

Discussions between Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and North Korean Leader Kim Il Jong, October 22-25, 2000
Source: Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary* (Miramax Books, 2003), pages as cited.

Discussions on the First Day: 10-23-2000 –

At the start of the first meeting between Albright and Kim, the Korean leader adopted a friendly and conciliatory tone, thanking Albright for Clinton's condolence message when Kim Il Sung died and for U.S. humanitarian assistance. The following statement demonstrates Kim's approach - "If both sides are genuine and serious ... there is nothing we will not be able to do."

Early in the first meeting, Albright turned the discussion to the matter of North Korea's export of missiles and the U.S. desire to get an agreement curtailing these sales as a precondition to any summit meeting between Kim and President Clinton. Kim claimed that North Korea was selling missiles to Syria and Iran to earn foreign currency that the country needed, and remarked, "So it's clear, since we export to get money, if you guarantee compensation, it will be suspended."

Albright: "Mr. Chairman, we've been concerned about your intentions for fifty years, and so we have been concerned about your production of missiles. And now you say it is just to earn foreign currency."

Kim: "Well, it's not just foreign currency... We also arm our military as part of our self-reliance program." Noting North Korea's concerns over South Korea's military, Kim said, "if there is an assurance that South Korea will not develop five-hundred-kilometer-range missiles, we won't either. As for the missiles already deployed, I don't think we can do much about them. You can't go inside the units and inspect them, but it's possible to stop production. It's been ten years since the collapse of the USSR, the opening of China, and the disappearance of our military alliance with either country. The military wants to update its equipment, but we won't give them new equipment. If there's no confrontation, there's no significance to weapons. Missiles are now insignificant." [page. 463]

Following this first meeting, Kim told Albright that he had changed the program for the evening: I have changed the entertainment. We have prepared a spectacular program in May Day Stadium that will help you understand North Korean culture and arts. The Western world things we are belligerent, and the U.S. has a lot of misunderstanding about us. It is important to know us directly. You can relax and enjoy it." [page. 464]

Part of that evening's program included the depiction of a Taepo Dong missile launch, as a demonstration of North Korea pride over the 1998 test of this missile. During the applause, Kim told Albright, "That was our first missile launch – and our last." [page 464]

Conversation at the state dinner that evening tended to be non-substantive, based on Albright's account, dealing with Kim's use of computers, the relative proficiency of North and South Korean interpreters, and Kim's well-known passion for the cinema. [see discussion on page 465]

Discussions on the Second Day – 10-24-2000

During the second official meeting between Albright and Kim on the afternoon of October 24th, the discussions included Kim's replies to a list of questions the U.S. side had presented earlier to try to pin down Pyongyang on the proposed ban on missile exports. As he had the previous day, Kim proved very agreeable, accepting all the U.S. desired positions on the ban. The discussion turned to the long-vexing issue for North Korea of U.S. troops in South Korea. Kim said that his regime's position on this had changed since the end of the Cold War, and that they now saw the American forces as a stabilizing factor on the peninsula. Kim did warn Albright that his military was evenly split on the wisdom of improving ties with the U.S., and that there was opposition within the foreign ministry to his agreement to talk to the U.S.: "As in the U.S., there are people here with views different from mine, although they don't amount to the level of opposition you have. There are still some here who think U.S. troops should leave. And there are many in South Korea who are opposed to the U.S. presence as well." [page 465]

As the second meeting came to a close, Albright commented that she felt her discussions with Chairman Kim had increased their mutual understanding, to which Kim replied: "When the South Koreans came, I asked whether they were looking for horns on my head. They said no. Yes, there were a lot of misunderstandings between us. For example, we did not educate our children right. Our children were taught to call your countrymen 'American bastards' instead of just 'Americans.'" [page 466]

During the final joint dinner the second day of Albright's visit, the talk with Kim turned to economic matters. The North Korean leader admitted that his country was in "dire straits" (Albright's words), rooted in its severe energy shortage. When Albright asked Kim if he would consider opening his economy to the world, Kim answered: "What do you mean by 'opening'? We will have to define the term first, because opening means different things to different countries. We do not accept the Western version of opening. Opening should not harm our traditions." Kim rejected the Chinese approach of combining free markets and socialism, but admitted to being interested in the Swedish model. Pressed by Albright to name other models of economic development, Kim noted that, "Thailand maintains a strong traditional royal system and has preserved its independence through a long, turbulent history, yet has a market economy. I am also interested in the Thai model." Commenting on this in her memoirs, Albright suspected that it might be Thailand's preservation of the monarchy that interested Kim more than its economic system. [page. 466]