



# Executive Memorandum

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## PRESSING CONCERNS ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA CALL FOR AN EARLY BUSH–KIM SUMMIT

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While most Americans are anxious to see the new Bush Administration achieve forward movement on such domestic issues as tax reform and education, significant foreign policy issues already confront the United States. One area that requires early attention is the U.S.–Republic of Korea alliance. New developments in relations between democratic South Korea and communist North Korea in recent months require that Washington review its policies toward the North and, where necessary, make appropriate adjustments. To do this most effectively, President Bush should extend an early invitation to South Korean President Kim Dae-jung to hold Washington summit talks aimed at closely coordinating respective policies.

### HOPEFUL BUT SLOW PROGRESS

The hostile, 50-year-old standoff between North and South Korea was fundamentally affected by last June's leaders' summit in the North's capital, Pyongyang. The talks between South Korea's President Kim Dae-jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il were the first such meetings between the two bitter enemies since Korea was divided in 1948. Before departing Pyongyang, President Kim Dae-jung signed a formal agreement with the de facto leader and Defense Commission Chairman of the North that identified concrete avenues toward reconciliation and eventual reunification of the Koreas.

The significance of the summit and the pact cannot be overestimated. Never before have political talks between the North and South reached such high levels. South Korean President Kim deserves high praise for his relentless pursuit of the summit after years of diplomatic stalemate. The next major step in the budding peace process will be the return visit to Seoul by the North Korean leader. While a date for that visit has not been set, there are increasing signs that it may take place in March or April.

However, it is still too early to celebrate the advent of peace on the Peninsula. In the past, the North consistently has shown its proclivity to cut deals that bring it benefits but then fail to live up to its commitments. Moreover, the North's massive military threat to the South, with a million men stationed along the demilitarized zone, requires that the United States continue to maintain a combat force of 37,000 U.S. troops in South Korea.

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## U.S.-SOUTH KOREAN COORDINATION IS ESSENTIAL

Washington should applaud President Kim's success at negotiating the pact as well as establishing Seoul's leadership role in the process, a role that the Clinton Administration mistakenly had downplayed in the past. To sustain the momentum that President Kim's visit to Pyongyang has sparked, the United States now should execute a careful strategy that keeps Seoul out in front and continues to offer any U.S. benefits to the North on a strict, reciprocal basis. This principle of reciprocity was rarely enforced during the Clinton Administration and now deserves close scrutiny by President Bush as he and his senior advisers review America's North Korea policy.

Last week, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il visited Beijing, exactly as he did just before the June inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang. This suggests that Kim may announce his Seoul visit soon, and that he has now held policy coordination talks with his Chinese allies. Prior to the Seoul summit, it is imperative for South Korea and the U.S. to coordinate their policies as well. Thus, an invitation from President Bush to President Kim for a summit in Washington is in order, and the working-level visit should take place before the anticipated March Korea talks in Seoul.

One area in which the Clinton Administration deserves credit is past coordination and communication among Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo with respect to Korea policy. Second only to the U.S., Pyongyang is keen on improving relations with Japan. The Bush Administration should continue this close cooperation and dialogue with both the South Koreans and the Japanese. Thus, consideration should be given to having early talks with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In his talks with President Kim in Washington, President Bush should focus on the following areas:

- **President Kim's "Sunshine Policy" of engaging Pyongyang and how it can best move forward in coordination with Washington's reciprocity policy.**
- **The specific messages that will be conveyed to North Korean leader Kim Jong-il in Seoul about the future of the coordinated U.S.–South Korean–Japanese policies toward Pyongyang.**
- **How the U.S. and South Korea can work together to achieve what was not secured during the Clinton Administration: concrete steps by the North to reduce its conventional military threat.**
- **The pace of South Korea's ongoing economic reform and restructuring efforts and how they can best be realized.** Seoul's military preparedness and the North–South peace process cannot be separated from South Korea's prosperity. While Seoul deserves considerable credit for the economic gains it has made since the Asian economic crisis that began in late 1997, South Korea still faces serious economic challenges. The new Bush Administration should encourage Kim Dae-jung to pursue these reform issues since economic and national security concerns are so tightly intertwined.

## CONCLUSION

Asia clearly has become the region of the future with respect to America's economic interests. Yet the most serious threats to regional peace are in the Pacific Rim, and the Korean Peninsula is at the center of these concerns. It is important for the Bush Administration to address these concerns promptly by orchestrating an early Washington summit visit by South Korean President Kim Dae-jung.

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