

U.S.-Korea Relations:

Trials, Tribulations, Threats, and Tirades

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This quarter will likely go on record as one of the most contentious and troubling in U.S.-Korea (North and South) relations – at least until next quarter, which promises to be even more challenging. Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly’s long-awaited visit to Pyongyang began a steady decline in U.S.-DPRK relations after Pyongyang reportedly responded to Kelly’s allegations of North Korean cheating on its nuclear promises by defiantly acknowledging that it had been “compelled” by Washington to begin a uranium enrichment program to defend itself after being branded a member of the “axis of evil” by President Bush. To make matters worse, Pyongyang threatened to restart its frozen nuclear reactor and began removing monitoring devices and seals from its reprocessing and other nuclear facilities in a blatant attempt to force the Bush administration to the negotiating table.

Meanwhile, growing anti-Americanism in the South, spurred by a tragic military training accident last June that took the lives of two South Korean teenage girls, continued to steam roll as the U.S. military (rightfully) refused to turn the two soldiers involved over to South Korean courts, trying and acquitting both before a military tribunal on charges of negligent homicide. Ruling party presidential candidate Roh Moo-hyun successfully rode the ensuing anti-American bandwagon to a close victory over opposition party candidate Lee Hoi-Chang, who was widely perceived (and labeled) as Washington’s preferred choice. By quarter’s end, outgoing President Kim Dae-jung and President-elect Roh were echoing Washington’s call for immediate North Korea compliance with its nuclear obligations, but both were becoming increasingly critical of Washington’s steadfast refusal to enter into negotiations with the North, ensuring a difficult diplomatic road ahead.

Secretary Kelly’s Ill-fated Visit

The long-awaited first high-level meeting between North Korea and the Bush administration finally occurred on Oct. 3-5 when Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs James Kelly traveled to Pyongyang as President Bush’s special envoy. This visit, shortly after the announced resumption of South-North Ministerial Talks and a dramatic (and, at the time, seemingly successful) meeting in Pyongyang between North Korean leader Kim Jong-il and Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, was seen by many as a potential first step toward finally getting U.S.-DPRK

relations on the right track after a difficult beginning. These hopes were quickly dashed, however, as a growing dispute between Pyongyang and Tokyo over the fate of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea two decades ago undermined that leg of Pyongyang's triangular diplomacy.

At first, U.S. accounts of the meeting were subdued, if not evasive. Upon departing Pyongyang, Secretary Kelly immediately went to Seoul and Tokyo to debrief Washington's Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) partners on his meeting. At an Oct. 5 press conference in Seoul, he described the talks as "frank, befitting the seriousness of our differences," but added that "they were useful too." Kelly told reporters that he had "explained how comprehensive efforts by North Korea to address our concerns could lead to an improvement in U.S.-DPRK relations." While he took no questions at his Seoul press conference and cancelled a press conference in Tokyo, a State Department spokesman subsequently noted that these concerns covered "a full range of issues, including weapons of mass destruction, missile-development programs, missile exports, North Korea's threatening conventional force posture, human rights failings, and the dire humanitarian situation."

The North, as is its habit, was considerably less circumspect in describing the meeting. Pyongyang condemned Kelly's "arrogant attitude," declaring that the trip confirms that "the Bush administration is pursuing not a policy of dialogue but a hardline policy of hostility to bring the DPRK to its knees by force and high-handed practices." What actually transpired at the meeting was not disclosed, however.

What happened next was truly amazing. For the next 10 days, details regarding the Kelly meeting actually remained secret. Rumors were running rampant, however, ranging from optimistic scenarios about an emerging "grand bargain" to allegations that the U.S. was about to abandon the 1994 Agreed Framework (under which Pyongyang was receiving heavy fuel oil and light water reactors in exchange for freezing its suspected nuclear weapons program). Finally, on Oct. 16, Washington revealed that Kelly, based on conclusive evidence, had accused Pyongyang of embarking on a secret uranium enrichment program in direct violation of its denuclearization pledges to Washington, Seoul, Tokyo, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the international community writ large.

According to Kelly, the North at first vigorously denied this accusation but, in a startling about face the next morning, First Deputy Foreign Minister Kang Sok-Ju defiantly acknowledged to him that the North had indeed embarked on such a program, which Kang claimed it had a right and a compelling need to do, given Washington's branding of North Korea as part of an "axis of evil." (Subsequently, Washington's "preemptive nuclear attack strategy" has been cited as another motivating factor.) Washington remains unmoved and unconvinced, especially since the uranium enrichment program apparently began during the Clinton administration, at a time when Pyongyang was actively attempting to seduce Washington with promises of historic breakthroughs if President Clinton would only pay a visit to Pyongyang. (Recall that it was Pyongyang's refusal to provide specifics or to make significant concessions on missile-related issues

that caused Clinton to decide not to go.)

Neither Confirm Nor Deny?

Pyongyang initially (and uncharacteristically) had little to say about Kelly's rendition of the meeting. Spinmeisters in the South began speculating, however, that Kelly may have "misunderstood" the North's message. Pyongyang subsequently began playing this same tune, claiming that it had merely stated it was "entitled" to possess nuclear weapons – conveniently not mentioning that it had given up this entitlement when it signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In the meantime, it remains publicly evasive about whether or not it actually has a clandestine uranium enrichment program.

In my own private discussions with North Korean interlocutors, another version of the conversation between Assistant Secretary Kelly and Minister Kang has emerged. In response to a comment about Kang's "confession," I was told "the DPRK has not acknowledged having a nuclear weapons program. Kelly accused us and we asked for proof and he provided none. Kelly was told by Minister Kang that the DPRK was entitled to possess nuclear and more powerful weapons to defend itself. Kelly asked if this meant that DPRK was admitting it had a nuclear weapons program, but Minister Kang, pursuing a 'neither confirm nor deny' policy, said it's up to you [Kelly] to judge based on my [Kang's] comments." This version is now also making its way into diplomatic conversations, even though it has been refuted by Secretary Kelly and other members of his team, who had no doubt what they heard: an admission that North Korea had a clandestine uranium enrichment program.

It should be noted that, contrary to some erroneous reporting, Minister Kang did not admit, nor has Pyongyang ever officially acknowledged, that the North actually possesses nuclear weapons and those knowledgeable about the uranium enrichment facility indicate it is several years away from producing weapons-grade material. Nonetheless, the uranium enrichment program violates the 1994 U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework – at least in spirit, although Washington argues convincingly that it violates the letter of the agreement as well – not to mention the NPT, the IAEA Safeguards Agreement, the 1992 South-North Joint Denuclearization Agreement, and the Pyongyang Declaration signed only a month before during Prime Minister Koizumi's visit.

Washington's response has been clear, consistent, and unyielding: there will be no new negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang until the North lives up to its previous agreements. While Washington claims it was previously willing to take a "bold approach" in its dealings with the North, all this has been put on hold until the North declares (and demonstrates) its willingness to give up its various nuclear weapons programs.

The international community has echoed these demands. Along the sidelines of the Oct. 26-27 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Meeting in Los Cabos, Mexico, President Bush, President Kim Dae-jung, and Prime Minister Koizumi signed a joint declaration calling on North Korea to dismantle its nuclear weapons program "in a

prompt and verifiable manner and to come into full compliance with all its international commitments.” (It also reiterated President Bush’s February 2002 statement that “the U.S. has no intention of invading North Korea.”) The assembled APEC heads of state also issued a rare political statement calling on the DPRK to “visibly honor its commitment to give up nuclear weapons programs.” In addition, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) Executive Committee, comprised of representatives from the ROK, Japan, U.S., and European Union, decided on Nov. 14 to “suspend” heavy fuel oil deliveries to the North to “condemn North Korea’s pursuit of a nuclear weapons program.” While an October shipment already en route to Pyongyang had been allowed to proceed, future shipments would depend on “concrete and credible actions to dismantle completely [Pyongyang’s] highly-enriched uranium program.” Pyongyang’s protests over this decision seemed somewhat ironic, given its earlier assertion to Secretary Kelly that the Agreed Framework had already been “nullified.” (Interestingly enough, KEDO construction activity at the light-water reactor site at Kumho continues, despite the nuclear stand-off, no doubt much to the relief of the large Uzbek construction crew.)

Drama on the High Seas

Just when it appeared relations between the U.S. and North Korea could not get worse, a North Korean merchant ship, *So San*, flying no flag and with its markings masked, was stopped in the Indian Ocean on Dec. 9 by a Spanish ship participating in a UN-sanctioned multinational force to prevent the flow of weapons to al-Qaeda or Iraq. U.S. intelligence assets had reportedly been tracking the ship since it left port in North Korea and provided the tip-off to the Spanish ship which then conducted the maritime intercept. A U.S. inspection team subsequently found 15 North Korean surface-to-surface missiles, reportedly hidden under bags of concrete, that had not been declared as cargo on the ship’s manifest.

A potential crisis was averted, however, when the government of Yemen acknowledged that it was the owner and intended recipient of the missiles. As a White House spokesman subsequently explained, “There is no provision under international law prohibiting Yemen from accepting delivery of missiles from North Korea. While there is authority to stop and search, in this instance there is no clear authority to seize the shipment of Scud missiles from North Korea to Yemen. Therefore, the merchant vessel is being released.” On Dec. 11, the ship and its cargo were released and permitted to continue to Yemen, which pledged to maintain tight control over this inventory.

To an informed observer, the system worked exactly as it should. A suspicious ship was stopped, as it turned out with good cause. Once the destination of its cargo was confirmed and was deemed legal, the ship continued on its way. Everyone acted in accordance with the law; everyone, that is, except the North Koreans, who have yet to explain why their ship was operating without a flag and why the cargo was not declared. Nonetheless, Pyongyang has demanded unspecified compensation for Washington’s act of “piracy” and “reckless state-sponsored terrorism.”

DPRK Threats and Tirades, in Search of a Crisis

Some (myself included) have speculated that North Korea may have actually been trying to create a crisis by sending an unflagged, unmarked ship into a sensitive, heavily patrolled area where it knew it would be stopped and searched, and that Kim Jong-il might have been disappointed, perhaps even frustrated, that Washington did not take the bait. Perhaps not! But, within days, Pyongyang choose to generate a new, and not so easily resolved or avoided, crisis. On Dec. 12, Pyongyang announced that it intended to immediately restart its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon. The specified (implausible) reason was to produce electricity to compensate for the fuel oil suspension. This action alone would not have been overly troublesome, provided that IAEA safeguards remained in place. However, concurrent with this announcement, Pyongyang instructed the IAEA in writing to remove all its seals and monitoring cameras aimed at ensuring that the reactor operated in accordance with NPT safeguard procedures; an action subsequently described by IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei as “nuclear brinkmanship.”

Conventional wisdom argued that Pyongyang was creating a fuss in order to force the Bush administration into new negotiations and this certainly appears to be the case. But the timing of this escalation, one week before South Korea’s presidential elections, hardly appeared coincidental. At a minimum, Pyongyang would have factored the election into its timing. More likely, it represented a heavy-handed attempt to influence the outcome.

North Korea no doubt recognized that ROK-U.S. relations were under considerable strain, exacerbated by the continued fallout over June’s tragic military training accident (in which two South Korean teenagers were killed). Creating a crisis just before the election also helped to fuel growing discontent among many Koreans over Washington’s hardline policy toward the North. This created a “win-win” situation for Pyongyang. Either Washington came to the table (where Pyongyang hoped to once again get rewarded for its bad behavior) or its refusal continued to feed anti-Americanism in the South. It is impossible to assess what role, if any, these actions played in Roh Moo-hyun’s narrow victory over the seemingly more pro-U.S. opposition Grand National Party candidate Lee Hoi-chang, but the North is likely to perceive that its actions did make a difference.

Any hopes that North Korea would moderate its actions after the elections were rapidly erased. Over the Christmas holidays, as many around the world were praying for peace, North Koreans were physically dismantling IAEA monitoring devices and expelling IAEA inspectors from the country. Most troubling was a report from the IAEA on Dec. 23 stating that Pyongyang was reopening its reprocessing facility. Without monitoring devices in place, the IAEA said it would be unable to assure that plutonium was not being extracted and diverted for weapons purposes. IAEA Director ElBaradei warned that the deteriorating situation raised “grave nonproliferation concerns.” Then again, that was Pyongyang’s intention, reinforced by its assertion that only direct negotiations and a nonaggression pact between Washington and Pyongyang would avert a “catastrophic crisis of a war.”

Anti-Americanism Continues to Rise

As noted, suspicions regarding U.S. motives in confronting Pyongyang on its nuclear weapons program – for some reason, the North’s motives seem to be questioned less frequently – and the continued U.S. refusal to yield to what Washington called North Korean “blackmail” helped raise anti-American sentiments to new heights in the South. Even without the North’s largely self-generated crisis, however, this would have been a rough quarter for U.S.-ROK relations.

As laid out by Donald Gross last quarter [in “After the Koizumi-Kim Summit, Nothing is the Same,” *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 4, No. 3, Oct. 2000], anti-U.S. protests, including break-ins at U.S. military facilities, were spiraling in the wake of the June 2002 military training accident. South Korean protesters demanded that the soldiers involved, two U.S. Army sergeants, be turned over to ROK civil authorities for trial, even though the ROK-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) clearly specifies that incidents occurring in the course of the performance of military duty would be handled by military authorities. Some ROK officials made things worse by seemingly endorsing protester demands, rather than explaining that, had the driver of the vehicle during the military training exercise been South Korean, he too would have been tried in a (ROK) military court and not turned over to civilian authorities. Ironically, even as ROK officials were demanding that the SOFA with Washington be renegotiated, similar SOFAs were being negotiated to protect ROK peacekeeping forces operating overseas. The ROK media also helped to sensationalize the incident and its aftermath, paying little or no attention to U.S. attempts to apologize, provide compensation, or otherwise address the problem.

The U.S. military, no doubt proceeding with the best of intentions, made matters considerably worse, first by refusing to discuss possible SOFA revisions and, more importantly, through the highly publicized individual trials of the military vehicle commander, Sgt. Fernando Nino, and the vehicle driver, Sgt. Mark Waller. On Nov. 20 and 22, respectively, both were found not guilty, further inflaming ROK sensitivities, especially since no one else in the military chain of command above the two young sergeants seemed to have been held accountable. This prompted additional peaceful and not-so-peaceful protests and heightened demands – from the ROK government as well as the general public and media – for SOFA revisions. On Dec. 10, in a belated attempt to defuse the situation (and hopefully make it less of a campaign issue), the U.S. reversed course and agreed to new negotiations aimed at modifying the ROK-U.S. SOFA, something even the most conservative of the presidential candidates had been demanding.

ROK Election Sends Washington a Wake-up Call

Allowing anti-American sentiment to fester was a convenient, and as it turns out, successful tactic during the presidential elections. It no doubt served the interests and ambitions of the ruling Millennium Democratic Party’s candidate, now President-elect Roh Moo-hyun. But, it is important not to read too much into the anti-American factor in the election, just as it would provide false reassurance to dismiss it completely.

Roh Moo-hyun did not run on an anti-American platform *per se*. He portrayed himself, first and foremost, as a political and economic reformer. Early in the campaign he reversed positions held during his more radical youth, announcing instead that he now supported the ROK-U.S. alliance and the continued presence of U.S. military forces on the Peninsula. He did, however, gain points among an increasingly nationalistic electorate (and especially with the 40-something and under crowd) with his statements that he would not “kowtow” to Washington and would demand a more “equal” relationship with Seoul taking the lead in dealing with the North. He was also an outspoken supporter of President Kim’s Sunshine Policy of engagement with the North, arguing that his more conservative opponent’s hardline views (which closely paralleled the Bush administration’s) could lead to disaster. “Inter-Korean peace and cooperation is not a matter of choice,” he said the day before the election, “The survival of 70 million people is at stake.”

He also stated that, in the event of conflict between North Korea and the U.S. – “if the North and the United States go to the extreme” – the proper role for the ROK should be to “mediate the possible quarrel” and that he would “call for concessions from both sides so the nuclear issue can be resolved peacefully.” This was interpreted and widely reported as a declaration of neutrality in a conflict (rather than backing an ally that had spent the last 50 years defending the ROK); *The Washington Times* interpretation read, “We should proudly say we will not side with either North Korea or the United States.” This statement is cited as prompting Roh’s alliance partner, National Alliance 21 chairman Chung Mong-joon (who had withdrawn his own candidacy in support of Roh) to withdraw his support at the 11th hour (although cynics also cited indications that Roh appeared to be renegeing on a pledge to support Chung five years hence). Despite this election eve controversy, Roh managed to win the presidency with 48.9 percent of the vote (2.3 percent more than Lee Hoi-chang, who subsequently retired from politics after his second unsuccessful bid for the presidency).

After the election, President-elect Roh was quick to send positive, although not necessarily conciliatory, messages to Washington, pledging to “closely cooperate” with Washington in handling the North Korean nuclear issue, while still asserting that relations between the two allies must “mature and advance.” He also repeated his call for SOFA revisions. President Bush immediately called to congratulate the president-elect and Roh’s office reported that the two “agreed to work closely together for peace on the Korean Peninsula and strengthen the South Korea-U.S. alliance.”

While neither the election of Roh Moo-hyun nor the current wave of anti-American feelings are likely to put the U.S.-ROK alliance at serious risk, they should serve as a wake-up call for Washington. For the second time in recent months, a ruling party candidate riding an anti-American bandwagon has won a democratic election in a nation formally aligned with the United States. The Korean and German experiences send a clear signal, reinforced in recent global opinion polls, that the Bush administration’s premature fixation with Iraq and its overall hardline image when it comes to dealing with friends and potential adversaries alike, are not serving America’s broader national security interests. Those most closely associated with this approach – Vice President

Richard Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld most readily come to mind, along with selected members of the U.S. Congress (they, and you, know who they are) – might want to reflect on its consequences. Washington must also do a better job in explaining its objectives and in reaching out to President-elect Roh and those who are not convinced that Korea's future is inextricably linked to continued close security cooperation with Washington.

The Bumpy Road Ahead

By quarter's end, outgoing President Kim Dae-jung and President-elect Roh were still echoing Washington's call for immediate North Korea compliance with its nuclear obligations, as was the international community in general. Following news that the North was removing IAEA monitoring equipment, President Kim announced that his government would "never go along with the North Korean's nuclear weapons development," once again demanding that the North abandon its nuclear and weapons of mass destruction programs. President-elect Roh subsequently warned Pyongyang that continued defiance of IAEA safeguards would negatively affect inter-Korean exchanges. He also called on anti-U.S. protesters to exercise "self-restraint."

Nonetheless, both President Kim and President-elect Roh, the ROK media, and public in general, were becoming increasingly critical of Washington's steadfast refusal to enter into negotiations with the North. This was especially true after a senior Bush administration official was quoted, on Dec. 28, as saying that Washington was considering a policy of "tailored containment" against the North in the belief that growing isolation, including the threat of economic sanctions (presumably approved by the UN), was the best way to force Pyongyang to give up its nuclear ambitions. "I am skeptical whether so-called 'tailored containment' reportedly being considered by the United States is an effective means to control or impose surrender on North Korea," Roh told reporters on New Year's Eve. "Success or failure of a U.S. policy toward North Korea isn't too big a deal to the American people, but it is a life-or-death matter for South Koreans. Therefore, any U.S. move should fully consider South Korea's opinion."

As the quarter drew to a close, the State Department – despite holding firm to a "no negotiations" policy – still seemed to be holding the door at least slightly open for some dialogue with the North. As late as Dec. 30, Secretary Powell was explaining (on NBC's *Meet the Press*) that the U.S. was "looking for ways to communicate with the North Koreans so some sense can prevail." That same day he mentioned (on CNN's *Late Edition*) that "there are ways for them to talk to us. We know how to get in touch with them." The subtle difference between *talking to* as opposed to *negotiating with* the DPRK may provide Washington with some breathing room in its dialogue with the South. Nonetheless, as the New Year began, the term most frequently coming from South Korean lips was "compromise"; a word few in Washington (or, for that matter, Pyongyang) seemed prepared to utter. This guarantees a difficult diplomatic road ahead.

Chronology of U.S.-Korea Relations October-December 2002

Oct. 1, 2002: South Korean students illegally enter U.S. Embassy compound and demand an apology for June accident in which two schoolgirls were killed during U.S. military exercises.

Oct 3-5, 2002: Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs James Kelly visits Pyongyang, North Korea.

Oct. 5, 2002: At Seoul press conference, Kelly describes meetings in Pyongyang as “frank” and “useful.” Meanwhile, North Korea broadcasts accuse Kelly of being “arrogant” and “high-handed” and condemn Bush’s “hard-line policy of hostility.”

Oct. 16, 2002: State Department reveals that Assistant Secretary Kelly accused North Korea of building a clandestine uranium enrichment facility and North Korea acknowledged this secret nuclear weapons program.

Oct. 17, 2002: South Korean presidential candidates unanimously call on North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program.

Oct. 19, 2002: Secretary Kelly visits Seoul following talks in Beijing on North Korea nuclear issue.

Oct. 24, 2002: Secretary of State Colin Powell meets South Korean Foreign Minister Choi Sung-hong in Los Cabos, Mexico on the sidelines of annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Ministerial Meeting.

Oct. 26, 2002: U.S. President George W. Bush, ROK President Kim Dae-jung, and Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro meet prior to the APEC Leaders’ Meeting in Los Cabos and reaffirm their commitment to a nuclear weapons-free Korean Peninsula.

Oct. 29, 2002: North Korea rejects international demands to end its nuclear weapons program on first day of talks aimed at normalizing relations with Japan.

Oct. 29, 2002: President Kim Dae-jung visits Seattle, meets with Washington State Gov. Gary Locke and Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates.

Nov. 9, 2002: Secretary Kelly attends Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group meeting in Tokyo, meets with ROK Deputy Foreign Minister Lee Tae-sik.

Nov. 11, 2002: Secretary Kelly visits Seoul to discuss North Korea nuclear issue.

Nov 14, 2002: Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization announces suspension of heavy fuel oil deliveries pending “concrete and credible actions” by DPRK to dismantle uranium enrichment program.

Nov. 20, 2002: A South Korean warship fires warning shots at a North Korean Navy boat in South Korean waters.

Nov. 20, 2002: A U.S. military court acquits U.S. Sgt. Fernando Nino of negligent homicide in the June 13 deaths of two South Korean schoolgirls. Sgt. Nino was the track commander of the vehicle involved in the accident.

Nov. 22, 2002: The North’s Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland (DFRF) calls on South Koreans to join the North and “shatter the nuclear fuss made by the U.S.”

Nov. 22, 2002: A U.S. military court also acquits vehicle driver Sgt. Mark Walker of negligent homicide.

Nov. 25, 2002: South Korean activists throw firebombs into a U.S. military support post, Camp Gray, in southwestern Seoul, in protest of U.S. soldiers’ acquittal.

Nov. 25, 2002: Chung Mong-joon, liberal party candidate and Korean World Cup soccer football chief withdraws his candidacy for the presidency; joins forces with ruling party candidate Roh Moo-hyun.

Nov. 26, 2002: South Korean activists illegally enter U.S. Army base in Uijongbu, north of the capital Seoul, to protest the acquittal of two U.S. soldiers in June 13 accident that killed two South Korean school girls.

Nov. 27, 2002: U.S. Ambassador Thomas Hubbard delivers apology from President Bush to the families of South Korean schoolgirls killed by U.S. military vehicle.

Nov. 27, 2002: A DPRK Education Ministry spokesman incites South Koreans to a “sacred war” against the United States over June accident.

Dec. 1, 2002: The United Nations Command (UNC) agrees to let Southern tourists cross the DMZ without prior approval, ending a dispute that was delaying cross-border links.

Dec. 3, 2002: President Kim calls for revisions to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the U.S. military.

Dec. 5, 2002: ROK Defense Minister Lee Jun meets U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in Washington. D.C.

Dec. 8, 2002: North/South Korea agree to second cross-border road to help build an industrial park in Kaesong, North Korea.

Dec. 9, 2002: A North Korean ship carrying Scud-type missiles is intercepted by the Spanish Navy and inspected by U.S. officials; ship is subsequently released when it is revealed the missiles are destined for Yemen.

Dec. 10, 2002: President Kim meets with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage in Seoul. Armitage issues apology for the deaths of the teenagers in June and announces the U.S. and South Korea will review the SOFA.

Dec. 11, 2002: South Korea's Deputy Foreign Minister Lee Tae-sik, U.S. Deputy Ambassador Evans Revere and 8th U.S. Army Commander Charles Campbell meet and announce agreement to form a committee to review the U.S.-Korea SOFA.

Dec. 11, 2002: In Seoul, U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Ronnie D. Kirby is convicted by South Korea's Supreme Court of severely injuring a pedestrian in Osan City (south of Seoul) in a motor vehicle accident on July 1, 2001.

Dec. 12, 2002: The U.S. military command announces it will surrender Sgt. Kirby to South Korean authorities.

Dec. 12, 2002: North Korea announces plans to immediately reactivate Yongbyon reactor; calls on International Atomic Energy Agency to remove monitoring devices.

Dec. 16, 2002: North Korea declares that only a non-aggression pact with Washington can prevent "a catastrophic crisis of a war."

Dec. 16-18, 2002: South Korean Red Cross officials meet North Korean officials during talks to establish a permanent reunion center for families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War.

Dec. 19, 2002: DPRK demands compensation for U.S. piracy and "reckless state-sponsored terrorism" over ship seizure.

Dec. 19, 2002: Roh Moo-hyun, the ruling Millennium Democratic Party (MDP) candidate, is elected president with 48.9 percent of the vote, defeating Lee Hoi-chang of the Grand National Party (GNP), who won 46.6 percent, and several other candidates.

Dec. 20, 2002: President Bush calls to congratulate President-elect Roh; the two "agreed to work closely together for peace on the Korean Peninsula and strengthen the South Korea-U.S. alliance."

Dec. 20, 2002: In his first post-victory speech, President-elect Roh says the ROK-U.S. alliance "must mature and advance in the 21st century."

Dec. 21-25, 2002: North Korea begins to physically dismantle IAEA monitoring devices; IAEA inspectors ordered to depart North Korea.

Dec. 22-23, 2002: Secretary Powell speaks to his counterparts in Britain, China, South Korea, Japan, and Russia to emphasize need for “a peaceful resolution,” without yielding to North Korean “blackmail.”

Dec. 23, 2002: President-elect Roh meets with President Kim to discuss North Korea.

Dec. 23, 2002: IAEA reports that North Korea has begun to reopen its reprocessing plant. Without monitoring devices, it will be impossible to tell if plutonium is being diverted for weapons purposes.

Dec. 23, 2002: Secretary Rumsfeld states that the U.S. is capable of dealing militarily with Iraq and North Korea at the same time if necessary.

Dec 26, 2002: IAEA Director ElBaradei accuses Pyongyang of “nuclear brinkmanship.”

Dec. 26, 2002: President Kim, at special Cabinet meeting, states “we can never go along with North Korea’s nuclear weapons development,” saying standoff should be resolved through dialogue.

Dec. 26, 2002: Russia calls on North Korea to cooperate with the IAEA.

Dec. 27, 2002: President-elect Roh warns that continued Northern nuclear defiance would negatively affect inter-Korean exchanges.

Dec. 27, 2002: President-elect Roh warns the DPRK that Seoul’s position could harden if Pyongyang ignored international concerns over its nuclear weapons program.

Dec. 28, 2002: U.S. official discusses policy of “tailored containment,” including possible economic sanctions, to force North Korea to give up its nuclear programs.

Dec. 30, 2002: President Kim rejects “tailored containment,” stating that “pressure and isolation have never been successful with Communist countries.”

Dec. 30, 2002: Secretary Powell says the U.S. is “looking for ways to communicate with the North Koreans so some sense can prevail,” seemingly making a distinction between *talking to* as opposed to *negotiating with* Pyongyang.

Dec. 31, 2002: President-elect Roh says he is “skeptical” of the U.S. approach to the North, and insists that “any U.S. move should fully consider South Korea’s opinion.

Dec. 31, 2002: Expelled IAEA inspectors depart North Korea.

Dec. 31, 2002: President Bush reaffirms his belief that North Korean program can be stopped “peacefully, through diplomacy,” asserting that “this is not a military showdown, this is a diplomatic showdown.”