



PEACE TALKS: THE NORTH KOREAN PERSPECTIVE

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



Introduction

North Korean viewpoint is often dwarfed by hostile comments and a true picture is hardly presented to the outside world except harsh comments that were exchanged in a retaliatory mood.

A recent development has taken place between the two Koreas to improve ties without taking into account other countries' viewpoints and wishes to meddle in the primary disputes. A positive outcome was noted as statements came from Seoul and Pyongyang confirming the improvement of ties. The reaction from China and Russia was highly encouraging, while the United States and Japan expressed satisfactions along with reservations.¹

The Peace Talks

The latest development comes after a fairly long time and particularly after talks were suspended two years ago. The isolation of the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK) on the world scene seems to be waning, and the country might come to the international fold exercising its potentials for building peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and the wider region of North East Asia. A high level talk was held at the Peace

¹ Dr Ahmad Rashid Malik, "The Resumption of Inter-Korean Talks", *Daily Times* (Lahore), January 13, 2018.

House in Panmunjom, on the south side, across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) on January 9, 2018. Both Seoul and Pyongyang were expected to discuss such issues as the size of the North Korea's art troupe, a route by which they will travel southward, and detailed performance schedules.² This was an important connection between the two Koreas after February 2015 when all channels of connections were terminated. The DPRK side was led by Ri Son Gwon, Chairman of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification, and a delegation of South Korea was led by Minister of Unification, Jo Myong Gyun.³ The working level negotiations were held in Tongilgak Pavilion, on the north side, on January 15.⁴ The second round of the negotiations will be held after a week.⁵

The short-worded joint press release of 9 January issued at the end of the talks is considered a spectacular development between the two sides after years of mounting tensions and differences. The statement covered important diplomatic initiatives, evolving understanding between the two militaries, reconciliation, national unification, and cooperation in a number of fields.

Sports diplomacy seems to have worked out to diffuse the tension between Seoul and Pyongyang.⁶ The press release stated that both sides agreed to proactively engage to hold the 23rd Winter Olympics in South Korea as a fundamental step to improving ties between the two Koreas. In this regard, the DPRK agreed to send a delegation of the National Olympic Committee, sports team, a cheer group, an art troupe, a Taekwon-do demonstration group and a press corps along with a high-level delegation to the Olympics, and South Korea agreed to provide conveniences needed for them.⁷ A combined women's ice hockey team will also be formed between the two Koreas.⁸ The DPRK side will send an advance team to the South Korea in February to make necessary arrangements for participation in the Olympics. North Korea would send a Director of its arts and

² "Two Koreas to hold working-level talks on art troupe's visit to Olympics on Monday", *The Korea Times* (Seoul), January 14, 2018.

³ "Inter-Korean High-Level Talks Held", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), January 11, 2018.

⁴ "South Korea and North Korea to hold working-level talks on Jan. 15", *Reuters* (London), January 13, 2018.

⁵ "North and South Korea hold second talks in a week to discuss Winter Olympics", *The Telegraph* (London), January 15, 2018.

⁶ It was ping pong diplomacy between China and the United States that became the foundation stone of opening dialogue between them in April 1971.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Thomson Reuters, "South Korea and North Korea to hold talks about Winter Olympics, January 13, 2018. AOL.Com. <https://www.aol.com/article/news/2018/01/13/south-korea-and-north-korea-to-hold-talks-about-winter-olympics/23332598/>

performance bureau, a conductor, and an orchestra administrator. South Korea would send a Deputy Minister for culture and arts, an art director at the Korean Symphony Orchestra and a Ministry of Unification Director.⁹

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) will hold a meeting at Lausanne, Switzerland with the delegates from North and South Korea on January 20 for making final arrangements. For the DPRK, it is a great opportunity as it did not send its team to the Winter Olympics since 1992. The Winter Olympics will be held at Pyeongchang in South Korea from February 9-25, 2018. While playing on the fields of Pyeongchang, North Korean athletes would spread emotional sentiments when their national anthem will be played and flag will be raised on the soil of South Korea, sending a message for peace and unification between the two Koreas.

In a crucial development, both sides agreed to “reduce military tension and to create a peaceful environment on the Korean Peninsula and promote national reconciliation and unity”.¹⁰ They agreed to iron out military differences and promote talks between military authorities.¹¹ South Korea needs to obtain assurance from the DPRK that it will never use its nuclear weapons against the South. If this assurance was achieved, it would resolve a number of military and political issues between the two Koreas.

The North Korean Hailing

North Korean state media has hailed talks with South Korea as a path to reunification, and as Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un’s brilliant policy of improving relations for national unification. The credit of inter-Korean talks goes to Kim Jong-un, who in his New Year address had expressed his willingness to participate in the Winter Olympics to be held in South Korea. He said that “the prevailing situation demands that now the north and the south improve the relations between themselves and take decisive measures for achieving a breakthrough for independent reunification without being obsessed by bygone days.”¹² He said that “it is a meaningful year for both the north and the south... The Pyeongchang

⁹ Pauline Lockwood and Jason Hanna, “North Korean state media hail talks with South as path to reunification”, *CNN* (Atlanta), January 14, 2018.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “Kim Jong Un’s New Year Address”, *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), January 2, 2018.

Olympic Games will be a good opportunity to show off the status of the nation, and we sincerely wish the Games to be successful”.¹³ He asked for a “sincere efforts for a *détente*” between the two Koreas, declaring to “open our doors to anyone from South Korea.”¹⁴ Kim, in fact, asked for an inter-Korean solution through a dialogue to end the deadlock without the interference of outside powers.

An editorial published in Pyongyang-based *Rodong Sinmun* on January 13 stated that “the cause of Korea's independent reunification is sure to be accomplished despite the persistent challenges and obstructive moves of the separatist forces as the Koreans have respected Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un as the sun of the nation and the bright lodestar of national reunification.”

The paper further added that the latest move would “end the confrontation era woven with distrust and antagonism and usher in a new era of national reconciliation and unit”, and help in removing “mutual misunderstanding and distrust” in order “to defuse the grave military tension and create a peaceful environment on the Korean Peninsula.”¹⁵ The paper accorded great appreciation to the leadership of the Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un. Commenting further on the inter-Korean talks, the paper said that it is “proved again that there is no problem unsolvable if the north and the south pool their efforts.” Now is the time for the north and the south to have sincere discussion on the issue of improving their relations and seek a way out for the nation in a bold manner by the concerted efforts”.¹⁶ The feelings expressed by the DPRK's media is a positive step in bringing harmony on the Korean Peninsula.

Conclusion

Prospects of peace on the Korean Peninsula are brightening. The sports diplomacy is a great means of removing tension and creating room for peace. The non-participation of the major powers in the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games should not jeopardize the two Koreas' efforts of creating mutual peace. The inter-Korean Winter Olympics are creating prospects of peace on the heavily fortified Korean Peninsula after decades of tension. After sports,

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Un Jong Chol, “Bright Lodestar of National Reunification”, Ibid., January 13, 2018.

¹⁶ Pak Chol Jun, “Barrier of Mistrust and Confrontation Should Be Demolished”, Ibid., January 15, 2018.

both countries would move on to talk to reduce military tension going on for the last two years and to improve relations on many fronts. Outside powers should appreciate the inter-Korean talks without interfering in the inter-Korean-led peace process.