

UPF Peace Talk 4: Increased Inter-Korean Cooperation is Vital

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UPF Peace Talk 4, Prospects and Challenges for Peace on the Korean Peninsula in Light of Recent Developments



Dr. Thomas Walsh: Aspirations for peace is what brings us together with these three great panelists, Ambassador Joseph DeTrani has had a distinguished career in public service that includes positions at the US State Department, senior positions at the Central Intelligence Agency and special envoy to the Six Party Talks. I'm eager to hear from him. I'm sure you are as well.

It's an honor being here. I am speaking out of Washington DC. This is, as we all know, a critically important issue. Prospects and Challenges for Peace on the Korean Peninsula in Light of Recent Developments -- Covid 19 is obviously the key recent development, and as Dr. Walsh indicated, the Republic of Korea handled and is handling the Covid-19 issue extremely well. It is a model for other countries. This is extremely positive but when you compare that with the dearth of information we have from North Korea... The DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea] maintains they have no Covid 19 issues.

I think the sense is that with the approximately nine-hundred-mile border with the Peoples Republic of China, it's likely that Covid 19 is indeed an issue for North Korea. Given the problematic health situation, the problematic health services situation, this has to be a challenge for the leadership of North Korea. Compounding that is what we just saw in the last week and a half with the non-appearance of Kim Jong-un and the media speculation. It was not only media speculation but also government speculation about the status of Kim Jong-un; was he alive, was he gravely ill, was he deceased?

That speaks to a big issue. I think we have to focus on that issue, the lack of transparency by North Korea. That's part of the tragedy regarding the situation of North Korea. There isn't that contact, there isn't that interaction, there isn't obviously that transparency. Conversely, it is the inability of even the Republic of Korea and others -- to include international organizations -- that may wish to contribute if there are issues in North Korea. How do we contribute? The DPRK said they do not need aid. On that, the Republic of Korea, the United Nations, the United States and others have offered aid. They say they do not need aid, but the fact of the matter is that North Korea has a number of sanctions that are significantly biting as we speak whether it is petroleum, whether it is crude oil, whether it is their inability to export and that is effecting, certainly, their economy. We know that a good portion of the money they receive through their exports goes into their nuclear missile program, but obviously, it is also effecting the people. There is this statistic I remember and that's with the sanctions on North Korea, with the petroleum and the crude oil, that the amount their committed to receive in one year is commensurate with what Australia, with about the same population, twenty-five million people, imports in one day. And when you talked about the agricultural sector, obviously the importation of oil and crude oil lends itself to fertilizers and other elements of their wellbeing, if you will. And that certainly effects the people.

Implement existing agreements

Look: we, with the Covid-19 issue, saw the disappearance of Kim Jong-un, and sensed that maybe there would be instability in North Korea. Well, Kim Jong-un has since appeared. He showed he is not deceased; he is not gravely ill. He made it clear that he is well with pictures of him visiting a fertilizer plant. Now, did he have a [medical] procedure? He could have had a procedure; we don't know. There was some reporting about Chinese doctors going into North Korea with the head of the International Liaison Department [of China's Communist Party], Song Tao, which is significant. If doctors did go in, that could be to oversee or participate in a procedure. It didn't have to be a serious procedure. But having their International Liaison Department go in, I think is important because that's coequals -- It's party to party relations. When Song Tao goes into North Korea, he usually meets Kim Jong-un. It's important that we saw Kim Jong-un. He's alive and he's well. But looking at other issues, where people said that if he had passed [died] or was incapacitated, who would follow? I maintain that Kim Jong-un, since he has taken over in 2011, has made sure that he has surrounded himself with loyalists. Not only do I think he

has loyalists around him but he is also looking at succession. Kim Yo-jong, his younger sister, obviously is one of the likely ones who would follow him in the name of the Kim family. She was just elected to the Standing Committee as an alternate member. That's important. A year ago, 2019, Choi Young-hae was promoted to be the president of the Supreme People's Assembly; he's also the vice-chairman of the State Affairs Commission, second to Kim Jong-un. These are the likely people who would follow.

So, I think we should just relax a bit, and focus on implementing the Panmunjom Declaration [April 27, 2018] between North Korea and South Korea, which is a commitment between both Koreas to pursue peace, to pursue reconciliation and a non-nuclear-weapon Korean Peninsula.

My view is that we have to see more between the ROK and North Korea in regard to separated families and visitations and looking at the business in Mt. Kumgang -- interaction so that there is more of a dialogue; there's more transparency about what's going on in North Korea and there are more people-to-people contact, to include looking at Kaesong [a North-South joint venture industrial complex that operated 2004-16] and reconstituting some of the programs there that could lend themselves to humanitarian assistance to North Korea to contend with the Covid-19 issue, which we believe exists in North Korea. So, there is a lot. There is the Panmunjom Declaration and that goes back to April 2018. There is also the Singapore Joint Statement between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un. The Panmunjom Declaration was between Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un. Both these declarations should be implemented soon and aggressively. I think we had that mandate. And this is where UPF and organizations like UPF come into play. Indicating clearly that we want peaceful resolutions to issues on the Korean Peninsula and that the two Koreas should be interacting in a meaningful way so that inter-Korean relations are becoming that much more vibrant and meaningful. For the benefit of what? For the twenty-five million people living in North Korea and for the fifty million people living in South Korea. And eventually moving toward what? Unification. This is the end goal, and this is something I think is attainable.

So I'm unsure where I'm at. Let me say there are a lot of issues out here, but I think the key one is implementing those two declarations, the Panmunjom Declaration and the Singapore Declaration, and President Moon Jae-in in the South interacting with the North and the same thing with the United States and international organizations like UPF indicating this is a global issue. We all need to participate and work toward peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Dr. Walsh: Thank you Mr. Ambassador, especially for these practical and specific recommendations. I think they're helpful. If I could just ask a follow-up, you mention the importance of transparency. This is a big issue with North Korea. There are broader discussions about what kind of countries in the future will be more effective at dealing with pandemics -- the liberal democracies that are open or the "more authoritarian democracies," let's call them. So your emphasis on transparency is a prime topic. I'm wondering also about the implications of the recent elections and that Moon Jae-in's party and his administration seem to be empowered. Do you see that as an opportunity for the kind of dialog and rapprochement that you are recommending and that I know UPF wholeheartedly supports?

Ambassador DeTrani: I think, Dr. Walsh, that is right on the mark. The recent elections in South Korea, the parliamentary elections, where Pres. Moon Jae-in's party, the Democratic Party, won 180 of the 300 seats -- that's a mandate for Pres. Moon; he has two more years in his tenure to move forward with North Korea, to pursue elements of rapprochement that we talked about. And I think it is again in pursuit of what they both agreed to in April 2017, which is actually peace and reconciliation and a non-nuclear-weapon Korean Peninsula. This is powerful. I think the elections in the South were so key, Dr. Walsh.