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U.S. Alternative Diplomacy towards North Korea: Food Aid, Musical Diplomacy, and Track II Exchanges



By Erin Kruth

I. THE FOOD SHORTAGE IN THE DPRK

According to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the DPRK is experiencing its highest food deficit since 2001, accompanied by rising food prices and its lowest agricultural output in seven years. In April 2008, FAO predicted that the DPRK would face a shortfall of 1.66 million metric tons of food in 2008, nearly double the deficit they faced in 2007. Furthermore, the prices of staple foods such as rice and corn have continued to rise, and the rising prices of food such as pork, potatoes and eggs have made them unaffordable for most of the population.

In an April 18, 2008, World Food Programme (WFP) publication, Jean-Pierre de Margerie, WFP country director for North Korea, described the situation as follows: “Now it takes a third of a month’s salary just to buy a few days worth of rice. Families and especially vulnerable persons will suffer from lack of access to food, eat fewer meals, and have a poorer diet, increasing their vulnerability to diseases and illness.”

Furthermore, WFP and FAO conducted a joint assessment of the situation in June 2008 and concluded that at least one in three households had reduced their food

intake and more than half were eating only two meals per day. They also noted that more and more people are scavenging for wild foods and the consumption of such foods is responsible for diarrhea and subsequent malnutrition in children under the age of five.

In assessing the causes of the current food shortages, there is a need to look beyond the economic decline and unfavorable agricultural conditions such as limited arable land, lack of agricultural machinery and energy shortages that have contributed to the DPRK's chronic food shortage. Experts agree that the massive flooding in the DPRK's "cereal bowl" region - North and South Pyongan Provinces and North and South Hwanghae Provinces - has exacerbated the situation. It is estimated that the floods washed away at least 11 percent of rice and corn fields, and as a result, the DPRK saw a 25 and 33 percent decrease in its rice and maize harvest output, respectively, in 2007 compared to 2006. Furthermore, until Lee Myung-bak was inaugurated president in February 2008, South Korea was one of the largest bilateral donors of food and fertilizer aid to the North. But in 2008, the South provided no assistance. On July 1, 2008, the Washington Post reported that "[t]he lack of fertilizer is projected to increase the food shortfall in the coming year by about 900,000 tons."

II. U.S. HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO THE DPRK

The Road to Bilateral Food Aid

The first 2008 delivery of U.S. food assistance to the DPRK arrived in June. However, according to Kurt Tong, director of Korean affairs at the U.S. Department of State, efforts to send much-needed aid began soon after the August 2007 floods. At that time, recognizing the dire condition of food supply shortages in the DPRK, the Department of State, USAID and the White House discussed the situation and decided to negotiate with the DPRK the possibility of providing humanitarian assistance. According to Tong, before offering assistance, the government considers how much it can give based on competing global needs and how it can set up access and monitoring rules to ensure that those who need the aid the most are getting it. Tong emphasized that the United States' decision to pursue humanitarian assistance has no relation whatsoever to the DPRK's

denuclearization process and that President Bush maintains a policy that “we will never use food as a weapon.”

When the United States and the DPRK sat down to negotiate the terms of the food aid, the U.S. took a strong position on the issue of monitoring. After successfully establishing improved requisites for monitoring food delivery, as well as guaranteeing access to confirm that the intended recipients were receiving the food aid, USAID announced on May 16, 2008 that they would resume food assistance to the DPRK. In a May 16, 2008 Voice of America feature, State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack explained, “Because the needs in terms of the monitoring regime have been met, and that there was perhaps the most rigorous monitoring regime for distribution of food aid that we’ve seen in North Korea, we’re able to provide 500,000 tons over the period of a year starting in June [2008].”

USAID stated that the food would be delivered between June 2008 and June 2009. Four hundred thousand metric tons are being distributed through the World Food Programme, while a partnership of five U.S. NGOs is delivering the remaining 100,000 metric tons. Mercy Corps is serving as the lead and World Vision as the co-lead. They are working with Samaritan’s Purse, Global Resource Services, and Christian Friends of Korea to deliver the food aid to more than 900,000 in the northwestern provinces of Changang and North Pyongan.

Following this announcement, a team of nine experts from the U.S. NGOs traveled to the DPRK for three weeks in June to assess the food shortage and needs of the people. This assessment played a key role in determining whether the food aid would go forward, because had it been determined that there was no need, the agreement would not have been necessary. A June 30, 2008 World Vision press release quoted Heidi Linton, executive director of Christian Friends of Korea, as saying, “I have visited North Korea many times through the years, and I have observed an extreme deterioration of the food situation in the past year. The need has never been greater.”

Monitoring Food Delivery

On June 30, 2008, the DPRK government agreed to expand the counties accessible

to international aid workers from 50 to 131, and allowed an additional 50 international relief experts to monitor food delivery. The exact number of aid workers conducting monitoring activities in the DPRK is unclear; however, it is reported that the WFP has 59 staff members in country, including native Korean speakers who had previously been banned from participating in monitoring activities. According to Victor Hsu, national director of the DPRK program at World Vision International, the NGO consortium has 16 people permanently residing in the DPRK until May 31, 2009, to monitor food distribution. Of the 16 monitors, four reside in Pyongyang, seven in the city of Sinuiju in North Pyongan Province, and five in Huichon city in Changan Province.

According to Hsu, the food aid is distributed to four main categories of people: children under the age of eight, pregnant and nursing mothers, orphans and those over the age of 60. Children generally receive their food aid at school and orphans receive at orphanages, while the elderly and pregnant and nursing mothers go to the county distribution center to receive their rations. When food is received, ration cards are stamped, and during random visits to homes, orphanages, and distribution centers, monitors check the cards. These cards play an important role in verifying that rations are being provided to people in need and not to military or government officials.

Hsu expressed with confidence that the North Koreans who receive food aid are aware of the fact that it is from the United States, as there are signs posted at the distribution centers explaining that the food is a gift of the American people, and a similar message is also printed on each ration card.

Food shipments Arrive in the DPRK

On June 30, 2008, the first shipment of bilateral food aid from the United States arrived at the port of Nampo in western North Korea. The shipment included 37,270 metric tons of wheat, half of which was discharged at Nampo, with the other half destined for Hungnam and Chongjin on the eastern coast. The second shipment containing 24,000 metric tons of corn arrived on August 4 and on August 20, another shipment of 32,500 metric tons of corn was delivered. On September 30, a further 24,500 metric tons of corn arrived to be delivered by the WFP.

The fifth cumulative shipment and the first to be distributed by the NGO consortium arrived in the DPRK on November 23 at the port of Nampo; the shipment's contents - corn and beans - were scheduled to be distributed to recipients in Changang and North Pyongan Provinces through public distribution centers, orphanages, schools, hospitals and nurseries.

While most of these deliveries arrive at the port of Nampo and are later distributed at distribution centers, schools, orphanages and the like, the road from Nampo to the warehouses and the subsequent distribution sites is not always an easy one. The transportation of commodities from port to warehouse is often hampered by shortages of covered train wagons to transport the food, electricity interruptions that result in stopped trains and inadequate numbers of trucks to transport the goods from the warehouses to the distribution centers. Furthermore, the geographic conditions in the provinces where the NGO team is operating are very mountainous and the roads are unpaved, making transportation in rainy and snowy conditions dangerous and difficult.

Table 1: 2008-2009 U.S. Food Deliveries to the DPRK, as of January 12, 2009

Delivery Date	Amount (metric tons)	Product	Consigned to	Distributed By
June 29, 2008	37,270	White Wheat	WFP*	WFP/USNGOs
August 4, 2008	24,000	Corn	WFP*	WFP/USNGOs
August 20, 2008	21,100	Corn	WFP	WFP
	11,400	Corn	USNGOs	USNGOs
September 30, 2008	24,500	Corn	WFP	WFP
November 23, 2008	20,000	Corn	USNGOs	USNGOs
	5,060	Beans		
January 8, 2009	21,000	Corn	USNGOs	USNGOs
January 19, 2009**	4,860	Vegetable oil and corn-soya blend	USNGOs	
Total NGO Delivery to 1/2009 (metric tons)			66,260	
Total WFP Delivery to 1/2009 (metric tons)			97,785	
Total Food Delivered to 1/2009 (metric tons)			164,045	

* The World Food Programme loaned U.S. NGOs 4,000 MT of wheat and 8,200 MT of corn from these two deliveries.

** Anticipated arrival date.

As for the contents of the food aid shipments, they primarily consist of corn. The Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust, which is managed by the U.S. Agriculture

Department and maintains up to 4 million metric tons of U.S. wheat, corn and rice in its reserve for humanitarian needs, is providing the food being shipped to the DPRK. According to Jon Brause, a DPRK expert at USAID, 400,000 of the 500,000 metric tons of food that the United States intends to deliver will be predominantly corn with some wheat, and 100,000 metric tons will be vegetable oils, pulses and corn-soy blends for children. USAID chose to supply the DPRK mainly with corn for several reasons; the North Korean people are familiar with it, it is a major staple food and it is less likely than other food products to be stolen.

Food Shipments Stall

On December 8, 2008, one day after the WFP and FAO issued a joint report stating that the number of hungry people in the DPRK had increased from 6.2 million to 8.7 million, and that more than one third of North Koreans will need food aid in 2009, the Washington Post's Blain Harden and Glenn Kessler reported that according to U.S. officials, food aid delivered through the NGOs was in progress, but "the main effort - through the World Food Programme - has stalled."

Officials attributed stalled efforts to transparency issues and disagreements over the number of U.S. personnel allowed in Pyongyang and limited access throughout the country for the UN's Korean-speaking monitors. However, the Asia Director for the WFP, Tony Banbury, pointed to food shortages as the key issue at stake, saying, "The North Koreans are fulfilling their obligations under agreements with the WFP and U.S. government ... we just no longer have food to deliver, and that is risking the cooperation we have been receiving from the North." He elaborated on the situation, saying that the WFP policy is that if they don't have access, they can't deliver food, whereas the DPRK's policy is if you don't give us the food, you can't have access.

While State Department spokesman Sean McCormack maintains that the U.S. government does not have "an interest in using people who are hungry as bargaining chips," Harden and Kessler point out that some experts say that this aid is "a reward for progress in the long effort to persuade North Korean leader Kim Jong-il to give up nuclear weapons." They also draw a parallel between the timing of the arrival of the last shipment in August, with the timing of Kim Jong-il's reported stroke and the DPRK's decision to veer off the path towards

dismantlement of their nuclear weapons program.

Vis-à-vis these complications, Banbury warned that the whole operation could freeze in January “because we don’t have enough food.” He also stated that in October, only 2.4 million people benefited from the program and even they were getting only 40 percent of the rations that they should have been getting.

In a January 6, 2009 press briefing, the State Department maintained that the United States had not stopped food aid to North Korea and acknowledged that despite a government delegation’s visit to the DPRK in December to resolve issues with WFP food deliveries, the issuance of visas for Korean-speaking monitors for the WFP and other technical problems still remained. Nonetheless, the State Department stated that it was committed to resolving the issues and continuing bilateral food aid.

III. SOUTH KOREAN PERSPECTIVE

Until this point, this paper has largely considered the points of view of the U.S. government, NGOs and the United Nations regarding the situation in the DPRK. However, Seoul has not consistently concurred with the evaluation of the situation in the DPRK, and its approach to dealing with the food shortage has differed from that of the United States and international aid organizations. This section explores both the South Korean government’s and South Korean NGOs’ mindsets regarding the situation in the North.

While organizations such as the WFP, describe the DPRK as facing “a potential humanitarian crisis,” or in a situation of “humanitarian emergency,” the general tone of the South Korean government appears to steer clear of using such rhetoric. In an interview with Ministry of Unification representative J. R. Kim on November 24, 2008, he stated that while there is hunger in the DPRK, there is not starvation or malnutrition on the same scale that there was in the 1990s and pointed to structural problems in rural areas as a major factor contributing to the situation. Furthermore, consistent with the Lee administration’s policy, Kim asserted, “We are always willing to provide food aid,” but if the North wants massive food aid they have to come forward and say so and also allow appropriate monitoring of

the food aid to ensure that it gets to the right people.

Grand National Party (GNP) National Assemblyman Park Jin's comments in a November 25, 2008 interview largely echoed J.R. Kim's. He agreed that there are food shortages in the DPRK but pointed out that "the assessment between our government and the World Food Programme are different," and said that "there is a food shortage but it is not at crisis level." In his elaboration on the differences, he pointed out that this year is better than last - this year there was no flood and the DPRK reaped 4 million tons of rice, which is not bad compared to the average harvest; he did say, however, that the people are still suffering from the harvest shortage and that there is an "insecure food supply." Park pointed out that the WFP and the South Korean government agree that the northeastern parts of the country, Yanggang and North and South Hamgyong Provinces are suffering most severely. He explained that when greater monitoring and assurance that grain will not go to the military are granted, the South can then provide aid to those areas first.

Some NGOs leaders in South Korea disagreed with the South Korean government's evaluation as was evident in an interview with representatives from three South Korean NGOs in December 2008. One representative commented that it is regrettable that the government's reference point is the mid-1990s, when there was mass starvation and death. He said that they seemed to be of the opinion that "As long as they don't drop dead, there is no crisis." According to the representative, North Koreans who receive WFP rations get about 180 grams of grain per day, but the minimum requirement for sustenance is 400 grams per day; which means that if they survive on rations alone, less than half of their daily dietary intake needs are being met. Another representative criticized their government for saying that there was no flood this year but omitting the fact that the South did not provide the North any fertilizer aid in 2008, something they have done for several years prior. Having visited South Pyongan Province and having seen the bad conditions of the crops, she said comments of "desk-bound" government officials reflect the fact that few of them have seen the conditions in the DPRK firsthand. One explanation that was offered was that if you fly over the DPRK you may see green fields of corn stalks, but once you are on the ground you may realize that there is only one piece of corn growing on each stalk. To that point, another representative pointed out that the real problem is the DPRK - they

don't allow the South to do the surveys necessary to see how bad the problems are and this enables desk-bound people to say what they say.

According to a May 2008 Voice of America (VOA) report, prior to the inauguration of President Lee Myung-bak, South Korea provided the North with "massive, no-strings-attached transfers of food and fertilizer." But after taking office, President Lee set out to end this unconditional humanitarian aid, insisting that the South's aid be tied to the North's cooperation in abandoning its nuclear weapons and other issues. The same VOA report cited Ministry of Unification (MOU) spokesman Kim Ho-nyoun as saying, "The government sees Pyongyang's current situation as not yet urgent enough to receive the South Korean government's aid. However, if the DPRK makes a formal request, we will begin offering food." As for fertilizer aid, according to a February 4, 2008 *Washington Times* report, the DPRK usually makes its requests for fertilizer aid between mid-January and mid-February for the spring planting season. While South Korea usually provides 20-30 percent of the DPRK's fertilizer - between 200,000 and 500,000 tons - this year, the DPRK didn't ask for the fertilizer and so the South didn't send any. Experts speculate that the reason that the North did not appeal for fertilizer aid was because of its apprehension about the incoming Lee administration's policies towards the North.

In late May 2008, South Korean Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan indicated that the South wanted to talk directly with the North about the food issue. He hinted that the South's position requiring the North to formally request aid could "eventually soften," saying, "If North Korea's food condition gets very serious or there is a natural disaster, South Korea can provide food. The North will not have to ask." A few days later on June 4, South Korea announced that it wanted to provide 50,000 tons of corn to the DPRK. The corn aid offered by the South had been previously promised by the Roh administration but the promise was not fulfilled due to soaring corn prices around the world. Kim Ho-nyoun stated that they were ready to offer the corn as soon as the North informed them where they wanted the aid taken, when to deliver it and how. However, as reported by the Kyodo News Agency in June 2008, according to Kim, "North Korea's working-level official said 'no' when [the South] asked about the North's position on a corn aid offer through the Red Cross channel at Panmunjom." While the South did not recognize this as the North's official position on the corn aid, at the time of this

writing the North had yet to otherwise accept or refuse the aid.

Following the shooting of a South Korean tourist at the Mount Kumgang tourist resort in the DPRK, talks of South Korean food aid stalled until October, when, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), the MOU announced that the 2009 South Korean budget would include funding to send 400,000 tons of rice and 300,000 tons of fertilizer to the DPRK in 2009. Furthermore, according to the Korean Broadcasting System, on December 9, 2008, South Korea's National Assembly allocated 352 billion won (approximately \$243 million) to the budget for humanitarian food aid for the DPRK as part of a government grant.

Despite these reports, however, Seoul also announced on December 9, 2008, that it had no immediate plan to send food aid to the DPRK, notwithstanding the WFP/FAO report that revealed that the DPRK faced a food deficit of 836,000 tons in 2009. Kim Ho-nyoun said that while the WFP/FAO report estimated total food production for the DPRK in 2008-2009 to be 3.3 million tons milled, or 4.21 million tons unmilled, South Korean experts and relief group activists foresaw a bigger harvest. On December 18, Reuters reported that South Korea's Rural Development Administration estimated that the DPRK would produce about 4.31 million tons of grains and cereals, falling 15 percent short of the minimum the country needs to feed its people. Kim also noted that this report and other factors, such as public opinion, would be considered in the government's decision to provide humanitarian aid in 2009. This does not bode well for the DPRK, as South Koreans are currently less sympathetic to the North amidst its recent inflammatory comments and tough policies towards the Lee administration.

IV. U.S.-DPRK CULTURAL EXCHANGES

Musical Diplomacy

On February 25, 2008, sounds of "The Star Spangled Banner," George Gershwin, and "Arirang" filled the East Pyongyang Grand Theater, as well as homes throughout the DPRK and the world via radio and television. The New York Philharmonic became the first American cultural organization to ever visit the DPRK. After receiving an official invitation from the DPRK's Ministry of Culture

in August 2007, a delegation including officials from the New York Philharmonic, the New York based Korea Society's Executive Director, Frederick Carriere, and a representative from the State Department's Office of Korean Affairs visited Pyongyang in October 2007 to explore logistical matters such as where the concert would be held, how equipment would be transported, how and where the performance would be broadcast, the extent to which American musicians could interact with local musicians and how many international reporters could travel with the group.

Finally, on December 7, 2007, the Philharmonic's President and Executive Director, Zarin Mehta, and its Chairman, Paul Guenther, alongside the DPRK's Ambassador to the United Nations, Pak Gil-yon, announced their acceptance of the DPRK's invitation to play in Pyongyang. According to the *New York Sun*, Guenther expressed faith in "the power of music [to] cross boundaries and cultural differences."

The same enthusiasm was echoed by Song Sok-hwan, the DPRK's culture minister, who was later quoted in the *Hankyoreh* on February 27, 2008 as saying, "As winter gives way to spring, we are very pleased to welcome these musicians as the first guests of the new year. ... We hope this will be a big step toward increased bilateral cultural exchange between our two countries."

But not everyone agreed with the positive outlook for the trip. While the State Department supported the trip, which it characterized as a "private effort," U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, offered more sobering comments in an NPR interview on February 24, 2008, stating, "I don't think we should get carried away with what listening to Dvorak is going to do in North Korea," but conceded the benefit of the event in giving North Koreans a window to the outside world.

In a December 27, 2007 interview with the *New York Sun*, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton criticized the Philharmonic's visit, saying that it "legitimizes the regime, which is still on the list of state sponsors of terrorism, has kidnapped people from South Korea and Japan and never given an adequate explanation, and not done a single thing on the nuclear front. ... [The visit] reduces the Philharmonic to the level of doing ping-pong diplomacy with a bunch of terrorists." He further stated that the invitation was merely part of the DPRK's

propaganda, saying, "It makes them appear less despotic than they are."

But based on press reports, Director Lorin Maazel wholeheartedly disagreed with statements such as those of Secretary Rice and Ambassador Bolton, relating the Philharmonic's performance in the Soviet Union to its performance in Pyongyang. "It showed Soviet citizens that they could have relations with foreign organizations and these organizations could come in the country freely," he was reported saying in the *New York Times* on February 27. "But what the Soviets didn't realize was this was a two-edged sword, because by doing so they allowed people from outside the country to interact with their own people, and to have an influence. It was so long lasting that eventually the people in power found themselves out of power" in a country that was a "global threat."

The performers described in an NPR interview in February, a connection between themselves and those in the audience, especially after their encore performance of the Korean folk song "Arirang." Principal bassist John Deak described North Koreans as waving and clapping for about five minutes as musicians left the stage. "Half of the orchestra burst into tears, including myself and we started waving back at them and suddenly there was this kind of artistic bond that is just a miracle. I'm not going to make any statements about what's going to change or anything. Things happen slowly. But I do know that the most profound connection was made with the Korean people tonight."

Karin Lee, director of the National Committee of North Korea (NCNK), reported in the March 2008 *Japan Focus*, that regardless of the debate over whether the Philharmonic's visit was a "good thing," "[i]n the United States, the concert gave Americans a new context for thinking about North Korea that did not involve weapons, terror, crime, or human security. ... Now each country has an additional image of the other country, a new cultural point of reference to add to the customary images of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. Ultimately, exchanges such as these prepare the people in both countries to sustain the peace that we hope will be brokered by our respective governments."

Lee further references the Asia Foundation's Ed Reed, who emphasizes the importance of cultural exchanges, saying that they "create a window of opportunity whereby political leaders can take policy risks. Cultural exchange

cannot change policy; policy will change only when political leaders act. ... If they choose to do so, political leaders in Pyongyang and Washington can interpret to their citizens an event such as this visit to Pyongyang as a gesture of goodwill, justifying concessions necessary to move the political process forward.”

In an interview in November 2008, the Cultural Affairs Officer for the U.S. embassy in South Korea, John Dyson, emphasized that while these cultural exchanges are not always front-page news, they are “very, very important in order to keep talks flowing at chilly times. They help build trust at lower levels, which paves the way for higher levels of trust.” He noted that after the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident in China, U.S.-China talks stalled for years, but at the same time there were science and technology talks and exchanges as well as an exchange involving the U.S. Department of the Interior. It is because of these types of low-level exchange programs, that the United States had avenues for discussions that led to the first cabinet-level talks since the Tiananmen Square massacre.

While the long-term effects of the Philharmonic’s visit to the DPRK remain unknown, the short-term benefits are murky at best, as the DPRK has since taken steps backward in the denuclearization process. But future musical exchanges between the United States and the DPRK remain a possibility. On December 13, 2008, the *Washington Post* reported that North Korean music leaders have expressed interest in bringing a North Korean orchestra to play for American audiences. According to the report, “The New York-based Korea Society is brokering discussions among the DPRK’s UN mission, the State Department and the Philharmonic with a goal of bringing 160 performers from Pyongyang’s State Symphony Orchestra to New York’s Lincoln Center next year [2009].”

Track II Exchanges

Track II exchanges, according to Karin Lee, are “talks and meetings regarding policy issues at which there is no official government presence, although they might include government officials participating in a non-official capacity.” The father of track II exchanges, former State Department official Joseph Monville, defines track II diplomacy as “an unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations that aims to develop strategies, influence public opinion and organize human and material resources in ways that might

help resolve their conflict.” These differ from track I exchanges, which are official diplomatic meetings that official representatives from two or more governments attend. While track II exchanges are completely divorced from track I exchanges, it is not uncommon for track II meetings to dovetail with track I events. As Lee explains, “The track II events that are hosted and sponsored by the NGOs enable track I exchanges to take place.”

As Lee mentioned, track II events are often organized and hosted by NGOs such as The Korea Society and the National Committee for American Foreign Policy (NCAFP), both of whom sponsored track II meetings with DPRK officials on November 6-7, 2008. These meetings gave officials, such as the DPRK’s American Affairs Bureau Director Ri Gun and State Department Ambassadors Sung Kim and Christopher Hill, the opportunity to discuss important issues in an unofficial capacity. The meeting also served as a forum for Frank Jannuzi, a top North Korea policy advisor for President-elect Obama, to meet with Ri Gun. In order to preserve the unique environment in which participants can “share honest and free opinions,” according to an NCAFP official, details of the meeting are not discussed publicly. However in a November 8, 2008 *Korea Times* article, organizer and participant Donald Zagora commented that the North Koreans were interested in continuity in talks with the Obama government.

Lee points out, “When there is considerable overlap in participants from one event to the next, track II events also allow for relationship-building, an important aspect of informal diplomacy.” Leon Sigal, a participant in many of these exchanges, offers a unique point of view on the value of those track II exchanges that precede track I exchanges: “They provide DPRK participants a first cut at understanding the U.S. policy environment at that moment. At the same time, U.S. officials who participate in the meetings receive an early indication of potential areas of disagreement and agreement.”

As for the overall impact that these exchanges have, a NCAFP report on the track II method cited their summer 2005 conference in New York as having played a decisive role in the resumption of the Six-Party Talks later that year, as well as the agreement of the Joint Principles that came out of those Six-Party Talks. NCAFP also points to a March 2006 conference that they hosted as evidence that track II exchanges work, as that meeting “pav[ed] the way for a compromise on the

financial sanctions previously imposed on the North Koreans by the U.S.”

In addition to NCAFP track II exchanges, other organizations coordinate similar track II exchanges. For example, the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD) holds a yearly track II forum where, according to its website, foreign and defense ministry officials, military officials, and academics from China, Russia, North and South Korea, Japan, and the United States meet to discuss regional security issues. According to Susan Shirk, who founded the NEACD track II meetings, “the greatest value of track-two diplomacy, however, is the intangible human one. Getting to know one another - over meals and coffee breaks as well as at the conference - helps dispel mistrust among former enemies.” She also notes that diplomats have referred to NEACD as the “Shadow Six-Party Talks,” and in an April 2006 article for the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, she provided an example that characterizes the importance of track II exchanges for solving DPRK security issues:

North Korea’s Vice Foreign Minister Kim Gye Gwan and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill didn’t get any further than a brief hello when they came to Tokyo last week. The Bush administration forbade Hill to meet with Kim unless North Korea first agreed to return to the Six-Party Talks, and Pyongyang refused to return to the talks unless the U.S. lifted the sanctions it has imposed on North Korea for suspected counterfeiting of U.S. dollars. Behind the scenes, however, the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue, or NEACD, having brought top officials from China, South Korea, Russia and Japan as well as North Korea and the U.S. to Tokyo, started to lay the groundwork for future solutions to the dangerous nuclear confrontation on the Korean peninsula.

According to Lee, it is probable that these track II exchanges will continue to be valuable to improving U.S.-DPRK relations. She notes that these “may prove [to be] fruitful venues” for future political appointees in the Obama administration to renew or maintain DPRK contacts as the Obama administration transitions to power on January 20, 2009.

V. CONCLUSION

However significant the improvement of U.S.-DPRK relations through resumed bilateral food aid, the New York Philharmonic's historic performance in Pyongyang, and track II meetings in 2008 has been, any optimism about improved relations is restrained by the challenges that lie ahead in 2009. U.S. food aid to the DPRK remains stalled and the DPRK's recent lack of progress towards disabling its nuclear facilities only confirms that "musical diplomacy" may not have played as strong a role as some would have liked. As the Obama administration prepares to take its place in Washington, it is imperative that they play an active role in getting food aid deliveries back on track and further explore cultural exchanges, perhaps even extending an offer to Pyongyang to have an orchestra play in Washington. While such an invitation would have been far-fetched under the Bush administration, Obama has expressed a willingness to have dialogue with Kim Jong-il and perhaps such an invitation would thaw relations just enough to facilitate a summit. As we saw in this report, track II meetings provide a unique forum in which government officials can unofficially test the waters to see how the DPRK would react to such a proposal. It is in the best interest of the Obama administration to use these unofficial meetings, humanitarian aid and cultural diplomacy to pave the road for official meetings, bilateral trade and formal diplomatic relations, no matter how long the road may be.

CHRONOLOGY

Food Aid

- August 15-31, 2007* The DPRK experiences massive flooding, destroying 11 percent of their corn and rice fields.
- The U.S. government discusses the possibility of providing food aid to the DPRK.
- March 2008* The normal time period for the delivery of South Korean fertilizer to the DPRK passes without the DPRK asking for the fertilizer and without South Korea delivering it.

- May 16* USAID and the DPRK government sign a protocol for U.S. food aid to the DPRK; USAID announces that the United States will ship 500,000 metric tons of food to the DPRK between June 2008 and June 2009.
- June* The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) report that one in three North Korean households had reduced food intake.
- June 27* The Private Voluntary Organization Consortium (PVOC) and the DPRK's Korea America Private Exchange Society (KAPES) sign a letter of understanding for food delivery through NGOs.
- June 30* 37,270 metric tons of white wheat arrive in the DPRK to be distributed by WFP.
- August 4* 24,000 metric tons of corn arrive in the DPRK to be distributed by the WFP.
- August 18* 32,500 metric tons of corn arrive in the DPRK to be distributed by the WFP.
- November 23* 20,000 metric tons of corn and 5,000 metric tons of beans arrive in the DPRK to be distributed by PVOC.
- December 8* The Washington Post reports that U.S. food aid deliveries through the WFP have stalled.
- December 9* The South Korean National Assembly allocates money in its budget to send 400,000 tons of rice and 300,000 tons of fertilizer to the DPRK in 2009.
- Mid-December* 21,000 metric tons of corn arrive in the DPRK to be delivered by PVOC.

Early January 2009 25,000 metric tons of corn and beans arrive in the DPRK to be delivered by WFP.

Alternative Diplomacy

August 13, 2007 The New York Philharmonic makes the announcement that it has received an invitation to perform in the DPRK.

October 4-11 A delegation from the Philharmonic and other organizations travels to the DPRK to assess the feasibility of a performance.

December 11 The New York Philharmonic formally accepts the invitation to play in the DPRK.

February 25, 2008 The New York Philharmonic arrives in Pyongyang.

February 26 The New York Philharmonic performs in Pyongyang.

November 6-7 Track II meetings are held in New York City.