

**“Mr.” Kim Jong Il’s Quest for Respect
And the Six Party Talks**

By

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Prospects for resumption of the Six Party Talks continue to rise and fall like waves in a rough sea. Chairman Kim recently told South Korea’s Unification Minister at their June 17 meeting in Pyongyang that North Korea would return to the Six Party Talks when the United States demonstrates respect for North Korea. South Korea’s government hailed Chairman Kim’s remarks as positive progress. Frankly speaking, however, nothing has improved.

Mr. Kim’s recent comments actually amount to old wine in a new bottle. Pyongyang for many months has repeatedly claimed that its “principled position is to return to the Six Party Talks,” but only after the United States drops its “hostile policy.” Chairman Kim has dropped the reference to “hostile policy” and substituted “respect.” Fundamentally, Kim Jong Il is still demanding that President Bush demonstrate good will and respect toward himself and his regime.

This has been going on since January 2005. After a US Congressional delegation visited Pyongyang in mid-January, North Korea officially declared that it, “... would not stand against the United States, but respect and treat it as a friend unless the latter (USA) slanders the former’s (North Korea) system and interferes in its internal affairs.” But then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on January 18 declared North Korea to be an “outpost of tyranny.” North Korea responded on February 10 by proclaiming itself a nuclear state and, “There is no justification for us to participate in the six-party talks again given that the Bush administration termed the DPRK ... an “outpost of tyranny, ...”

Pyongyang’s campaign for respect intensified. On March 2, its Foreign Ministry clarified North Korea’s position. It declared that, “The U.S. should apologize for (the Bush Administration’s remarks “axis of evil” and “outpost of tyranny”), withdraw them, and renounce its hostile policy ...” and “clarify its political willingness to co-exist with the DPRK ...” When Secretary Rice refused to withdraw her comment, Pyongyang warned on March 16 that, “The U.S. had better behave realistically and wisely if it truly wishes to have the six-party talks.” Secretary Rice stood firm, but softened her rhetoric during her mid-March visit to Northeast Asia. She recognized North Korea as an “independent sovereign state,” and urged North Korea to return to the Six Party Talks, but reiterated that “the character of the North Korean regime is an issue.”

Pyongyang's continuing grumbling finally garnered a positive reaction from Washington. President Bush at a May 31 press conference referred to "Mr. Kim Jong Il." Pyongyang's Foreign Ministry promptly noted Bush's politeness, but reiterated its demand that Washington withdraw the remark "outpost of tyranny." It also urged that Bush end the political dueling between "hawkish and moderate" groups in his administration. Then a couple of days later, Pyongyang accused Defense Secretary Rumseld of having "malignantly slandered the DPRK."

Obviously, the Bush Administration's often pointed rhetoric has not nurtured an atmosphere conducive to resumption of the Six Party Talks and diplomatic dialogue vital for progress toward a peaceful diplomatic solution of the Korean nuclear issue.

At the same time, however, Mr. Kim Jong Il's efforts to win respect have actually been contradictory and counterproductive to achieving a diplomatic solution. He continues to demand that the Bush Administration respect his nation's sovereignty, but at the same time his officials try to dictate to President Bush how to manage the US government.

More importantly, Mr. Kim Jong Il clearly does not understand how to win respect for himself and his government. Respect cannot be bought. Nor can it be coerced from anybody or any nation. Respect must be earned through one's actions and the fulfillment of one's promises. Mr. Kim is having difficulty winning respect because he has not fulfilled his promises to the international community. For example, even after Prime Minister Koizumi traveled twice to Pyongyang for summit meetings with Chairman Kim, Mr. Kim has yet to fulfill his promises regarding resolution of the abduction issue. While claiming he wants a nuclear free Korean Peninsula, Mr. Kim has done the opposite by building a nuclear arsenal.

If Mr. Kim Jong Il really yearns for respect from the United States and the international community, he must demonstrate sincerity and fulfill his pledges. North Korea should begin its quest for respect by immediately returning to the Six Party Talks. This is the only way for North Korea to earn respect.