

## Let the Talks Begin!

Written by John Hallam

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OUTBREAK OF COMMONSENSE FROM KIM AND MOON NEEDS TO BE FOLLOWED UP BY TALKS WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS

YES ABSOLUTELY WE NEED TALKS FOR THE SAKE OF TALKS: TRUMP ADMIN MUST NOT BE ALLOWED TO SABOTAGE THEM

In the wake of the winter olympics, from Seoul, has come a fresh breeze of rationality and good-vibes, into the fetid atmosphere of US-DPRK relations.

Nobody in their right mind will think that the road from here could possibly be easy. But no one in their right mind could fail to see that the road we were on prior to the olympics led to only one place – an abyss that would almost certainly become nuclear war.

The Trump administration has continued to insist that negotiations with the DPRK cannot even begin until the DPRK has denuclearized, a position that has looked likely to lead not to denuclearization but to its opposite – to a growing DPRK nuclear capability and to the actual use of nuclear weapons. There are any number of terrifying and apocalyptic possibilities for this all with multi-million bodycounts. We do not want to go there.

The DPRK for its part, has insisted that the sea is as likely to dry up as they are to denuclearize – in the short term at least.

What is absolutely necessary in the short to very short term is a settlement that will enable North and South (and then only secondarily the US, whose presence in the South is

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theoretically purely at the behest of the South) – to live together. Provided the two sides accept each others existence (for the moment anyway) and do not threaten each other, there is no iron law saying they must be hostile to each other.

The fact that right now RoK and DPRK are physically in the same room talking to each other is of immense, and hopeful, significance, whatever glitches there may be from here on in.

It is often said with a sense of smugness that 'we do not want talks about talks'. (which is what we are having right now). This is nonsense. We do precisely want talks about talks, and yes absolutely, we want talks for the sake of talks.

We want anything that removes the tension from the situation and decreases the likelihood of potentially nuclear hostilities.

Preconditions – any preconditions whatsoever – are merely a tool to ensure that talks that could take place, never in fact do take place. Those who insist on preconditions are either incredibly naive, or do so in the full knowledge that such insistence will sabotage any chance of their being talks of any kind whatsoever and will contribute to a steady ratcheting up of tension in exactly the way we have seen. In which case they are both cynical and perverse.

There will come a time when talks need to focus a little more specifically. When that time comes, talks will need to focus on two intertwined questions:

- What arrangements will enable the RoK and the DPRK to exist at peace with each other?
- What arrangements will enable to DPRK to be at peace with its immediate neighbors and with the US?

In the immediate term, much talking both could and should be done entirely without US involvement, which is likely to be at best counterproductive and may derail the talks entirely.

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