

North Korea and the World:
New Millennium, New North Korea?

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The year 2000 was, by any standard, unprecedented in the annals of North Korean diplomacy. By way of a symbolic arch, the first and last months of the year saw full relations established with two G-7 nations, Italy and the UK. In between came a dazzling array of activity by past Pyongyang standards. Pride of place goes, of course, to the first North-South summit in June and the wholly new phase of regular and substantive inter-Korean dialogue that has ensued: ministerial and defense talks, family reunions, economic deals, transport links, and more.

But this was not all. In a for once happily inapt metaphor, diplomatically speaking the DPRK blazed away on all barrels in all directions during the past year, apparently seeking better ties across the board, both reviving old alliances and embarking on new ones. Startling spectacles came in quick succession: from Jo Myong-rok, the DPRK's hitherto hidden military *eminence grise*, taking tea at the White House in full vice-marshal's uniform, to U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in Pyongyang watching a mass display in praise of communist power--including scenes of the Taepo-dong missiles that will continue to roil U.S.-DPRK relations.

At Albright's side stood Kim Jong-il, who took a double risk in 2000: not just in embarking on this opening, but in sacrificing his own long-honed personal *purdah* for a new public role--first visiting China, then welcoming Vladimir Putin as well as Kim Dae-jung--from which there can be no going back. A memorable *Economist* cover caught the moment with the irreverent caption: "Greetings, earthlings." But if spaceship DPRK has finally landed, what exactly do the aliens and their newly visible yet still inscrutable chief want? The skeptical view, that this is just the latest bold move in Pyongyang's old poker game rather than a whole new leaf, will gain added weight with a Republican president in the White House.

Yet blanket cynicism would be as misplaced as its mirror image, the bland optimism of some die hard advocates of sunshine. We are in a new phase, which has no pre-written script. The challenge in 2001 will be for the DPRK to show that its change is more than just cosmetic and tactical by imbuing its new formal ties with substantive content and

above all by moving to address at least some of the many real security concerns of its various interlocutors.

North-South Relations

Until the June summit was announced, fears lingered that North Korea sought friendship with everyone *except* South Korea, as on occasion in the past. Not so. The surest sign of change is not the summit as such--we had apparent inter-Korean breakthroughs before: in 1972, 1985, and 1990-92--but what has followed. For the first time in the 55 years since the Peninsula's division, regular contact between the two Koreas is now normal rather than exceptional, across a range of forums with diverse and substantive agendas. Naturally, not all is smooth. But as the process deepens, so the chance of returning to the bad old days looks ever more remote.

Whereas one used to register each rare encounter, in this new era there is now too much going on between the two Koreas to list it all in a short summary article. The summit itself has been much worked over, and already passed into history. But neither its occurrence nor its success was a foregone conclusion. Both Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-il deserve credit for courage and skill in handling it, themselves, and each other. It could very easily have gone wrong in so many ways. Instead we saw two skilled professionals--one familiar, the other a startling revelation--determined to create a win-win encounter rather than play zero-sum taekwondo games. This was statesmanship of the highest order, and in the full glare of global publicity. Those of us who had waited a lifetime for this moment could not have asked for more.

But that was just the start. Unlike previous false dawns, the summit ushered in a whole array of North-South dialogue. The main channel has been ministerial talks, held almost monthly so far (four rounds during July-December), but from 2001 expected to become quarterly as other forums expand. Their achievements include creating a framework for economic cooperation, both in terms of basic ground rules (investment protection, etc.) and a specialized committee whose first meeting was held in Pyongyang in late December. Meanwhile private business, mainly Hyundai, continued its own activities. Hyundai took almost 200,000 southern tourists on its pioneering but loss-making cruises to Kumgang-san, and was rewarded with permission to build a large industrial export zone in a stunning location: near Kaesong, just across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) within easy reach of Seoul. As the Hyundai group's financial difficulties began to cause alarm, South Korea's state-owned Korea Land (Koland) quietly bought into and took over the Kaesong project, on which work is due to start early in 2001.

Another fruit of the summit was reunions of separated families, with two such meetings (only the second and third ever in half a century) in August and December. Inevitably emotional, these were not without tensions. It is not clear if the North is ready to meet southern wishes for more frequent and less controlled encounters. Pyongyang also upbraided the head of the ROK Red Cross for critical press comments; by the year's end he had resigned. Another headline-catcher was the joint march-past of DPRK and ROK athletes at the opening of the Sydney Olympics, under a single flag; they went on to compete separately, however.

On the all-important security issues, a start was made when North Korea's defense minister visited Seoul (and Cheju) in September. Subsequent working-level meetings at Panmunjom found the North disinclined to widen the agenda beyond rebuilding road and rail links across the DMZ. Both sides began mine-clearing, and the new links are due for completion by September. The DPRK successfully pressed the UN Command (UNC) to cede the requisite border authority to the ROK: a political card one suspects it may save to play another time. But discussion of the whole array of formal and substantive security issues has yet to begin. When it does, this may be in a multilateral rather than bilateral forum: Kim Dae-jung is seeking to revive the Four-Party Talks (the two Koreas, China, and the U.S.), which have achieved little hitherto. Meanwhile, Pyongyang was angry at being designated as main enemy in Seoul's latest Defense White Paper, but did not fulfil its threat to boycott all dialogue until this slur was withdrawn.

As this contretemps suggests, the general tone of the new inter-Korean ties is encouragingly pragmatic. After half a century of hostility, one could hardly expect a lovefest. But now when the Koreans row it is usually for a reason (e.g. on the exact wording of agreements), rather than mere mud-slinging; and most important, they find a way to resolve it. All this augurs well, as does the sheer normality now of delegations and planes going back and to between Kimpo and Sunan airports.

Yet in 2001 fresh hurdles loom. No schedule has yet been set for Kim Jong-il's reciprocal trip to Seoul, which will be a huge challenge for him and his hosts alike. South Korea's opposition, which in two years could well return to power, criticizes the Sunshine Policy as appeasement and wants more reciprocity from the North. Certainly Sunshine has its paradoxes: a poignant one being the spectacle of Kim Dae-jung, awarded a richly deserved Nobel Peace Prize for his lifelong advocacy of democracy and human rights, refusing to raise such issues with or in regard to North Korea. Southern critics even speak of a reverse McCarthyism, with the government discouraging any criticism of North Korea as allegedly evincing a "Cold War mentality." In a democratic ROK, keeping up Sunshine's momentum and support will be harder in 2001.

The United States: Almost the President

Other than the new North-South relationship, North Korea's most spectacular diplomacy in 2000 was with the United States. But it took a while to get going. For many months after the DPRK tacitly agreed to a moratorium on long-range missile tests in exchange for the lifting of some sanctions in September 1999, the U.S. was frustrated by Pyongyang's reluctance to move ahead on the Perry process and send a high-level emissary to Washington. The June summit added a tacit worry--the mirror image of earlier fears in Seoul--that better North-South ties meant sidelining the U.S. Such fears are to a degree inevitable, at least as regards the allies' differently prioritized agendas vis-à-vis Pyongyang (with the U.S. and Japan, for instance, far more concerned about missiles than South Korea is), despite continued careful coordination between them both bilaterally and via TCOG (Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group).

Such zero-sum fears proved groundless, however, as the latter half of 2000 brought ever new heights of protocol between the U.S. and DPRK. In July, Secretary Albright met North Korean foreign minister Paek Nam-sun in Bangkok at the Asean Regional Forum (ARF), which the DPRK joined as its 23rd member. Then in October Kim Jong-il sent Jo Myong-rok, his right-hand man in the Korean People's Army (KPA) (whose travels were hitherto limited to places like Syria) as a personal emissary to Washington, swiftly followed by Secretary Albright's hastily arranged visit to Pyongyang. A presidential visit would have capped a remarkable year, and this remained in the cards until December 29th when Bill Clinton concluded, with evident disappointment, that there was no longer enough time to be sure of securing a meaningful deal on missiles.

It would be wrong to dismiss these meetings (except Bangkok) as mere photo-opportunities. Kim Jong-il, for so long the subject of intense and often febrile intelligence speculation from afar, is now known in the flesh. Nor did he send Marshal Jo lightly. Informed reports suggest that talks in Kuala Lumpur and elsewhere produced the embryo of a missile deal, yet not solid enough on all of the many aspects--research, testing, production, deployment, and export; short, medium, and long range rockets; systems already *in situ* or in various stages of development; not to mention verification and compliance in all this--that Clinton could confidently sign an agreement which would be left to his successor to implement and (so to say) field-test.

For 2001, the key issue in U.S.-DPRK relations will be that successor. George W Bush and Kim Jong-il are not exactly soul mates, but they do have common features: political paternity, aversion to foreign travel, and a certain sociability. Much hinges on how far Bush's advisers will press on missile issues: not only those specific to the DPRK, but the broader national and theater missile defense (NMD/TMD) agendas, which threaten discord with allies and powers like Russia and China alike. The appointment of Donald Rumsfeld as Defense Secretary may not bode well. Then again, the new administration will have its hands full enough elsewhere (e.g. the Middle East) that a Secretary of State as cautious as Colin Powell may leave well enough alone in North Korea; a case Kim Dae-jung will press. "Well" here includes ongoing direct Department of Defense-KPA cooperation over Korean War MIA (missing in action) remains, which after a successful 2000 will expand in scope this year.

All in all, fears that the shriller Republican voices in Congress will run policy on North Korea henceforth may be overstated. But Bush will drive a harder bargain, and Kim Jong-il may come to regret not having moved further and faster on missiles while the going was good. It may also be harder now for the DPRK to wean itself off the State Department's list of nations suspected of sponsoring terrorism, under which the U.S. mandates itself to refuse bilateral and oppose multilateral aid. Despite this proviso the U.S. has been the major contributor to the World Food Program's successive food aid appeals for North Korea. That too could well change under Bush.

China: Always There, Always First

Alternatively the Dear Leader may reckon he has other fish to fry. Significantly, Kim Jong-il's self-outing from recluse to media figure began in May with a visit--technically unofficial and at the time secret (but not very)--to the one country he still regards as a reliable ally. China is also the sole foreign country he is acknowledged to have visited before, way back in 1983, although at the summit, joking about his hermit image, he also hinted at secret travels.

In Beijing, Kim Jong-il met most of the top leaders, visited a computer firm, and for the first time praised Chinese economic reforms--raising hopes, as yet unfulfilled, that at long last the DPRK may take the Dengist road. The timing of this visit, just a fortnight before the summit with Kim Dae-jung, suggests a desire to obtain news and views on the South and its leader--plus perhaps a practice run for the Dear Leader himself, in his new role in the media spotlight.

For China, this visit--long sought, to the point where Beijing was getting impatient--was a gratifying endorsement of Chinese primacy, not only as big brother to the DPRK, but as a facilitator of inter-Korean dialogue. Over the past decade--formally, since 1992--China has succeeded with great care and skill in building strong new ties with Seoul without unduly alienating Pyongyang. By being pro-active as a friend of both Koreas, China's long-term game is to displace the U.S. (and its troops) to resume its historical role as peninsular hegemon.

Kim's trip should lead to a senior Chinese leader visiting Pyongyang in 2001 for the first time in some years. Lower level delegations go back and forth as ever, and China continues both overtly and covertly to sustain the northern regime economically so that it at least survives. For China, the DPRK is a crucial buffer state; it has enough actual or potential trouble on other frontiers to dread the effects of any North Korean collapse, and already fears--and harshly persecutes--northern refugees as a potential source of instability. To ward this off, Beijing will continue quietly to press Pyongyang to embrace market reforms: a message steadfastly ignored for twenty years, with catastrophic results. But Kim Jong-il knows China will back him up no matter what and that it fears a Republican-led U.S. posture on missiles and Taiwan alike. In 2001, North Korea can continue to count on China.

Russia: A Flash in the Pan?

Can North Korea also count on Russia? In July last year, President Vladimir Putin at a stroke brought Moscow back into the Korean game by becoming the first ever Kremlin top leader, Soviet or Russian, to visit Pyongyang (en route to the G-8 meetings in Japan). He stayed less than 24 hours, but that went a long way to undo the decade of distrust under Gorbachev and Yeltsin, ever since the former outraged Kim Il-sung by recognizing the ROK in 1990. Moreover, Putin went on to the G-8 as the center of attention, on the strength of an alleged new North Korean offer to end its missile programs if other countries would launch its satellites. Kim Jong-il later said this was a joke, but the idea, though sketchy, remains in circulation. The Dear Leader agreed to a return visit to

Moscow and (en route) Vladivostok, with whose governor he struck up a bond after it transpired they share a birthday. No schedule has yet been fixed.

Such *bonhomie*, plus the earlier signing and ratification (after years of negotiation) of a new post-Soviet friendship treaty minus the old pledges of mutual military support, might suggest a new era of warmth between Moscow and Pyongyang. Yet in practice it is not clear how far Russia can drive home its advantage after the undoubted coup of Putin's visit--all the more pointed in that he has yet to go to Seoul, although that is expected this year. It takes more than a gesture, however dramatic, to budge the two abiding dilemmas. What is, or should be, the Korea policy of post-Soviet Russia? And what resources is Moscow ready to commit?

On the former, beyond cocking a snook and stealing a march by meeting Kim Jong-il--and so signalling, as elsewhere in the world, that Russia no longer merely marches behind a Western agenda--it is not clear that Putin has a wider game plan. While the first decade of Moscow-Seoul relations disappointed both sides, Russia is hardly so deluded as to suppose that North Korea is in any sense a better bet--especially given its history as the least biddable of allies. Also, as with other satellites gone sour (e.g. Cuba), there are decades of debt worth billions of dollars still outstanding. Of course North Korea cannot and will not pay; but equally Russia is not about to throw good money after bad on any scale.

Where interests converge most immediately is in transport. Russia is excited by the prospect of rail links across the DMZ, seeing this as creating a new trans-Siberian freight route linking South Korea to Europe--although realistically this would require not just a new cross-border link, but costly upgrading of North Korea's own antiquated track and facilities. Otherwise, 2001 may not see any dramatic change in the rather low level of Russia-DPRK ties after all.

Japan: Talks, but Far Apart

Of the four powers involved in the Peninsula by geography and/or history, Japan's ties with North Korea made least progress in 2000. Even here there was some activity. After a gap of eight years, three rounds of high-level talks towards diplomatic relations were held: in April in Pyongyang, in Tokyo in August, and in Beijing in November. These were officially gazetted as the 9th, 10th, and 11th rounds; the first 8 having been during 1990-92.

They met, and yet they did not meet. Despite an apparent will for progress on both sides, their respective agendas remained far apart, with little discernible movement throughout the year. One sticking point is that Tokyo remains forced by public opinion to prioritize the odd case of suspected abductions of Japanese citizens from the 1970s and 1980s; an issue where it is inconceivable that Pyongyang would ever admit any culpability it may have. Although Japan's gaffe-prone Prime Minister, Mori Yoshiro, was criticized for revealing to Britain's Tony Blair at the ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) talks in Seoul in October a former proposal that the abductees might be "found" in a third country, in fact

some such face-saving device seems the only way this knot could ever be untied. It was this that sank the earlier 1990-92 talks, and history could repeat itself.

Not that there is a lack of other thorny issues. Japan's missile concerns (more immediate than the U.S.'s, being palpably within range) were likewise dismissed by North Korea, whose own avowed agenda was resolutely backward-looking. The DPRK continues to insist on apology and compensation for past Japanese aggression as the precondition for progress on any other issue. This time the categories of compensation demanded were wider than before, extending to psychological as well as physical suffering and the looting of cultural relics.

In principle, progress is possible here. As both countries know, the precedent is that Japan's establishment of diplomatic ties with South Korea, back in 1965, was accompanied by an aid and loan package. Computations of equivalence at today's prices suggest North Korea could stand to gain as much as \$10 billion--but not while it refuses to address Japanese concerns. Tokyo also disputes being characterized as an aggressor, as distinct from an occupier.

Having taken a risk in the face of hostile public opinion by talking to North Korea at all, and sweetening the process by offering half a million tons of rice (after several years of refusing food aid), the Japanese government is perplexed and dismayed at Pyongyang's maximalist stance. But the likeliest explanation is that the DPRK is keeping Japan in reserve as the ultimate gift-horse. With South Korea--and perhaps the U.S., although that chance may have been missed--ready to offer substantial aid, there is no immediate need to make concessions to Tokyo. Besides, the abduction issue remains as a thorn. In 2001, neither side may be in a hurry to meet formally again until and unless some prospect of progress appears, although talks are planned.

Europe: EU Embraces DPRK

While South Korea and the four powers are the five key points on the DPRK's compass, it also proved keen in 2000 to mend fences and build bridges more widely. It scored a great success with the EU, where the balance of opinion shifted visibly during the year. Initially, when Italy established ties on January 4, the comment from other EU states was that, while happy to pursue dialogue with the North, full relations would be held in reserve as a reward for substantial progress on various issues, including nuclear concerns, missiles, and human rights.

By October that stance had changed. At the ASEM meetings in Seoul, the UK, Germany, and others announced their intention to move to full diplomatic relations with the DPRK. Britain took this step on December 12, followed by Spain on December 15. Germany, Netherlands, and Belgium are all expected to follow suit early in 2001. The odd man out is France, which notably has not gone along with the trend--despite having been the first major EU member to semi-recognize North Korea in the early 1980s, giving it an odd "general legation" status shared with Palestine and Quebec.

For the majority who has decided to take the plunge, the likeliest explanation is persuasion by South Korea, with ASEM a convenient forum for this small gift to Kim Dae-jung. But it is quite a shift--especially for Germany, which despite having *de facto* inherited the old East German mutual missions, had spent the past decade firmly rebuffing pleas from Pyongyang to tie the knot formally. The exact level of European coordination remains unclear. Another possibility is that this mass movement by the EU might be meant to make it harder for a new U.S. administration to move in the opposite direction and seek to isolate North Korea.

Middle Powers and More

Besides the EU, similar moves were made in 2000 by three western middle powers: Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Australia resumed diplomatic relations with the DPRK on May 8. (Ties were first established in 1974, but within months the North Koreans mysteriously left--and expelled the Australians.) Canada and New Zealand too have exchanged delegations and announced plans for ties, which are expected to come to fruition in 2001.

Elsewhere, relations were opened on July 12 with the Philippines, which had long hesitated over fears of Pyongyang as a supporter of terrorism. Contrary to some reports, and despite North Korea's also joining the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in the same month, this did not quite give Pyongyang a full house in ASEAN; Myanmar is still holding out. Once a close ally, it broke relations after the Rangoon bombing of October 1983, and has yet to restore them despite Pyongyang's entreaties. Myanmar demands an admission of guilt and an apology. As much as the DPRK demands apologies from others (e.g. Japan), it is not inclined to give them.

To complete the roundup, ties were also established with Kuwait. The DPRK has long had a large trade mission there, and has in recent years sent up to 2,000 construction workers (as South Korea used to do in this region). Local media quoted a visiting North Korean deputy foreign minister as taking gratifyingly anti-Iraqi positions--*contra* the naïve assumption that all "rogue states" must be best buddies, North Korea and Iraq fell out long ago when Baghdad saw Pyongyang as taking Tehran's side during the Iran-Iraq war.

How Will They Pay?

One downside of these diplomatic gains may be their expense. At a time when the DPRK has been cutting back its once extensive network of embassies around the globe, it will now need to open more. In some cases an existing mission can be upgraded, such as Italy (Food and Agricultural Organization), UK (International Maritime Organization), or Kuwait (trade). In others, North Korea may choose to accredit a nearby existing embassy--just as many of its new friends will elect to cover the DPRK from Beijing, rather than open an office in Pyongyang. Yet it is hard to imagine North Korea turning down the chance of opening embassies in places like Brussels or Amsterdam.

The question of cost is neither abstract nor, unfortunately, innocent. Prominent among the behaviors which, over the years, have made the DPRK a better candidate than many for the State Department's now discontinued sobriquet of "rogue state" is the repeated arrest of its diplomats for smuggling all manner of goods, including drugs. The DPRK's first success in western Europe, its recognition by all four Nordic countries in the early 1970s, was tarnished when all four soon expelled their North Korean ambassadors because of rampant illicit sales of duty-free alcohol from their missions. One can only hope that the new breakthrough with the EU will not be similarly tarnished, and that such unconscionable actions are now history.

From Formal to Substantive Friendship?

A wider question is just what the DPRK proposes to make of all these new relationships. If it expects simply more aid, it risks disappointment. New partners will expect some reciprocity. It may be discomfiting, for instance, to have a resident British embassy raising human rights concerns actually in Pyongyang. Similar considerations may be one reason why an exchange of liaison offices with the U.S., as specified in the October 1994 Agreed Framework and much discussed since, shows no sign of coming to fruition. The same issue also arises multilaterally. Joining ARF, for instance, is more than merely symbolic. Membership imposes obligations, and its fellow members will be looking to see how far North Korea pulls its weight.

Another question also arises. In Kim Dae-jung's view, any and all contact that North Korea has with the wider world is positive-sum, cumulative and good: the more the merrier. That optimistic stance will now be put to the test. One caveat concerns diminishing returns. Do we really expect DPRK behavior to change in any way if, say, Luxemburg establishes ties?

A second caveat is that in the past, North Korea has proved adept at playing off big powers against one another, from the Sino-Soviet dispute onward. There is no reason to suppose it has lost either the knack or the motive. Thus one should distinguish between seeking wider Western support and opening up *per se*. There has long been far too much wishful thinking, both politically and economically, about North Korea opening up. Whatever Pyongyang's self-perceived game plan is, one can be sure openness as such has nothing to do with it.

In sum: in the future as in the past, North Korea will continue to calculate where its balance of advantage lies, especially vis-à-vis the four powers (U.S., Japan, China, and Russia) and South Korea, and so shift the weight of its efforts accordingly from time to time. Still, the extraordinary year just concluded raises the hope that a wider move towards a kind of normalization may be under way. 2001 will be a year in which such hopes are put to the test. Pyongyang will be pressed from many quarters to show that its new smiles have substance, by moving on to concrete concessions on security and other concerns. A great deal is riding on how far and how fast it responds.

Expanded Chronology North Korean Diplomatic Activities 2000

Jan. 4, 2000: Diplomatic ties are established between DPRK and Italy.

Feb. 9, 2000: A new peace treaty is signed between DPRK and Russia, replacing that of 1961 with the former Soviet Union, minus the former commitment to mutual military support.

Mar. 10, 2000: ROK President Kim Dae-jung's "Berlin Declaration" offers aid to rebuild North Korean infrastructure. Soon after, secret North-South talks begin in China.

Mar 28-29, 2000: Italian foreign minister visits Pyongyang.

Apr. 5-7, 2000: Ninth Japan-DPRK inter-governmental talks (the first since 1992) begin in Pyongyang.

Apr. 8, 2000: Kim Dae-jung announces the first ever North-South summit meeting, set for June 12-14.

May 8, 2000: DPRK diplomatic ties with Australia are restored after a hiatus of 25 years.

May 29-31, 2000: Kim Jong-il pays an (at the time) secret and technically unofficial visit to Beijing.

Jun. 13-15, 2000: North-South summit meeting, Pyongyang. Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-il meet several times, signing a Joint Declaration on Jun. 15.

Jul. 12, 2000: Diplomatic ties are established between DPRK and the Philippines.

Jul. 19-20, 2000: Russian President Vladimir Putin becomes the first top Kremlin leader (Soviet or Russian) to visit the DPRK and meets Kim Jong-il.

Jul. 27, 2000: North Korea becomes the 23rd member of the ASEAN Regional Forum at its seventh meeting in Bangkok. DPRK Foreign Minister Paek Nam-sun meets with his U.S., South Korean, Japanese, and other opposite numbers.

Jul. 29-31, 2000: First post-summit North-South ministerial talks take place in Seoul.

Aug. 21-25, 2000: No progress is made at the tenth Japan-DPRK inter-governmental talks in Tokyo.

Aug. 15, 2000: North and South Korea reopen liaison offices at Panmunjom. New fiber optic communications installed.

Aug. 15-18, 2000: First official North-South family reunions since 1985. 100 family members from each side fly to the other capital for brief public meetings with long-lost kin. The southern contingent is chosen by lot, while the northern consists mainly of dignitaries.

Aug. 29-30, 2000: Second North-South ministerial talks, Pyongyang.

Sept. 2, 2000: South Korea lets 63 unconverted former long-term communist prisoners cross the DMZ to a hero's welcome in North Korea. In the south, some criticism of the government for not linking this to the reciprocal return of its own several hundred prisoners of war, abductees, etc.

Sept. 5, 2000: Various meetings are aborted, including a planned summit between Kim Dae-jung and North Korea's titular head of state, Kim Yong-nam, when the latter turns round and heads home after being body-searched by American Airlines staff at Frankfurt airport. He was en route for New York to attend the UN Millennium Summit.

Sept. 11-14, 2000: North Korean party secretary Kim Yong-sun visits Seoul to discuss arrangements for Kim Jong-il's return visit, then expected during 2000.

Sept. 15, 2000: North and South Korean athletes march together under a single flag at the opening of the Sydney Olympic Games, but go on to compete separately.

Sept. 18, 2000: Kim Dae-jung presides at groundbreaking ceremony for restoring rail and road links across the DMZ. No North Korean or southern opposition delegates attend.

Sept. 25-26, 2000: First ever meeting between North and South Korean defense ministers, Cheju Island, South Korea.

Sept. 25-26, 2000: First working-level talks on inter-Korean economic cooperation, Seoul. South Korea agrees to donate 600,000 tons of food aid.

Sept. 27-30, 2000: Third North-South ministerial talks, Cheju Island, South Korea.

Oct. 2000: North Korea cancels or postpones several planned inter-Korean meetings.

Oct. 8, 2000: After hesitating, South Korea allows 42 civilians to attend "non-political" celebrations of the 55th anniversary of the North's ruling Korean Workers' Party.

Oct 9-12, 2000: Vice-marshal Jo Myong-rok, first vice-chairman of the DPRK National Defense Commission (the top state organ), visits Washington and meets President Clinton.

Oct 23-25, 2000: U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visits Pyongyang and holds talks with Kim Jong-il.

Oct. 22-26, 2000: Chinese Defense Minister Chi Haotian visits Pyongyang and meets Kim Jong-il.

Oct. 30-31, 2000: 11th Japan-DPRK inter-governmental talks, Beijing. No progress.

Nov. 8-11, 2000: Second working-level meeting for North-South economic cooperation, Pyongyang.

Nov. 25, 2000: North Korea's acting ambassador in Singapore attends the official arrival ceremony for Kim Dae-jung at the ASEAN Plus Three meeting.

Nov. 25-28, 2000: Third EU-DPRK political dialogue, Pyongyang.

Nov. 28, 2000: Working-level military talks at Panmunjom, discussing railway practicalities.

Nov. 28-30, 2000: State visit by President Nujoma of Namibia, his ninth to Pyongyang since 1965.

Nov. 30 – Dec. 2, 2000: Second inter-Korean family reunions, Pyongyang and Seoul.

Dec. 5, 2000: Second inter-Korean working level military talks, Panmunjom.

Dec. 12, 2000: Choe Jin-su appointed DPRK ambassador to China, replacing Ju Chang-jun who had served since 1988.

Dec. 12, 2000: Diplomatic ties are established between DPRK and the United Kingdom.

Dec. 13-16, 2000: Fourth inter-Korean ministerial talks are held in Pyongyang. Agreements signed on a framework for economic cooperation.

Dec. 15, 2000: Diplomatic ties are established between the DPRK and Spain.

Dec. 19, 2000: Expanded joint U.S.-DPRK MIA remains recovery program for 2001 is announced.

Dec. 21, 2000: Third inter-Korean working level military talks, Panmunjom.

Dec. 28, 2000: First meeting of Inter-Korean Cooperation Committee begins in Pyongyang.

Dec. 28, 2000: President Clinton announces that he will not visit North Korea.