



PEACE ON KOREAN PENINSULA: THE CHINESE PERSPECTIVE

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The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK) resumed political talks on January 9, 2018 and again on January 15 along the heavily fortified demilitarized zone after communications between them were completely broken down in February 2016. The resumption of talks were a major breakthrough after two years of prevailing doubts and threats with the increasing role of the United States, which further deteriorated the situation when the Korean Peninsula came to the brink of a deadly nuclear catastrophe in 2017.

The Inter-Korean Diplomacy

Credit of this breakthrough must go to Kim Jong-un who in his New Year's message, had expressed his wish to open dialogue with ROK to resolve outstanding disputes between both the countries.¹ The ROK also unreservedly hailed DPRK's move. In Seoul, the Moon Jae-in administration welcomed Kim's move: "we have always stated our willingness to talk with North Korea anytime and anywhere if that would help restore inter-Korean relations and lead to peace on the Korean Peninsula."²

The important role played by the President of the ROK, Moon Jae-in since coming into power cannot be denied who opted to open dialogue instead of pursuing Donald Trump's rhetoric of war against the DPRK. Moon is a left-leaning politician and strongly believes in reconciliation. He made a number

¹ "Kim Jong Un's New Year Address", *Rodong Sinmun* (Pyongyang), January 2, 2018.

² Press Release, "Kim Jong Un Message Draws Favourable South Korea Response", *Executive Intelligence Review*, (Washington), January 1, 2018.
https://www.larouchepub.com/pr/2018/180101_kim_message.html

of statements in 2017 to discuss disputes on the table instead of going for any other belligerent options.

The resumption of the peace talks could be termed as Kim-Moon joint effort for success of putting a new vigour in the Sunshine policy adopted in the late 1990s to bring peace on the Korean Peninsula. Former ROK President Kim Dae Jung had paid a visit to Pyongyang in June 2000, making the first high-level contact between the two countries after the Korean War. Both Kim and Moon have written a new history in relations between the two countries by reviving the spirit of the Sunshine policy.

The Chinese Respective

China has fully appreciated the resumption of the talks between the two Koreas without suggesting any preconditions.³

Following the mounting tension between North and South Korea, China was under server pressure to persuade the DPRK to shun its belligerent postures. China tried to persuade the DPRK, but not much success was achieved even as China continued its persuasion.

The new situation, however, was seen as a welcome move by China as it has for a long time been anticipating for such a move towards peace between the two Koreas. It cannot be said that the ball is now in the court of ROK. Both the ROK and the DPRK have been equally eager to respond to the latest developments and sharing the responsibility to make progress in their bilateral talks for changing the strategic atmosphere on the Korean Peninsula. The nascent inter-Korean-led peace needs the support of the outside powers, but not interference or dictation, to successfully achieve the goals of the peace. China has been supporting the process, as well as keeping the distance so that it should not become a Chinese intervention in the process.

China supported the two Koreas' efforts to improve bilateral relations, ease tensions, and realise denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. President Xi Jinping made a telephone call to President Moon on January 11 appreciating the opening of the dialogue between the two Koreas. "All sides concerned should make joint efforts to keep up the hard-won momentum for the easing of the situation on the Korean Peninsula and create conditions to restart talks," he was quoted as saying.⁴ Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Lu Kang, in a press conference in Beijing shortly after top

³ Dr Ahmad Rashid Malik, "Peace Talks: The North Korean Perspective", *Issue Brief*, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, January 16, 2018.

⁴ "All sides concerned should jointly create conditions for resumption of talks on Korean peninsula -- Xi", *Xinhua*, (Beijing), January 16, 2018.

officials of the two Koreas met on January 9, said that "we are pleased to see such high level talks being held between the two sides."⁵

Moon has also improved ties with China, which had deteriorated following the deployment of the American Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) missile system in South Korea. He visited Beijing in December 2017. The new inter-Korean development is yet another opportunity for improving the China-South Korea ties besides positive impacts on the Korean Peninsula. China hoped the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics is a right step towards improving the inter-Korean ties. There are also brighter chances of improving the United States-North Korea ties, as well as North Korea-Japan ties.

The Vancouver's Derailing

China, however, took a pessimistic stance over the Vancouver talks on the North Korean issue, jointly sponsored by the United States and Canada on January 16, because China and Russia, two important allies of North Korea, were not invited to participate in the meeting. Second, the meeting's primary objective was to pressurise North Korea for denuclearization and focus on better implementation of the UN sanctions. China believes that other diplomatic and political issues such as diplomatic opening, visa exchanges, Kaesong industrial complex, and trade also need to be discussed. Third, the Vancouver meeting invited those American allies from 20 nations who had sent troops to fight in the Korean War during 1950-53.

To consider that the Vancouver meeting would bring peace on the Korean Peninsula is out of question. It was just a gathering of nations hostile to North Korea and there would be no possibility of bringing peace on the Korean Peninsula without bringing in China in such talks. China is the main pillar of strength for any peace talks between the two Koreas. Lamenting the Vancouver meeting, spokesman of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lu Kang, termed the gathering as the "Cold War mentality", "to undermine the peace efforts" that "would not help", to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue.⁶

China has adopted, therefore, a right stance on the Vancouver meeting by condemning it. While the two Koreas are talking to each other and participating at the Winter Olympics to be held in South Korea in February 2018, the Vancouver meeting only serves to sabotage and undermine such

⁵ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang's Regular Press Conference on January 9, 2018, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, January 9, 2018.
http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1524479.shtml

⁶ "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang's Regular Press Conference on January 17, 2018", Ibid.

mutually agreed peace efforts when tension is easing. The Chinese objection to this gathering is thus rightful

Conclusion

China's policy on the DPRK is unchanged and continuously yielding positive outcomes even during the critical junctures. China has been encouraging peace talks between the two Koreas without an iota of doubt and misunderstanding, and has been watching the evolving situation as a sincere observer without making any interference. However, it seems that the Vancouver meeting intended to revive the "Cold War mentality" on the Korean issue as major contenders such as China, Russia, and even the DPRK were not present. Any dialogue on North Korean issue will be pointless without the participation of these countries.