

**US-DPRK MIA Remains Joint Recovery Operations And  
Restarting US-DPRK Dialogue -  
Some Suggestions**

**By**

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## A. Get Our Act Together

Before engaging North Korea, the US must get its act together. The US government's (USG) persistent internal haggling over priorities and approaches to the DPRK has enable Pyongyang to manipulate one faction within the USG against others. It has also enabled Pyongyang to manipulate one US ally against both the US and against each other. A detailed discussion of these problems is presented in my paper, "The Quest for an Effective DPRK Strategy."

Resumption of the USA-KPA (US Army – Korean People's Army) Joint Recovery Operations (JRO) could prove a critical step toward rebuilding mutual US-DPRK cooperation and trust. The lack of trust is a root cause of the "nuclear issue" and a formidable impediment to halting North Korea's quest for a nuclear arsenal. Without trust and cooperation, effective negotiations are impossible and, inevitably, any agreement would collapse.

Some prerequisites for resumption of US Army-Korean People's Army (KPA) negotiations to restart the JRO are:

1. **Establish recovery of Korean War remains as a national and presidential priority.** The first Bush Administration established such a priority, the Clinton Administration continued it but the second Bush Administration unilaterally halted the joint recovery operations.
2. **Establish bi-partisan political support** for the JRO. The Senate Joint Committee on POW-MIA's co-chaired by Republican Senator Howard Smith and Democratic Senator James Kerry accomplished this.
3. **Designate the MIA recovery operation a humanitarian issue** separate from security and political issues as was done during the Bush '41 and Clinton Administrations.
4. **Consistently inform both the North and South Korean governments that the sole goal of the recovery operations is to locate, recover and identify the remains of US military personnel** who died and were buried in North Korea during the Cold War.
  - a. **Both governments in Pyongyang and Seoul are equally intent upon manipulating the US government** in a manner favorable to their goals. This fact needs to be recognized in the US government and dealt with effectively by establishing the recovery operations as a US government priority.
  - b. **The Seoul government can be expected to claim that any funds paid to the KPA for recovery related expenses will be used to support DPRK weapons development.** Obviously this is fiction. The joint operations ceased in 2005 but the KPA has continued to develop its arsenal of weapons of mass destruction nevertheless. Also, previously funds paid to the KPA were in exchange for concrete services provided, i.e. food, fuel, etc.
  - c. **Pyongyang can be expected to claim that its cooperation with the recovery operations merit political rewards.** This possibility must be rejected from the very start of the negotiations. Instead, the US government can emphasize that the humanitarian effort will help to erase the long legacy of mutual distrust. The KPA can be expected to reject this, but the DPRK Foreign Ministry very much favors erasing mutual distrust.
5. **Designate either the NSC or the Department of State as the key coordinating agency for overseeing the negotiations and the operations.**
  - a. DoD is internally fragmented into supporters (DPMO) and opponents (JCS and UNC) of the JROs. The JCS maintains the myth that it is unsafe to send US military personnel into the DPRK. During the decade-long JROs, there was not a single incident that caused harm of any kind to a US member of the JRO teams. Once a US Army major was expelled from the DPRK for berating a KPA officer in front of his men. This individual returned to the US and became the source of claims that the situation in the DPRK was dangerous to US military personnel. The UN Command in Seoul is a primary source of stories about the KPA using funds acquired from the US Army to support its weapons development programs. This

- assumption is partially based on South Korean government efforts to discredit the JROs. Also the UNC has long claimed that establishing a separate, humanitarian track outside the Military Armistice Commission (MAC) to pursue the JROs eroded the UNC's ability to sustain the Armistice. The DPRK declared its disengagement from the MAC in 1995, one year prior to the start of the JROs.
- b. Convene an inter-agency working group with representatives from the NSC, DOS, and DPMO to define a negotiating strategy and priorities, including operational procedures such as reimbursement of expenses to the Korean People's Army directly related to the recovery operations (food, fuel, lodging, etc.). Prior operational procedures can serve as precedents.

About C. Kenneth Quinones:

After receiving his Ph.D. in History and East Asian Languages from Harvard University in 1975, he taught East Asian history as an assistant professor and was commissioned a Foreign Service officer in 1980. He served in Washington, DC, Seoul, Korea (political officer) and Principle Officer, Pusan Korea (1981-87), Washington, DC (Acting Director of the Regional Affairs Office in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs) 1987-90, Tokyo, Japan (Deputy Director of the Mutual Defense Assistance Office) 1990-92, North Korea Desk Officer (1992-94) and liaison officer in the DPRK at the Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center and for the US Army-KPA Joint Recovery Operations. He retired from the Foreign Service in 1997. After one year at the US Institute of Peace, he was the Asia Foundation representative in Seoul, Korea and in 1999 became the director of North Korea operations for Mercy Corps (a US humanitarian organization). From 2001 to 2005 he was a senior fellow at the International Center in Washington, DC and also served as a voluntary back-channel link between the State Department and the DPRK mission to the UN in New York. In 2006 he accepted a position at Akita International University where he is currently Dean for Faculty Research Evaluation and Professor of Korean Studies.