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12

In pursuit of lasting peace

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(Part II)

THIS was at a time Pyongyang itself was also trying to broaden its East Asian friendships; and we met with the North Korean leader, President Kim Il Sung, at his mountain villa north of Pyongyang. We were accompanied then by Filipino Congressman Miguel Romero, now deceased, Philippine business leader Len Oreta, who is married to the younger sister of the late Sen. Benigno Aquino, Sen. Teresa Aquino-Oreta, and civic and education leader Nestor Kalaw.

Despite his forbidding reputation, we found the legendary Kim Il Sung widely and keenly interested in the outside world: our appointment of ten minutes stretched to more than one hour as he and I exchanged views on many issues. We were later informed it is rare that he entertains visitors for a long period.

When we inquired into the possibility of another war on the Korean Peninsula, he dismissed the liability outright. Conflict would be foolish — he said emphatically — it would only cause "mutual destruction" in both North and South Korea that neither side could afford to suffer. In no uncertain terms, he told us: "If we attack the South, the South will be destroyed. But we in the North will also be destroyed."

Thus, when today Pyongyang, with leader Kim Jong-Un, his grandson, and previously his son, Kim Jong-Il, rattles the sounds of war in the Korean Peninsula, we remember those words of practical wisdom from the late Kim Il Sung.

Most importantly, at the same time, in response to our request and appeal, Kim Il Sung did us honor and he promised and indeed put in writing that North Korea would not give aid and comfort to our Filipino NPA guerrillas — who had, by then, been fighting to overthrow the Philippine State for more than two decades. President Kim Il Sung, the founder of North Korea, told us that by the time we leave for Beijing en route to Manila, the North Korean government would have the letter ready. And he kept his promise.

On our invitation, President Kim Il Sung sent to Manila, a few weeks after we left Pyongyang, his Deputy Premier Kim Dahl Hyun to finalize the agreement with our then Foreign Secretary Raul Manglapus, which expeditiously resulted in diplomatic relations between Manila and Pyongyang.

That was the most successful result of our trip to North Korea.

Today the North Korean Ambassador in Bangkok is accredited to Manila, presents his credentials to the Philippine president in Manila, and visits Manila from time to time. Similarly, our active and experienced ambassador in Beijing Chito Sta. Romana, is accredited in Pyongyang.

We turned over to then President Corazon Aquino the priceless North Korean document signed by North Korean Deputy Premier Kim Dahl Hyun committing the North Korean government not to give aid and comfort to the insurgent Philippine New People's Army. We specifically asked this document from the President of North Korea (DPRK) and he authorized Deputy Premier Kim to sign it and handed to me. We in turn proudly presented the document to then President Cory Aquino in Malacanang when we returned to Manila.

Yes, through thick and thin, that agreement which we forged in Pyongyang in the summer of 1990 has kept our two states friendly and cooperative until now.

We must say that we have since developed close relations with the CPP-NPA-NDF leaders Jose Maria "Joma" Sison; my high school classmate at De La Salle Luis Jalandoni, then CPP-NPA-NDF chief negotiator with the Philippine government on the peace talks, and now senior adviser. With Fidel Agcaoile, their new chief negotiator, we have helped push over the years, and hopefully success at some time, sooner than later, a final peace agreement with our Communist brothers at home.

#PEACETALK

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Two Koreas should adapt to global changes

We must point out that despite the occasional harsh rhetoric on both sides of the 38th Parallel, We believe governments, parliaments, political parties, civil society organizations, and religious groups must encourage and support direct talks between Seoul and Pyongyang.

As we know in past years, direct talks re-started some years ago between Washington and Pyongyang — in New York and Geneva, but had not met with success.

Indeed, direct talks between North and South will complement these high-level explorations. Perhaps they could even catalyze the long-suspended Six-Party Talks to prevent nuclear proliferation in the Korean Peninsula. Perhaps direct bilateral or multilateral talks could even lead to agreement on a road map to eventual unification. But these talks have not been reopened for a long time now.

Today the basic fact is that the distribution of power in the world is fast-changing – particularly in East Asia – and the Korean Peninsula must adapt to these epochal transformations.

Vietnam itself emerged from three difficult successive wars, winning against great powers, and its socialist government adopting a market economy, lifted its people from poverty to become today a rising peaceful economic power. North Korea can be like Vietnam, which is already emerging as a power in Southeast Asia.

The great example of course is how the two Germanys finally emerged from Cold War confrontation and totally united under then Chancellor Helmut Kohl, to become today the predominant economic power in Europe.

And China, under the unforgettable leader Deng Xiaoping, opened China to the world, lifted more than 500 million people from poverty and introduced appreciable elements of free enterprise capitalism to China's socialist economy, which has propelled China to the second largest in the global economy, and perhaps No. 1 within 10 years.

Perhaps the two Koreas should begin with some degree of economic cooperation. And the obvious way which of course should not take too much time is for Pyongyang to be invited to associate itself with the East Asian Economic Grouping of the 10 Southeast Asian states and the 3 Northeast Asian states – China, Japan, and South Korea. The ASEAN Plus 3 could become ASEAN Plus 4. This should not be a long process and the idea should be shared with Pyongyang sooner than later.

Yes, indeed, North Korea should not be left alone and isolated as we push for political and economic integration in Asia.