

Promising Summit Steps

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The second summit meeting together with the latest six-party accord marks a high point of reconciliation not only between North and South Korea but also between the United States and the D.P.R.K. Such reconciliation is the critical both to the nuclear disarming of North Korea and lasting peace on the peninsula and beyond.

Three points in the eight-point agreement reached by Roh Moo-hyun and Kim Jong-il seem especially promising.

First, their shared commitment to "terminate the existing armistice regime and to build a permanent peace regime" opens the way to a series of peace declarations or agreements that would include the United States as a signatory. Any agreement that the United States signs with North Korea constitutes a token form of diplomatic recognition, which might give it an inducement for steps toward nuclear disarming. One such agreement long sought by Pyongyang is to replace the Military Armistice Commission with a new peace mechanism. Satisfying the North on this point could provide a further inducement for disarming.

In such a forum, the three countries with troops on the ground in Korea could meet to resolve incidents like the 1996 shooting down of a U.S. reconnaissance helicopter that strayed across the DMZ or incursions by North Korean spy submarines. To avoid a recurrence of such inadvertent clashes, they could use the forum to negotiate confidence-building measures, such as hot lines to link military or naval commands, advance notification of

exercises, and an "open-skies" arrangement to allow reconnaissance flights across the DMZ.

Second, deepening economic cooperation, as suggested by a second phase of development of the Kaesong Industrial Complex and construction of ship-building complexes in Anbyun and Nampo, is also essential. Such engagement is the only way to bring about much needed change in North Korea peacefully. More than that, by revealing Kim Jong-il's priorities in the economic sphere, it provides potential inducements for greater cooperation by Pyongyang in nuclear disarming.

Third, the prospect of a joint fishing area in the joint sea is a creative way of linking economic cooperation to confidence-building measures that enhance security. Crabbing boats from both sides have strayed across the Northern Limit Line, occasionally provoking an exchange of fire between North and South Korean naval patrols. Those incidents may be averted by new arrangements that could include a navy-to-navy hot line.

Pyongyang has made agreements with Seoul before without always fulfilling them, but improving political circumstances make the prospects much better for turning these words into deeds. Despite talk about unifying Korea through "the spirit of 'by-the-Korean people-themselves,'" what happens elsewhere in Northeast Asia is critical to that task. And the adverse circumstances in the region over the past few years are now in process of changing for the better.

When President Bush took power, he came under pressure from hardliners in the administration and Congress who were

spoiling for a fight with China and North Korea. He withstood those pressures and sustained cooperation with Beijing, the key to Korean and Northeast Asian security.

Hardliners did get their way on North Korea, however. Far from bringing Kim Jong-il to his knees, their strategy provoked him to accelerate arming. Now Bush's change of course on North Korea is not just in reversing the North's nuclear weapons programs. It is also opening the way to peace in Korea and improved security for all of Northeast Asia.

With a North Korean nuclear test impending, hardliners in Washington were determined to intensify pressure on Beijing to force Pyongyang to yield, but Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice instead persuaded the president to try reconciling with North Korea in return for its disarming.

That induced the North to shut down its plutonium program this summer. Now it has promised to disable its nuclear reactor, reprocessing plant, and fuel fabrication plant by year's end, making it more time-consuming and costly to restart them. It has also promised a complete listing of its nuclear facilities, equipment, and components, including how much plutonium it has already produced.

The president's new course has brought even more dramatic results in Asia. This week's inter-Korean summit meeting is Kim Jong-il response to George Bush's turnabout. He agreed to the first summit in 2000 only after Washington had said it would end sanctions under the Trading with the Enemy Act and pledge it had no "hostile intent" to the North. Ever since Bush backed away from those commitments, Pyongyang has held a second summit meeting with Seoul hostage to reconciliation with Washington.

The president's turnabout will also have a positive effect in Japan. It shocked Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, an assertive nationalist, but Abe was rebuffed in the July elections by an opposition party led by Ichiro Ozawa and replaced by Yasuo Fukuda. Both Ozawa and Fukuda want to avoid dangerous rivalry with China and ease frictions with Korea, which will do much to damp down tensions in Asia and make it easier for North Korea to implement the summit agreement and sincerely improve relations with South Korea.

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Nampo port is an ideal place for a South-North joint venture.

