

Track 1.5 Diplomacy Initiatives with North Korea – ILC

July 27, 2021

Session 1 of the International Leadership Conference 2021, July 27, 2021, dealt with “Track 1.5 Diplomacy Initiatives with North Korea.” Panelists included: Mr. Jacques Marion, Co-chair, UPF Europe & Middle East; Mr. Humphrey Hawksley, Author, Commentator, former BBC Foreign Correspondent; Hon. Glyn Ford, former UK Member of the European Parliament; Founder, Track 2 Asia, UK; and Dr. Antonio Betancourt.

Mr. Jacques Marion

Dr. Betancourt is the former director in Washington, DC, of the International Office of Peace and Security, one of UPF’s key initiatives for world experts to discuss volatile areas of tension. He also served as the executive director of the Summit Council for World Peace, during which he visited North Korea 17 times, meeting President Kim Il Sung five times and Kim Jong Il twice. He played a key role in the visit of Father and Mother Moon to North Korea in 1991, and later in June 1994 for the visit of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter. During those tense times leading up to the October 1994 Agreed Framework, Antonio was a pivotal player and trusted so much that he was one of the few Westerners invited to attend Kim Il Sung’s funeral.

Dr. Antonio Betancourt

I’d like to speak about the reconciliation of Father and Mother Moon with the Kim Il-sung clan or Kim Il-sung dynasty, as a precondition for the major involvement of Father Moon’s resources to help North Korea to upgrade the meetings and dialogue with the U.S., which by 1991, was almost zero. There were discussions at a very low level between the U.S. political counselor at its embassy in Beijing and his Chinese counterpart, but their discussions never rose to the attention of the Secretary of State or President.

Father Moon had this idea that in order to help North Korea join the community of nations, even as a socialist state like Vietnam or Cuba or other countries, it was necessary for an upgrade of dialogue between the two countries. That was my job and we did that. Father Moon knew that it would be very difficult for a representative of him and the Unification Church to be able to visit Pyongyang and be welcomed officially there.

After his successful meeting with Soviet President Gorbachev in 1990, Rev. Moon told me there will be a new policy of the Unification Church and the Unification Movement globally towards North Korea to end the hostilities and the ideological war, and that they will initiate a policy of reconciliation and working together for the sake of the Korean people and an eventual unification.

He asked me to visit the embassies of every country that had DPRK diplomatic representation that I visited in my mission and my job globally. I was kicked out of every North Korean embassy because they would welcome me, because I had about four or five big titles that were very impressive to them, but on the other hand, I had a very bad reputation. I was born in Colombia and Colombia fought against them in the Korean War, so they carry grievances against Colombia. I was a Moonie, and they carried big grievances against the Moonies and against Sun Myung Moon and the Unification Church. I was also an American citizen by choice, which they also hated. I went to the embassies and the ambassador but as soon as I revealed who I really was beyond my titles and all these flashy cards that I presented, they would brusquely escort me out.

The letter that Rev. Moon asked me to write to Kim Il-sung announcing the new policies of the Unification Movement and he himself, towards Kim Il-sung, his family and towards North Korea, that letter was never delivered.

I complained to the chairman of the Summit Council for World Peace, President Rodrigo Carazo, former president of Costa Rica, a social democrat who also had friendships with both Kim Il-sung and Fidel Castro. President Carazo had previously helped to establish the teaching of peace studies at Kim Il-sung University. He said, "I can help you. I can take you to North Korea." He began to write letters but they would not respond. At last he said, "Well, let's go to Fidel Castro and the Foreign Ministry of Cuba." That worked. Fidel Castro vouched for him with North Korea in terms of helping us get visas to North Korea. This is an irony for members of the Unification Movement who don't want to touch even moderate leftists. They are convinced that every leftist is a conduit to communism, which is very strange. There is very little relationship to our Movement with the Democrats in the U.S. and social democrats globally.

In any case, the route for Reverend Moon to go back to the place of his birth to reconcile with his nemesis. It was through Cuba, and it was through the left. Let's not forget that God is in charge and God uses evil for a good purpose, and he uses good for greater good purposes.

We went to pick up our visas at the Embassy of Nicaragua in San Jose, Costa Rica. We went to Pyongyang in May 1991. The first thing we offered to them, after all the interrogation they do on people like us who are persona non grata -- they drill you for three days and treat you like dirt. But Rev. Moon educated me in the diplomatic work that I did by telling me, "You don't achieve anything by demonizing your adversaries. You don't go anywhere, you don't achieve any of your objectives. You have to give respect and dignity, he said, to your adversaries, even though you believe that they don't deserve dignity and respect. Then you'll see how this brings results."

I practiced that in my meetings in Pyongyang. I found them extremely sincere with their beliefs in Kim Il-sung and *juche* and their ideas, but I projected an energy of genuine friendship and honesty. They appreciated that. They appreciated honesty and they appreciated respect because since they treat adversaries very bad, when you go there, you have the tendency to respond in kind, but I didn't. President Carazo also told me, "Treat them with respect and they will respect you." That's what happened.

The first thing we offered them was something that never happened before with the North Koreans. We consulted with them to establish under the Summit Council an International Commission for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea, to be composed of five former presidents and prime ministers. They were thrilled that we consulted with them. There are all kinds of academic meetings on Korean affairs in the U.S., Japan, and Europe without them, in which they don't participate, usually are not even invited. They were very happy that we consulted with them and asked them for the program, if they were pleased with the program and so forth, and they said yes. Our first commission meeting took place in September 1991 in Washington, DC.

Meanwhile, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr., became a military advisor to President Clinton during the 1992 presidential campaign (he was later appointed U.S. ambassador to the Court of St. James in the UK). The two of them were very close because there was a campaign by the Republicans to discredit Clinton's friendship with the military, that the military hated him and that he would be no good for defense. We invited Adm. Crowe to chair our next two roundtables, in Dec. 1992 and March 1993, on U.S. policy and the two Koreas because he had access directly to President Clinton. Our goal was to begin to upgrade the discussions and the dialogue between the two countries -- the DPRK and U.S.

The roundtables went very well. We produced two very nice conference reports that we sent to North Korea. I am confident this directly led to senior diplomatic dialogue between the U.S. and the DPRK by June 1993, the first ever since the Korean War.

From late 1991, the North Koreans were basically performing in their subsequent inter-Korean Basic Agreement according to communiques that started with Father Moon's meeting with Kim Il-sung. He signed a ten-point communique with Kim Il-sung that was then mirrored in the Basic Agreement, which was signed only a week after Rev. Moon left North Korea.

We found out that the U.S. was trying to get hold of the large remittances sent to North Korea by pro-North residents of Korean ethnicity in Japan -- they were contributing every year about \$600, \$700 million contributions to Kim Jong Il's fund in the country. The U.S. was going to go after that as part of its sanctions against the North's nuclear program, with the cooperation of Japan and South Korea -- to stop those remittances.

We heard from the office of Kim Jong-il that this would be a cause of war. They asked me to please advise the Moon family to consider leaving Seoul because there was the possibility of an outbreak of war.

In spring 1994, we knew that former President Carter was exploring the possibility of going to North Korea to visit Kim Il-sung, but he knew that this was not approved by either the State Department or the President. I called President Carter and I emphasized the necessity of him to go, even if it was without official sanction by the White House and South Korea. He eventually persuaded President Clinton to allow him to go; President Carter became more active internationally as a former president than as President. He did a very good job in promoting peace, dialogue, stability and assistance to many, many countries.

Because there was such hostility toward his trip to North Korea by the South Koreans and by the Americans, we knew that whatever happens there between Kim Il-sung and President Carter will be filtered through the traditional bias of the governments of South Korea and the U.S. because no foreign press would be present. The news that would filter around the world will be spinning in a direction contrary to what was supposed to produce. The goal of President Carter was to reduce high tensions and go about establishing a better dialogue with the North at the level of President Kim Il-sung.

I suggested to President Carter to bring CNN with him and he agreed. Father Moon also agreed CNN should accompany Carter. The North Koreans did not understand why they needed to have this American news network that they hated. I explained because if you want to have the meetings and what they discuss, what they agree, publicly known without filter, without pollution, by the intelligence services, with their traditional bias, serving their traditional interest of their countries, you have to have CNN because CNN will air the news as it is. The vice president of CNN accompanied Carter along with their Beijing bureau chief, Mike Chinoy. The rest is history. The world was able to see this diplomacy at work with Kim Il-sung and former President Carter, which defused the first nuclear crisis and led to the 1994 Agreed Framework freezing the DPRK nuclear program.

Both the left and the right in the U.S. have loved to hate North Korea. North Korea has engaged in shenanigans and doing all kinds of things that the U.S. does not approve or hates. The Korean War left very bad blood between the U.S. and the DPRK, and of course, with South Korea. These things prevent scholars and journalists from being objective towards North Korea. Any objectivity towards North Korea was denounced by intelligence services and the media in South Korea and also in America as appeasement, and that we didn't understand the danger of North Korea and so forth and so forth.

We were educated by Father Moon and he had a totally different view. He felt that communism based on dialectical materialism has to enter into a dialogue with capitalism and democracy. Democracy is centered on God, even though it's more centered on God from the rhetorical point of view rather than practice.

The birth of democracy was based on the gospel of Jesus and all democracies believe in God. They don't practice it, but they believe in God. While dialectical materialism and historical materialism, the basis for the values of North Korea, are godless. Reverend Moon believed in that dialogue. He also encouraged me to talk to them about the necessity of this dialogue.

I started to discuss with the North Koreans the possibility of studying the Divine Principle, the revelations that Rev. Moon received in the mountains of North Korea from 1936 until he left North Korea as an exile to South Korea after the UN Forces liberated the labor camp where he was going to be killed the next day. They were killing all these prisoners because they knew that the camp was going to be bombed by the UN Forces. All the prisoners there were basically sent to die -- many Christian ministers and people who had confessional objections to communism and to Godless atheism.

I began to tell them that the commonality of the revelations, the spiritual revelations of Father Moon to build a world based on principle rather than on the interest of nations, which has been developed until today: The purpose of life is profits, control, and peace through strength. Peace through a big stick and diplomacy is in shambles. Reverend Moon sent me there to convince them that it was important for us to study *juche* and find the similarities of values that will bring good news and good things to the people and together with studying democracy and Divine Principle. They agreed.

They invited me to come to sign the agreement in which we will open a Pyongyang office of the Federation for World Peace, which was the organization that Rev. Moon used to visit North Korea. He didn't go there as a religious leader. He went there as a civil leader of an international global organization called the Federation for World Peace, which today is now Universal Peace Federation. They agreed to open those offices. I went there in July 1994 and the night before we were to sign the papers, Kim Il-sung died. I was there. In the morning, they were supposed to come to pick me up for the meeting and sign the papers and this didn't happen. I was surprised that it was 9:00 a.m. and nobody came from 7:30 and I was waiting.

At 9:00 a.m. somebody showed up crying that the Great Leader had died. I decided to get back to Beijing and to the States. When I arrived in Beijing, I was surprised to find the staff of the DPRK embassy waiting for me at the airport, asking me to please prepare to return to Pyongyang, you are a VIP invited to President Kim's funeral. I said, "No, if you're going to invite me you have to invite an actual Korean representative, Dr. Bo Hi Pak." I called Bo Hi Pak. They didn't think that South Korea would let him come. There were security laws that ordinarily prevented him from going there.

The next day he was on a plane to Beijing, and together we traveled to Pyongyang for the funeral and gave our condolences to Kim Jong-il and to the superstructure of leadership of all the different ministries and offices there. We continued to build a great goodwill. This made South Korea very angry and they notified Dr. Pak while he was in Beijing that if he returned to Seoul, he would be arrested for violating the National Security Law. This forced him to live and work in exile in Japan for three years. I worked with the State Department to pressure South Korea to allow Dr. Pak to return to South Korea because he had lost everything.

South Korean President Kim Young-sam stripped Dr. Pak of his medals because he was a hero of the Korean War. Out of 300 cadets in 1950 of the ROK Military Academy of South Korea he was only one of five who survived the war, and he was a great hero, a great man during the war. The South Korean government deprived him of his title, and they completely ruined his reputation. Only at the end of President Kim Young-sam's term, under U.S. pressure, did South Korea allow Dr. Pak to return to his homeland in South Korea. Let me stop here. ☹