

Oct 1982 - Unsuccessful Talks on Reunification between North and South Korea - Subsequent South Korea Proposals for Discussions rejected by North Korea

Following the assassination of President Park Chung Hee of South Korea on Oct. 26, 1979 [see [30216](#) A], proposals for talks between the Prime Ministers of North and South Korea on the peaceful reunification of the country were put forward by the North Korean Government. Preliminary talks between delegations from the two Governments opened at Panmunjon (in the demilitarized zone between the two countries) on Feb. 6, 1980, but were broken off by North Korea on Sept. 24, after Gen. Chun Doo Hwan had assumed the presidency of South Korea [see page [30608](#)]. President Chun offered to meet President Kim Il Sung of North Korea for talks on Jan. 12, 1981, and put forward detailed proposals for reunification on Jan. 22, 1982, his proposals being rejected by North Korea on both occasions. Details of these and related developments are given below.

North Korean Proposals for Talks between Prime Ministers -Discussions in Panmunjon broken off by North Korea

The first North Korean suggestion for negotiations after President Park's assassination appeared on Nov. 9, 1979, in the official newspaper Nodong Sinmun, which said: "We consider that now is the time for the North and the South to explore an effective way for achieving the country's independent and peaceful reunification through concerted efforts."

The chairman of the North Korean Olympic Committee proposed in a letter of Dec. 20 to his South Korea counterpart that a single Korean team should be formed for the forthcoming Moscow Olympics; this proposal was rejected on Jan. 11, 1980, however, on the ground that there was insufficient time to make the necessary preparations.

A letter from the North Korean Prime Minister, Mr Li Jong Ok, to Mr Shin Hyon Hwack, then Prime Minister of South Korea, was delivered through the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission in Panmunjon on Jan. 12, 1980, together with letters to 12 leading South Korea public figures from Vice-President Kim Li, acting in his capacity as chairman of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland. In his letter Mr Li proposed that the two Prime Ministers should meet as soon as possible for "an unreserved exchange of views" on peaceful reunification, either in Panmunjon, in Pyongyang (North Korea) or Seoul (South Korea) or in a third country. The letter, for the first time in an official North Korean document, referred to South Korea by its official name, the Republic of Korea. Vice-President Kim Li's letters proposed that a conference should be held of political parties and organizations in the North and the South.

Mr Shin replied on Jan. 24, 1980, proposing that representatives of the two sides should meet in Panmunjon on Feb. 6 to make arrangements for a meeting of the two Prime Ministers. His letter referred to North Korea by its official name of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Mr Li accepted this proposal in a letter of Jan. 29.

The South Korea delegation at the talks was headed by Mr Kim Young Choo, a former Deputy Foreign Minister, and the North Korean delegation by Mr Hyon Chun Guk, a former ambassador to China.

At their first meeting on Feb. 6 Mr Kim proposed that the two Prime Ministers should meet in Geneva, whereas Mr Hyon suggested that they should meet alternately in Seoul and Pyongyang and that their meeting should form part of “contacts between politicians and political party members of the South and the North”. It was agreed to reopen the direct telephone “hot line” between Seoul and Pyongyang, which had been severed by North Korea on Aug. 30, 1976.

The disagreement over the site for the Prime Ministers’ talks continued at meetings on Feb. 19 and March 4, 1980, but on March 18 the Southern delegation accepted a Northern proposal that they should be held in Panmunjon. The Southern delegation proposed that the agenda at the talks should be the creation of mutual trust between the North and South through exchanges and co-operation between them; (ii) the establishment of lasting peace on the Korean peninsula; (iii) the question of peaceful reunification. The Northern delegation proposed that the agenda should consist of a single item, the question of expediting peaceful reunification through co-operation in all areas.

Three serious incidents occurred a few days later. Three alleged North Korean armed agents were shot dead 12 miles north-west of Seoul on March 23, 1980; an alleged North Korean spy boat was sunk by a South Korea patrol boat on March 25 off the east coast of South Korea, three Northerners and four Southerners being killed; and an exchange of fire took place in the demilitarized zone on March 27, one man being killed on each side. In consequence no progress was achieved at the fifth round of talks on April 1, and two subsequent meetings on April 18 and May 6 failed to reach agreement on the agenda for the Prime Ministers’ meeting.

Before the next round of talks took place on May 22, 1980, martial law had been imposed throughout South Korea and a popular uprising had begun in Kwangju [see [30605](#) A]. At the meeting Mr Hyon Chun Guk protested against President Choi Kyu Hah's broadcast of May 18 accusing North Korea of stirring up the disturbances in preparation for an invasion of South Korea, and pointed out that the United States had not supported this allegation[see page 30606]. Mr Kim Young Choo in reply accused the North Korean delegation of exploiting the dialogue to instigate disorder in the South.

At the next round of talks, held on June 24, 1980, Mr Kim proposed that the talks should be concluded by the end of July to enable the two Prime Ministers to meet in August or September, and also protested against an incident on June 21 when an alleged North Korean spy boat had been sunk off the west coast of South Korea, eight of its crew being killed and one captured. Mr Yim Chung Ku, who led the North Korean delegation in the absence of Mr Hyon for health reasons, asserted that “there is no person to meet”, as Mr Shin Hyon Hwack, who had signed the

South Korea delegation's credentials, had resigned [see page 30606]. It was finally decided to meet again on Aug. 20, but at the session on that date Mr Yim again declared that the meeting was “meaningless”, as South Korea had no Prime Minister, and proposed that it should be adjourned.

A statement issued by the North Korean delegation on Sept. 24, 1980, two days before the next round of talks was scheduled to take place, referred to the “intolerable and grave situation” in South Korea, citing the heavy sentences passed on Mr Kim Dae Jung and others [see page [30608](#)]. “We consider that it is now meaningless to continue the contact between the working-level delegates to arrange the North-South Prime Ministers’ contact when an abnormal situation going against reunification and contradictory to the fundamental aim of the dialogue prevails in South Korea,” the statement concluded, “and we hereby make it clear that we will not go to the place of dialogue for the time being till everything has returned to normal in South Korea... In the hope that the contact between the working-level delegates of the North and South will be resumed at an early date to arrange the Prime Ministers’ contact, we will keep watching developments in South Korea for that day.”

Mr Kim Young Choo, in a statement issued on Sept. 26, 1980, proposed that the two Prime Ministers should meet between Nov. 3 and 8 in either Panmunjon, Seoul or Pyongyang, and should meet again a month later. The agenda should be left to the Prime Ministers to decide, but the delegates should meet in Panmunjon on Oct. 7 to discuss this proposal. The statement was ignored by the North Korean side, however; a call on the “hot line” on Sept. 25 was not answered, and it was stated in Seoul on Oct. 7 that the telephone link had again been cut off by the North Koreans.

At the sixth congress of the (North) Korean Workers’ Party President Kim Li Sung on Oct. 10, 1980, revived the proposal for the reunification of Korea as a confederal state which he had first put forward in 1973[see 26148 A;page 30991 A].

President Chun Doo Hwan said in a New Year broadcast on Jan. 12, 1981: “I hereby solemnly propose that the highest authorities in the South and the North exchange visits. I invite President Kim Li Sung of North Korea to visit Seoul without any conditions attached and free of any obligation on his part. I will ensure that his personal safety is fully guaranteed during his stay in Seoul. I will extend all possible co-operation to him if he wishes to travel anywhere to take a first-hand look at the actual situation in Seoul, other cities or rural areas. I also want to make it clear that I am prepared at any time to visit North Korea if he invites me on the same terms as I offer

Vice-President Kim Li declared in a statement issued on Jan. 19 that “it is a mockery of the ardent desire of the nation for reunification, and an insult to the sacred cause of the nation, that he who has followed a road of treacheries stained with the blood of fellow-countrymen over the past half year or so should talk about mutual visits”. He asserted that President Chun should “apologize to the whole nation for his never-to-be-condoned treacherous act in massacring fellow-countrymen”, release Mr Kim Dae Jung and other political prisoners and demand the withdrawal of the US troops from South Korea, and concluded by declaring that reunification must be achieved by founding the confederal republic proposed by President Kim Li Sung.

The Advisory Council on Peaceful Unification Policy established under the new South Korea Constitution of 1980 met for the first time on June 5, 1981. The council consisted of the 5,277 members of the Presidential Electoral College elected in the previous February, who held office for seven years, and 3,642 others nominated by the President for a two-year term to represent different sections of the community.

In his inaugural speech to the council President Chun repeated his invitation to President Kim, and said that it did not matter whether President Kim visited Seoul first or he himself visited Pyongyang first. He would agree to any other meeting-place the North Koreans chose, whether in Panmunjon, a third country or any other place, and any date, the sooner the better. The meeting might be arranged through an authoritative international organization or institution, such as the UN Secretary-General.

“All citizens of the Korean nation have the right to determine how unification should be achieved and what system should be adopted for a unified Korea,” President Chun continued. “All Koreans ought to be given ample opportunities to observe, examine, analyse and compare the situations and systems in South and North Korea, if that right is to be exercised judiciously... If the situation in North Korea does not permit the prompt and complete opening of their society, I hope that exchanges can begin first in the athletic, cultural, academic, postal and economic fields, with gradual progress made towards all-out exchanges and a complete opening....

Nodong Sinmun commented on June 10: “We cannot discuss the sacred question of national reunification with traitor Chun Doo Hwan, and he cannot be a party to a dialogue with us... The key to the reunification question is not the mutual visits clamoured about by the traitor Chun Doo Hwan. The first priority is getting rid of him.

In a New Year policy speech on Jan. 22, 1982, President Chun put forward detailed proposals for reunification through a conference of representatives of both the South and the North, which would draw up a draft constitution.

“I would like to make use of this occasion to disclose a new peaceful unification formula that was originally prepared in anticipation of a South-North summit meeting,” President Chun said. “I do so with a view to providing the North Korean authorities and the rest of the world with an opportunity to comprehend our genuine intent. It is my conviction that the most reasonable way to peaceful unification is to adopt a constitution of a unified Korea testifying to the commitment of the entire people to unification—a commitment attained through the promotion of national reconciliation—and then to establish a unified state on the terms and conditions laid down in the constitution.

“I suggest that, to have the said constitution adopted, the South and the North organize a Consultative Conference for National Reunification (CCNR), with participants from the two sides representing the views of the residents in their respective areas, and authorize this body to draft a constitution presenting the terms and conditions of a unified Democratic Republic of Korea committed to the ideals of nationalism, democracy, liberty and individual well-being. I would further suggest that, when such a draft constitution is drawn up, the two sides make it into law through free, democratic referendums held throughout the whole peninsula. The unification

of the country can then be accomplished by organizing a unified legislature and establishing a unified Government through a general election held under the constitution of the unified Korea. It is my understanding that such issues as the political ideology, the name of the country, the basic domestic and foreign policy directions, the form of government and the methods and dates of the general elections for a unified legislature will have to be discussed and agreed on in the CCNR in the course of drafting the constitution.

“It is our intention to present our own draft of a constitution for a unified country to the CCNR. If North Korea genuinely desires an independent and peaceful unification, they will also have to present a draft constitution for a unified country before the CCNR, so that the two versions can be studied and forged into a single draft.

“It is essential to promote trust between the South and the North and steadfastly eliminate from national life all impediments to unification to facilitate the historic drafting of a unified constitution. Accordingly, the unnatural relations between the South and the North, which have resulted in self-inflicted injuries, must be brought to an end and replaced by normal contacts that promote the national well-being. To achieve this end, I hope that the South and the North will first normalize relations and, within the framework of these normalized relations, take concrete steps to bring about national reconciliation. I therefore propose, as a practical arrangement leading to unification, the conclusion of a provisional agreement on basic relations between South and North Korea featuring the following provisions:

“ Relations between South and North Korea shall be based on the principle of equality and reciprocity pending unification.

“ The South and the North shall abandon all forms of military force and violence, as well as the threat thereof, as a means of settling issues between them and seek peaceful solutions to all problems through dialogue and negotiation.

“ South and North Korea shall recognize each other's existing political order and social institutions and shall not interfere in each other's internal affairs in any way.

“ The South and the North shall maintain the existing regime of armistice in force while working out measures to end the arms race and military confrontation in order to ease tension and prevent war on the Korean peninsula.

“ In order to eliminate national suffering and the inconvenience resulting from the partition of the land and to promote an atmosphere of national trust and reconciliation, the South and the North shall progressively open their societies to each other through various forms of exchange and co-operation, to substantially advance the interests of the people. The South and the North shall facilitate free travel between the two halves of the peninsula, including the reunion of separated families, and shall promote exchanges and co-operation in the fields of trade, transportation, postal service, communications, sports, academic pursuits, education, culture, news gathering and reporting, health, technology, environmental protection, etc.

“ Until unification is achieved, both parties shall respect each other's bilateral and multilateral treaties and agreements concluded with third countries, irrespective of differences in ideologies, ideals and institutions, and consult with each other on issues affecting the interests of the Korean people as a whole.

“ The South and the North shall each appoint a plenipotentiary envoy with the rank of cabinet minister to head a resident liaison mission to be established in Seoul and Pyongyang. The specific functions of the liaison missions shall be determined by mutual consultation and agreement, with both parties providing the liaison mission from the other party with all necessary facilities and co-operation to ensure its smooth functioning.

“It is my earnest hope that North Korea will expeditiously accept the proposal for a meeting between the top leaders of the South and the North in order to conduct frank and open-minded discussions on all issues noted above. I propose to North Korea that high-level delegations from the South and the North, headed by cabinet-rank chief delegates, meet together at the earliest possible date in a preparatory conference to work out the necessary procedures for a South-North summit meeting. I want to make it clear that if North Korea is agreeable to the proposal for a preparatory conference, the Government of the Republic of Korea has already made the necessary preparations to send a delegation

The National Assembly unanimously approved President Chun's proposals on Jan. 23, and adopted a resolution appealing to the North Korean Government to respond favourably to this initiative and to third countries to support the proposals. Vice-President Kim Il rejected the proposals on Jan. 26, however, declaring that the only way of solving the reunification question was by the establishment of a confederal republic.

“In the light of the present complicated North-South relations,” he said, “it is clear to everyone that a possible time for general elections is far off, and moreover it is not logical to hold general elections according to principles of national self-determination and democratic procedure while leaving foreign troops and maintaining the military fascist system in South Korea as they are. As for the formation of a Consultative Conference for National Reunification with those who represent the will of the people, it can only be regarded as mere empty talk under the present state of harsh repression where the conscientious people who speak for the demands of the popular masses are all cast into prison and their political activities banned by law in South Korea.... The US troops must be withdrawn from South Korea, democratization carried out there and the anti-communist confrontation policy brought to an end · ·

“We are ready to meet the present South Korea rulers even tomorrow, if they show their new start by their deeds, by removing these obstacles blocking the way of national reunification. In that case the reunification consultative body to be organized may take any form-be it a conference for promotion of national reunification or a consultative council for national unification, we will not be nervous about its name. We only hold that the authorities of the North and the South and representatives of different parties and groupings and of all strata at home and abroad should participate in it, and that all reunification proposals to be raised, including the proposal for the establishment of the Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo, and immediate

questions for developing North-South relations in the interests of national reunification should be discussed

Despite this hostile North Korean reaction, the South Korea Minister of National Unification, Mr Sohn Jae Shik, put forward on Feb. 1 a list of projects for co-operation between the South and the North. These included opening of a highway between Seoul and Pyongyang; permission for separated families to exchange mail and to meet; establishment of joint fishery and tourist zones; free travel through Panmunjon for overseas Koreans and foreigners; promotion of free trade; ending of “slandorous” broadcasts and jamming; encouragement of sports, cultural and economic exchanges; freedom for journalists to collect material; joint historical and scientific research; joint development and use of natural resources; removal of all military facilities from the demilitarized zone; and establishment of a direct telephone link between the military authorities on each side.

The North Korean Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland put forward alternative proposals on Feb. 10 for a conference of 50 political figures from the North and 50 from the South, which would discuss all possible proposals for reunification. It also published a list of the proposed participants in the conference; the 50 from the South nominated included well-known political figures, such as ex-Presidents Yun Po Sun (1960–62) and Choi Kyu Hah (1979–80), Mr Kim Dae Jung, Mr Kim Chong Pil, Mr Kim Young Sam and other representatives of the parties dissolved in 1980, but no representatives of any existing parties [see [30997 A](#)].

In a statement issued on Feb. 25 Mr Sohn Jae Shik described the North's action of “arbitrarily announcing a list of figures from the opposite side for a dialogue” as “unprecedentedly brazen”, and added that it was “outrageous” for the North Korean Communists to “pick a quarrel over our political order” while “maintaining a one-man dictatorship for 37 years and trying to make this power hereditary”, and “mercilessly suppressing en masse” their fellow-countrymen. He proposed that delegations of nine high-ranking officials from each side should meet in Seoul, Pyongyang or Panmunjon in March to discuss “the holding of talks between the supreme leaders of the North and South Korea authorities to convene a consultative meeting on national unification to formulate a unification constitution and to normalize relations between North and South Korea”. At a press conference on the same day he said that the Government was prepared to consider the construction of a railway linking North and South Korea.

Mr Min Shik, the Southern co-chairmen of the North-South Co-ordinating Committee, issued a statement on July 3 to mark the 10th anniversary of the joint communiqué of July 4, 1972, establishing the committee [see [25488 A](#)], in which he appealed to North Korea “to restore the direct telephone line between the North and the South, to come to the table of dialogue in accordance with the ideas of the July 4 North-South joint communiqué, and to respond to discussing and resolving the future problems of our nation and the pending questions with an open mind”.

Sporadic incidents continued throughout the period under review, including exchanges of fire in the demilitarized zone for which each side held the other responsible, the shooting of alleged Northern infiltrators in South Korea, the sinking of alleged Northern spy ships and the seizure of Southern fishing boats;[see also pages [31727](#) above].

Three Northern infiltrators were reported to have been killed on Nov. 4, 1980, two on Dec. 2 and another on Dec. 6, whilst an alleged spy ship was sunk on Dec. 2. Incidents were comparatively few in 1981, although a Northern infiltrator was killed on July 4 and exchanges of fire occurred in the demilitarized zone on Oct. 31, Dec. 10 and Dec. 18. In 1982 exchanges of fire took place on April 21, May 17, June 7 and July 9, and a Northern infiltrator was reported to have been killed on May 15. A Southern fishing vessel was fired on by a Northern patrol boat on July 5, and another was seized on July 13. According to South Korea official figures, 453 boats and 3,554 fishermen had been abducted since 1953, although most of them had subsequently been returned.

Several trials of groups or individuals accused of spying for the North were reported from South Korea during this period. In the most sensational case Mr Lee Jae Mun, a journalist, Mr Ahn Kae Ku, a university professor, and two other men were sentenced to death on May 2, 1980, and 72 others to terms of imprisonment ranging from eight months to life.

The accused included the local leaders of Amnesty International and many former students who had been expelled for political activities opposing President Park Chung Hee's regime. At the trial, which was held in secret, it was alleged that in 1976 they had formed an underground organization called the South Korea Liberation Front which received funds from the North, and had plotted to overthrow President Park's Government, carried on espionage activities and committed armed robberies. Christian sources in South Korea and Japan alleged that almost all the defendants had been tortured, including an official of the Young Men's Christian Association who had had his back broken; the police, however, maintained that he had jumped from a third-storey window during interrogation.

One man was sentenced to death and another to 15 years' imprisonment for espionage on Nov. 26, 1979, and a third to 10 years on the following day. In subsequent trials, one man was sentenced to death on Nov. 17, 1981, two to 15 years on Nov. 24, and another to life imprisonment on April 13, 1982. (Korea Newsreview, Seoul - New York Times - International Herald Tribune - Times - Guardian - BBC Summary of World Broadcasts)