



Could a Canadian broker peace deal?

Roger Dennis

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On Thursday, Aug. 3, Geoffrey Johnston wrote a lengthy article in the Kingston Whig-Standard on American foreign policy as it pertains to North Korea. This article tried to summarize the history of recent American relations with North Korea, as a way of making an argument for implementing a bipartisan foreign policy towards North Korea.

Mr. Johnson forgot some key points in his history; moreover, the idea of a bipartisan approach, if it implies consistency may be unrealistic.

The first and perhaps most important excluded fact in Johnston's article is that President Clinton asked Secretary Albright to visit North Korea twice. Albright visited North Korea to facilitate a meeting between Kim Jong Il and President Clinton. The primary purpose of this meeting would have been to discuss North Korea's nuclear program.

"The length of the first face-to-face session and the fact that a second is scheduled for Tuesday appeared to indicate that both sides were trying to resolve questions about North Korea's missile and nuclear programs so that President Clinton could make a visit here before he leaves office," reported the New York Times on Oct. 24, 2000.

These meetings between Secretary Albright and Kim Jong Il were also scheduled to discuss why the 1994 agreement between the Clinton administration and North Korea failed. This treaty was negotiated by former U.S. president Jimmy Carter. In the 1994 agreement, the Americans promised to provide oil and light-water reactors to North Korea in exchange for a cessation of their nuclear program. The reactors promised cannot be used to create the material needed to make nuclear bombs. The oil provided by the Americans was intended to alleviate the significant energy shortage North Korea was experiencing.

"Clinton helped spearhead a new deal later that year," the Washington Post reported on Jan. 6, 2016. "In what was dubbed the Agreed Framework, North Korea committed to freezing and eventually dismantling its nuclear weapons program in exchange for two nuclear power plants (built with proliferation-resistant, light water reactors) fuel oil and a commitment to easing sanctions and normalizing relations. The deal was portrayed as a turning point at the time."

What is most interesting and indicates that politics is often less partisan than it appears is that before Bill Clinton left office in January 2001, he met the incoming president's father. This meeting is part of a longstanding tradition in American politics in which an outgoing president briefs the incoming president before he takes office. George H.W. Bush hoped to convince Bill Clinton not to visit North Korea, as he had agreed, because his son, George W. Bush, was planning to take America along a significantly different path in relation to North Korea. Clinton's arranged meeting with Kim Jong Il was (unfortunately) cancelled.

"Yet it's worth wondering what would have happened had President Bill Clinton visited the North before leaving office," political analyst Doug Bandow wrote. "Secretary of State Madeleine Albright partied in Pyongyang during the brief warming of relations after negotiation of the Agreed Framework. Efforts to arrange a presidential summit floundered as the Clinton presidency ran out of time."

What is most needed is dialogue between North Korea and the West. Therefore, a Canadian politician with the appropriate level of seniority should take this concern seriously and engage North Korea on their current nuclear program before military action is agreed upon. Perhaps Prime Minister Trudeau would consider this role.

Lester Pearson, who negotiated the peace agreement following the Suez Crisis, won a Nobel Prize for his efforts. I believe a Canadian politician who accepted the role of peace broker between North Korea and the West could potentially win similar global recognition.