

May 1979

Korea Status Report

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Summary:

Korea status report on inter-Korean talks, Ping-pong Diplomacy, and its prospects.

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Transcript - English

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The Talks

-- The two sides remained deadlocked on the status of the delegations although each has modified its original position. The South now propose that the two sides hold "working-level contacts" with the next meeting on 28 March. The North proposes, instead, that the meetings should be between "liaison delegations of the political parties, public organizations and authorities" with the next meeting on 5 April. It remains open if and when a further meeting will take place but the contacts seem likely to continue.

-- While the official statements made by both sides sound harsh, the atmosphere has been quite good. Both sides have given the contacts low-key domestic coverage and avoided raising great expectations. The North, while continuing to broadcast criticism of the South, has honored its commitment to end propaganda attacks. The North also reacted with relative moderation (compared to previous years) to the joint US-ROK military maneuvers which began on 1 March. The DPRK might have used them as a ground for breaking off the talks, had it been so inclined.

Ping-pong Diplomacy

-- Simultaneously with the political contacts, talks have taken place in Panmunjom between the Table Tennis Associations of the North and the South concerning Korean participation in the World Table Tennis Championships which will be held in Pyongyang on 25 April. The North has proposed a United Korean team. The South, while not rejecting the idea, has insisted that the South Korean Tennis Team participate, in any event, as such.

-- The ping-pong discussions have attracted attention because of the role of ping-pong in opening the way for broader US-Chinese contacts. The South has had some difficulty dealing with the issue since while publicly favoring reunification, it does not wish to lend credence to a one Korea concept with joint international representation. A unified team now seems ruled out and the South is suggesting a North-South tournament as a means of encouraging cooperation.

Prospects

-- The South is interested - at least to some limited degree - in a "German style" arrangement in Korea. The North rejects the concept, as such. It should be possible to find middle ground that would meet some of the interests of both sides and the generally favorable atmosphere suggests both sides are interested in exploring possibilities. So far, however, substance has not been touched and until it is, no assessment can be made of the prospects of establishing a more stable relationship on the peninsula.