alarmed Japanese any pretext to justify arms expansion or incentive to acquire nuclear arms. Kim Jong-il will

prefer to find the above-explored avenue of letting the American military presence continue, albeit neutralized and sympathetic with a peace-keeping role, rather than see its disengagement from Korea set the stage for a replay of great-power rivalry in the Far East.

This scenario will release the Americans from their guilty conscience over their illegal presence and responsibility for keeping Korea divided so long. There will be no Vietnam-like debacle with Americans kicked down into the seas or clinging to a chopper lifting off. No red flag will be flown in Seoul and Pusan and no boat people will flood the Japanese coast or seek shelter in Hawaii and the US mainland. The American presence will be welcomed as a sympathetic, peace-keeping force in the intra-Korean movement toward the ultimate goal of territorial reunification.

5. Prospects of Four-Way Talks

Kim Jong-il and his lieutenants think that chances are that the Four Way Peace Talks will follow one of the following four courses:

Case 1, collapse or indefinite adjournment over the American military presence in South Korea; Case 2, natural eclipse by North-South high-level or summit talks with the Americans and the South Koreans losing interest; Case 3, successful ending with conclusion of a peace treaty involving all the four parties as signatories; Case 4, reduction of the four-party conference to a two-way session between the DPRK and the USA which will craft a bilateral peace treaty between the two former war enemies with China and South Korea invited to witness the signing ceremony and with North and South Korea agreeing to implement the 1991 non-aggression agreement.

Case 3 is highly unlikely, while the first two will eventually set the stage for Case 4. In the final analysis, given all the factors as things stand, Case 4 is the most likely scenario. Reason No. 1 is that North Korea and America are the sole main players in the big picture of the Korean question as Kim Jong-il sees it. There is no settling the issue without addressing the Pyongyang-Washington relationship. China is on the sideline as a mere assistant. In the small picture, however, North Korea and South Korea are the protagonists, with Washington and Beijing costarring. The Korean War cease-fire came about as a joint effort of the DPRK and the USA despite Seoul's protests. The Pueblo, the EC-121, the Poplar Tree, and the nuclear standoff were all resolved between the two countries. To take the most recent example, the September 18, 1996 violation of South Korean territorial waters by a North Korean minisub was discussed not between Pyongyang and Seoul and but between the DPRK and the USA. The negotiations were held neither in Seoul nor Pyongyang or in any third country city but in New York. No South Korean representative was present.

Reason No. 2 is the American obligation imposed by the October 21, 1994 Agreed Framework worked out in Geneva to deliver two nuclear reactors to the DPRK by 2003 and upgrade the North Korean-American relations to ambassadorial levels. The Americans are duty-bound willy-nilly to meet the deadline, or otherwise will face such strident charges of "default" and "most serious breach of international commitment" from Pyongyang that the North Koreans will order the uncompleted KEDO project suspended, expel all the American and other foreign personnel, and decide to resume their frozen nuclear activities. The Americans will be left with only two options: to go to war or to offer additional compensation for the delay and agree to sign a peace treaty. If the Americans are wise, they will prefer the second choice. If their choice should be war, the Kim Jong-il Government would respond in kind. The final decision rests with the Americans.

Reason No. 3 is that in order to prevent the worst-case scenario in Korea, the most volatile flashpoint in the world, there is no alternative than to end the state of war between the key belligerents, the DPRK and the USA. As the submarine incident eloquently testifies, the American military will soon be exasperated by the lack of direct communication with the North Korean military

in a highly tense situation where heavily armed combat troops are within striking distance of each other along the 38th Parallel. The American government will be left with no alternative than to seek direct talks with the North Korean forces and consent to an interim cease-fire-policing agreement, pending a peace treaty. There always remain serious risks of resumed belligerency on the Korean Peninsula so long as the American forces stay on in South Korea in breach of the armistice accord. Once war erupts, it will instantly spill into neighboring countries such as Japan, escalating beyond control into thermonuclear war.

There are fundamental differences between the Korean War and a possible second Korean conflagration: The last war was confined to the Korean Peninsula, because the Korean People's Army had no means to strike the American forces in Japan or to attack carrier battle groups. Today, however, this is no longer the case. The KPA has the capability to inflict direct hits on American forces outside Korea and sink costly leviathan American warships, meaning that Japan and other parts of the Asia-Pacific rim--where the most dynamic economies and heaviest population centers are concentrated--will be a major theater of a new war in Korea. In the last conflict there were no operating nuclear power plants in Korea, in Japan, or aboard American warships. Now however, 11 nuclear power plants are operating in South Korea and 53 in Japan, each located within 100 meters of the sea. Many American submarines and surface ships are nuclear-powered. In the new high-tech age, huge carriers and AEGIS vessels are sitting ducks for small fast boats firing anti-ship missiles and torpedoes, as demonstrated in the June 5, 1967 third Mideast War, the October 5, 1973 fourth Mideast War, the April 2, 1982 Falklands War, and the January 17, 1991 Gulf War. Anti-aircraft missiles and guns accounted for around 70-80% of warplanes shot down from WII through the Korean War and the Vietnam War to the Gulf War, while dog fights represented the rest. In other words, big ships and big planes no longer guarantee control of battleground. Cheaper but high-tech missiles in the hands of a small nation are an effective means of delivering devastating blows to the enemy.

North Korea has successfully developed and acquired long-range means of delivering lethal blows on any given remote target outside the Korean Peninsula and in any part of the globe, as the January 1, 1997 editorial of Rodong Sinmun commented. The Seoul-centered industrial zone, inhabited by at least 20 million people, about 40 percent of the South Korean population, is within firing range of an estimated 13,000 long-range artillery pieces and multi-rocket launchers along the Military Demarcation Line, while Pyongyang is 180 km north of the DMZ, safely out of reach of American and South Korean guns. An untoward incident or miscalculation could quickly expand beyond control, producing inconceivable disastrous consequences to Korea and its neighboring countries. This is against the reunification strategy of Kim Jong-il, who is wise enough not to be the first to trigger such a tragedy that would bomb the Far East back to the stone age. It will make no sense at all to try to reunify the ruined Korean Peninsula.

The little noticed but most significant change in the American attitude came in the promise given to the North Koreans that the Geneva Peace Talks would focus its business on the American military presence in South Korea. The MIA project and the missile talks are other working channels between the two military establishments.

6. North Korean Collapse Along the Way?

With regard to the prospects of the Peace Talks in Geneva, some policy planners in Washington, DC may say, "The North Korean regime will fall apart along the way before the Geneva talks succeed." They may be referring to what they call its dismal economic and agricultural performance and the increased number of refugees from North Korea. Their observation is little founded on any proper historical, scientific and traditional and cultural insights. Firstly, there is no historical record of any nation collapsing because of famine. Recorded human history can be traced back as far as 10,000

years ago. Numerous dynasties and nations rose and perished, but none fell as a result of food shortage. Access any library in any part of the world and you will find no written records documenting the fall of any nation or government due to famine.

Secondly, an elementary knowledge of political science shows that it is an illusion to expect the Pyongyang regime to collapse. In order to topple any government in place, there needs to be an organized opposition force, which needs to be able to neutralize or win to its fold such means of oppression as the standing army, the police, and mass media. No organized opposition force exists in North Korea. There needs to be such pent-up widespread popular dissatisfaction that it may explode into a rebellion at the slightest provocation, with people taking to the streets.

Thirdly, traditional Korean Confucian culture rules out any possibility of opposition to the central government. This distinguishes Korea--except for South Korea--from China and Japan, where popular uprisings and coups are an important part of history. In Korea, the dynasties lasted much longer than any counterparts in China and Japan. In Korea, it is tradition for the national ruler to be respected as the father and for the masses of people to be taken care of as children. In any Korean family, except those in South Korea, parents wield unquestioned authority and command respect, with no delinquent children contemplating rebelling against parental authority. There is little reported domestic violence. Unlike South Korea, Japan, Europe, and America, North Korean schools are totally free of violence as traditional Confucian values prevail. No children are punished for petty offenses, such as violation of any set of school regulations. In North Korean schools, no rules is practically the rule. In short, there is no theoretical basis in the so-called collapse theory in light of Korean tradition and culture.

III. NAPSNet Invites Your Responses

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Below are a few questions that some readers may find useful in putting the issues raised by the essay into a critical light. Please send responses to:napsnet@nautilus.org. Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author's name, affiliation, and explicit consent. Below are some questions that might help you to frame your response in a critical light.
* The author argues that the US lacks a "road-map" for the four-party peace talks. Is this true? If so, is the reason given by the author--i.e., the US "guilty conscience" over its role in ROK affairs--the true cause of this lack of direction? What other factors may account for such alleged US indecision?
* The author cites US promises to focus on the military issue and to continue to provide food aid to the DPRK as the reasons for the DPRK's acquiescence to the peace talks. However, US spokespersons have repeatedly denied that such promises were made. What implications does this variance in public positions have for the success of the talks? What other factors may account for the DPRK's actions?
* The author suggests that, while the DPRK would prefer to see US troop withdrawal, it will settle for the "legalization" of the US troop presence on the peninsula. Does this represent a genuine movement in the DPRK's position? How does it affect the prospects for concluding a peace treaty? How would it fit in with overall US military policy in the region? How would the surrounding countries (ROK, Japan, the PRC, Russia) view a "sympathetic, neutralized" US force on the Korean Peninsula?
* The author states that the most likely outcome of the four-party peace talks is a US-DPRK peace treaty, with the ROK and the PRC acting as "witnesses." Given that the US has repeatedly rejected the notion of a "separate peace" that does not include the ROK, is the author correct?
* The author denies the possibility of a DPRK collapse, stating that no regime has ever fallen due to famine, and that traditional Korean Confucianism forestalls the development of the type of opposition necessary to overthrow the Kim Jong-il regime. Is the author's view of history accurate in

this case? Even if it is true that no viable opposition currently exists in the DPRK, is there a possibility that one might develop in the future? What conditions would be necessary for such a development?
* The author implies throughout that "traditional Korean Confucianism," rather than socialism, is the driving ideological force behind the DPRK regime. Does this represent a change in the DPRK's policy? If so, what does it imply for policymakers attempting to deal with the DPRK? What implications might it have for ROK-DPRK reconciliation? Do the recent economic problems in the ROK and Southeast Asia de-legitimize such an "Asian values" interpretation?

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