

**May 31, 1972**

**Conversation between Park Chung Hee and Pak Seong-cheol**

**Citation:**

"Conversation between Park Chung Hee and Pak Seong-cheol", May 31, 1972, Wilson Center Digital Archive, South Korean Foreign Ministry Archive.  
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/114596>

**Summary:**

Park Chung Hee and Pak Seong-cheol discuss their commitment to the three principles of Korean unification, the need to create an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, and the importance of resolving humanitarian issues through Red Cross meetings at Panmunjeom in order to encourage progress in higher-level discussions.

**Original Language:**

Korean

**Contents:**

Translation - English

## Conversation between Park Chung Hee and Pak Seong-cheol

Date and Time: May 31, 1972 19:00-19:40

Location: Blue House

## Participants:

## South

PARK Chung Hee President

LEE Hu-rak Director of KCIA

KIM Jeong-ryeom Chief Secretary to the President

KIM Chi-yeol Deputy Director of KCIA

JEONG Hong-jin Director of Conference Management, Conference Office, Korean Red Cross

## North

PAK Seong-cheol [Pak Song Chol] 2nd Vice Premier

RYU Jang-sik [Ryu Jang Sik] Deputy Director of Organization and Guidance  
Department & Director of External Affairs, Worker's Party of Korea Central CommitteeKIM Deok-hyeon [Kim Tok Hyon] Chief Officer of the Political Bureau, Central  
Committee, Workers' Party of Korea

H.E. [Park Chung Hee]: Director Lee has told me that he received such warm hospitality during his visit to Pyongyang.

PAK [Seong-cheol]: Since Director Lee provided the warmest hospitality and President Park welcomed us, I will speak to you candidly as it comes to my mind as if I were at my own home.

--- Reads through a prepared document ---

I highly appreciate Your Excellency meeting with us today, sparing your valuable time. First of all, we would like to courteously deliver Premier Kim Il Sung's greetings to Your Excellency. The Premier is delighted to hear through the media that the President is recovering from the injury that Your Excellency received while walking. Premier Kim Il Sung is very content with the fact that we recently opened a path to mutual contact and therefore have bright perspectives for accomplishments. He especially welcomed Director Lee Hu-rak's visit to Pyongyang, mentioning that it is an expression of your trust in us. Our encounter is only at a beginning stage. However, many issues are already resolved through Director Lee's two conversations with the Premier and also during his two sincere conversations with Director of Organization and Guidance Kim Yeong-ju [Kim Yong Ju].

I assume that Director Lee has reported this to Your Excellency already. During his meetings with Director Lee, Premier Kim Il Sung has mentioned the three principles on less conflict and peaceful reunification of our country, achieved by rejecting foreign influence, resolving our nation's issues with self-determination, rising above the differences in ideology and type of system, and therefore, achieving the solidarity of our people. The three principles the Premier has mentioned originate from his wish to resolve the issues of peaceful reunification through self-determination and through the combined efforts of the South and the North. With regards to the three principles, Director Lee mentioned that President Park has the exact same opinion. I believe our

search for common ground on the basic principles in resolving the issue of reunification means that the basis for the success of our conference is prepared. It is gratifying progress for our nation and the future of our people. We believe it is the greatest success accomplished in the Pyongyang conferences held between Director Lee and us.

Director Lee's visit to Pyongyang has resolved long-held misunderstandings between us and contributed greatly in constructing mutual confidence. Through our candid communication, we have learned extensively that there has been a substantial amount of misunderstandings and distrust between us. The most fundamental of all would be that we regarded the South as wanting to be dependent on the United States and Japan, whereas in the South you were concerned that we will invade the South. Nevertheless, Premier Kim Il Sung has assured Director Lee that the North will never invade the South and told him to report to President Park when he returns [to Seoul] that there is no need to be concerned about the matter. Director Lee stated that it is Your Excellency President Park's solid will not to depend on the U.S. and Japan and you desire to solve our issues through self-determination. He assured us that the South would never depend on the U.S. and Japan.

Therefore, we now have the fundamental issues in South-North misunderstandings and distrust resolved. We believe this is a very important achievement. Premier Kim Il Sung mentioned, now that we have agreed on the principle issues of reunification and have our fundamental misunderstandings resolved, the most basic issue is to deepen our trust and promote our nation's grand solidarity. He mentioned, since Your Excellency the President dispatched Director Lee with a trust in us and also since we have found commonalities in principle issues through our conversations, we could work toward our reunification hand-in-hand as fellow countrymen and comrades.

Frankly speaking, I believe the issue of achieving reunification depends on the planning and the determination of the both of you. Even if we wish to reunify, it is impossible without an agreement between the two of you. We are confident that an agreement can be reached if you two met in person, deepened the mutual trust and made casual conversations. We believe we will be able to proceed rapidly with matters once an agreement is reached between the two of you. The Premier sent me [to the South] as a return for Your Excellency's sending of Director Lee to Pyongyang, and commanded me to hear Your Excellency the President's valuable opinion on the methods to reach solidarity among our people and to achieve reunification.

H.E.: It is truly a valuable event that Director Lee visited the North for the first time twenty-seven years after the liberation and met with Premier Kim. I was glad that you had open conversations on many issues during your short visit to Seoul. Also, please accept my gratitude for the warm hospitality you provided for Director Lee during his visit to Pyongyang. Director Lee has seen the rural and urban community while traveling, and has reported to me that the North is developing actively despite the damages due to the war. Although we have a limited amount of land, when we reunify, we will have a population of fifty million. With the heavy industry the North has developed and the industrial might of the South, combined, there is no great power we should be envious of. Therefore, if the South and the North maintain a [small] portion of standing army, and devote [the rest] to development, we could construct a great nation. In order to do so, we should achieve the ardent desire of all fifty million Koreans for reunification. I am delighted about the agreement on the three basic principles.

I whole-heartedly agree with and approve of the three principles. Regardless of how much we yearn for reunification, we must not hastily attempt to achieve it through military force. Instead, we must achieve it in a peaceful manner. Although our systems, ideology, and world view may be different, we are able to unite as fellow countrymen approaching beyond such differences. "Avoiding foreign reliance" and "self-reliance" are very reasonable thoughts. Although I am not familiar with the

current status due to many barriers between us, I thought the North was subjugated to the Soviet Union after the liberation, hearing phrases such as "Stalin" avenue or the "Red Army." When we look back at our history, our nation was unable to develop through self-determination because people who worshiped the powerful were in control of the country. I assume Premier Kim has this fact cut deep into his heart during his revolution. We are also conscious of this.

I support the idea of "self-determination" to the fullest extent. We can solve the South-North issues one by one, based on the three principles. I also agree with "developing a coordinating committee" [in pursuit of our goals]. When Director Kim on the North side and Director Lee Hurak on the South side look at the agenda more seriously and bring up an agreed solution, I am willing to positively support what is decided. The question is "how do we proceed." Director Lee has reported to me that the conversations in Pyongyang were held in a harmonious manner. Despite our bitter memories of fighting against each other, it was possible only because our sense of fellow countrymen is stronger. In other words, the blood of fellow countrymen runs thicker than the memory of the past. However, we must recognize the reality separately. The South and the North maintain military preparations and have occasional conflicts with an armistice line in the middle. Furthermore, the spiritual barrier developed between us for twenty-seven years has thickened solidly.

It is nearly impossible to remove this [barrier] in a day. Since our path to conversation is now open thanks to the extensive efforts of Director Kim and Director Lee, it must not be interrupted by hasty decisions. Also we must not make mistakes trying to impatiently remove the solid wall. Even though we are in a hurry, there are orders and procedures in a task. When we have a tall wall in front of us, we need to remove the bricks one by one. We cannot remove the whole wall at once. We must systematically start working on easier matters one by one. It is why patience and effort is required. It may seem tardy. However, it is in fact the fastest way.

I doubt that all issues are resolved through one meeting. The thickened barriers and distrust are not resolved by a word. If we discuss the issues regarding reunification right now, we won't be able to reach any conclusion. We must develop a coordinating committee and deal with such issues one by one. Between two people who turn a deaf ear to whatever the other person says, an atmosphere of mutual trust must be gained first. When the issues are discussed under such conditions, then we can expect the issues to be solved. When we discuss serious issues without such conditions, our long-awaited conversation could be disrupted in large part due to the lack of mutual understanding. I completely welcome the three principles. Under the current circumstances [of instability], how can we announce [our relationship] to the public? I've heard Vice Premier Pak has a somewhat different opinion on the methods. It is a little improper to discuss another matter, but let's take a war as an example.

How many relatives and families has the war harmed? There are a large number of them in the North but there is also a large number in the South. Why did the war begin? I need not to speak about the obvious reason that the Heaven, the Earth, and you also know. You might argue that you have invaded the South because the South first provoked a conflict.... The core of the distrust is anyhow a war. In addition, how many spies in the armistice line and "guerrillas" have you dispatched? Kim Sin-jo's team got as close as four hundred meters to me to secretly do me harm. I was about to walk into the bedroom and realized [what was happening] when I heard the gunshot. Because of such issues, the distrust the fellow countrymen in the South have is not easily eliminated regardless of our principle agreement.

I believe it is the process to solve such issues first and then move on to discussing the political issues including our reunification later. Vice Premier Pak suggests that we make a public announcement after we've settled on the principle agreement. However, I object to making the announcement at the current point of time. There is more to lose than to gain when you make official announcements. We must set the

environment first and then publicly make the announcement. Even if we announce our agreement now, the South Koreans will not believe us. After the announcement, we must proceed with our conferences open to the public. In an open conference, it is rather ineffective for the South and the North to propagate and argue with each other. Please deliver my words to Premier Kim that my opinions are due to the concerns mentioned just before.

PAK: The idea of Your Excellency and the Premier must be uniform.

H.E.: When it is the right environment and right conditions, Premier Kim and I will meet with each other and have an honest conversation. It is not the time yet. There is a pile of unsolved issues as high as a mountain, for instance, the issue of distrust. It is quite difficult to progress significantly in South-North issues even if we attempt to meet now. If we are unable to obtain any achievements, it is better that we don't meet at all. The South is an open society and also a society run by public opinion. As you are well aware, a couple years before when I attempted to normalize relations between Korea and Japan, many student revolutionaries attacked me, saying, "President Park is like Lee Wan-yong. He wants to sell the country." The protests against me continued for a year. There are still some people who are against [my decision].

We must eliminate the distrust between the South and the North, and be able to understand each other one by one. You don't understand other people easily. The North argues that you won't force Communism on us. It is the same for us. We shouldn't force the North "to abandon Communism," and you shouldn't force "the South [to] abandon Capitalism." It is not going to work that way. Rising above such issues, the South-North issue must be dealt with from a larger perspective as people of the same nation. Reunification is not a matter to rush. I would like to visit Pyongyang and enjoy naengmyeon with my family. However, the reality is not what I desire. Desire and reality are different matters.

PAK: We do not intend to achieve everything at once. We merely mentioned what we have in mind. Nevertheless, what we are suggesting is to organize a committee that will facilitate us to visit [each other] and have intense discussions. A coordinating committee, how shall we deal with this, how about we do it this way, we are telling you what we have in mind. Premier Kim Il Sung also asked me to deliver to Your Excellency the President that "it can't be achieved at once, [and] the most important is the issue regarding trust and how we will achieve solidarity."

H.E.: I am not forcing my opinion. I also intend to tell you what I have in mind. For instance, it is an "issue of process." I hope for swift progress in the Red Cross meetings at Panmunjeom. When the Red Cross meetings, which are held after a quarter century [of separation], go well and the separated families and relatives are able to visit each other crossing the South-North border freely, we will be able to build a foundation for the next steps. When progress in humanitarian Red Cross meetings lags, it is very difficult to deal with other matters.

PAK: We will soon reach agreement. I believe we will accomplish this in the Red Cross meetings in the near future.

H.E.: The people of the South and the North will be greatly disappointed if the Red Cross meeting is dismissed without reaching an agreement after all the troubles. When we are unable to reach an agreement in even a humanitarian issue, they will be disappointed, thinking reunification is a distant reality. We will be able to build a foundation for other issues to be solved when we allow separated families to freely visit each other at least.