

**VOA Note #9**

**DATE:** Late May 1993

**PLACE:** New York

**Event:** Preparations for Arrival of DPRK Delegation to US-DPRK  
Nuclear Negotiations

It was quickly decided that the first US-DPRK negotiations would convene in New York city at the earliest possible date since North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT would become effective on June 11, 1993 (90 days after the March 11 announcement). May 31 was Memorial Day, a holiday in the US. Thus it was decided to convene the talks on Tuesday June 1, ten days prior to the deadline. As decided by mid-May, the talks would be held in the top floor conference room at the US Mission to the UN which was located across the street from the UN Headquarters.

While the "principals," State Department jargon for policy level officials (Office Director and higher), thrashed out how to negotiate with the North Koreans, I was dispatched to New York to make all the arrangements necessary to ensure that the talks proceeded smoothly.

This proved much more challenging than anyone could have imagined. North Korea was officially considered a "state sponsor of international terrorism," legally at war with the US, an enemy of the US and under extensive economic sanctions. North Korea officials had been admitted to the USA but as visitors to the United Nations. Thus the arrival of the DPRK negotiating team required special arrangements.

First I had to work with security officials that included: US Marine Guards, State Department Diplomatic Security, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), US Customs and Immigration, and New York City Police Department (NYPD). All of them wanted to get in on the action to show their bosses that they were doing important work. Each also wanted to demonstrate that they knew best how to safeguard the interest of the US government. At the same time, no State Department officials wanted to get involved because: 1. they had their own work, and 2. they knew how much work was involved. Finally one State Department secretary was dispatched to assist me.

The first challenge was to gain admission to the US Mission for DPRK Ambassador Kim and his assistant so that we could decide on how to arrange the tables and chairs for the negotiations. On this topic, I received all kinds of warnings and suggestions from Washington, DC. Many claimed that the North Koreans would use the arrangement of tables and chairs as a way to delay the start of negotiations. After all, many people recalled, the North Vietnamese had done this during the US-North Vietnam talks in the early 1970s that aimed to allow the US withdrawal from Vietnam.

Such concerns proved to be fiction. First I arranged the tables and chairs in the top floor conference room – four tables in two pairs facing each other with chairs arranged accordingly. Then I invited Ambassador Kim to the mission. Wow – this caused the US Marines and Diplomatic Security serious heart burn. No North Korean had ever been allowed into a US diplomatic mission except for one day in January 1992. I had to get the State Department to order the US Mission to permit entry. I successfully argued against the Marines doing a physical body search of Ambassador

Kim. A huge Marine armed with a pistol accompanied Ambassador Kim and I in the elevator to the top floor. He looked around and promptly approved the arrangement of tables. He asked about smoking – no smoking allowed, but I offered that coffee would be provided without charge along with a telephone and a separate area where smoking would be permitted during breaks in the negotiations.

I had a strategy in mind – extend to the DPRK officials the same courtesy that the US government extended to all diplomats. Also, it seemed to me that minimizing relatively minor irritations and maximizing an atmosphere of mutual respect would foster an atmosphere more conducive to successful negotiations.

Many in the US and ROK governments disagreed. They advocated treating the DPRK delegation with disdain to underscore US and ROK displeasure with the government in Pyongyang. This was particularly true among US officials who had previously served in the US Armed Forces in Korea. Their model for dialogue with North Koreans was the Panmunjom talks where both sides competed in shouting matches to demonstrate their loyalty to their respective side and superiors.

I was determined that the talks in New York would be conducted in an atmosphere of calm mutual respect aimed at achieving a diplomatic outcome. This is why I argued against physical searches of the North Koreans both after their arrival at the airport and entry into the US Mission to the UN. Arrival arrangements at JFK airport were to be expedited and the DPRK delegation treated as diplomats, not as terrorists. FBI surveillance was to be invisible and unobtrusive. I insisted that coffee and tea be made available during the talks.

Finally, to the amazement of many in Washington, I purchased two pairs of small flags at the UN gift shop – one US and one DPRK. These I displayed on the tables where the negotiations would be held.

The North Koreans were very responsive to such small niceties. They viewed it in terms of the diplomatic principle of reciprocity – want you do for me, I do for you.

For nearly half a century the two nations had been at war with each other. Neither side had any recollections of cooperation. Their collective memories harbored thoughts of war, killing and distrust. But now, it seemed to me, the national interests of both the United States and South Korea were best served by creating an atmosphere that could prompt achieving our shared goal – preservation of peace on the Korean Peninsula with a negotiated end to North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Reciprocal courtesy, flags and coffee seemed a small price to pay for our goal to be achieved.

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