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Viewing cable 09SEOUL1243, SEOUL - PRESS BULLETIN; August 06, 2009

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TOP HEADLINES

Chosun Ilbo
"Very Happy"... U.S. Says No More Two U.S. Journalists Reunited with Families after 141 Days of N. Korea Ordeal

JoongAng Ilbo, Seoul Shinmun
Freed Journalists: "Nightmare of Our Lives Over... We are So Grateful to Our Country"

Dong-a Ilbo
Foreign Residents Exceed 1 Million

Hankook Ilbo
Hillary Clinton: "Release of Two American Journalists Is Separate from N. Korea's Nuclear Issue"

Hankyoreh Shinmun
Police Gain Control of Most of Ssangyong Motor Plant, Leaving Hundreds of Striking Workers Isolated in Their Stronghold

Segye Ilbo
Clinton, Two Freed Journalists Arrive in Los Angeles

DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

An ROKG official cautioned yesterday against reading too much into former U.S. President Bill Clinton's visit to North Korea to secure the release of the two U.S. journalists, saying that, for the time being, it would be difficult for the U.S. and North Korea to resume dialogue. (JoongAng)

The ROKG official also said that the ROKG had received enough information about Clinton's trip in advance and that close consultations took place. (JoongAng)

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INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told reporters in Nairobi, Kenya yesterday that the release of the two journalists is a totally separate issue from efforts to re-engage North Korea, to have the country return to the Six-Party Talks, and work toward a commitment for the full verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. She went on to say: "The future of our relationship with the North Koreans is really up to them." (All)

White House Spokesman Robert Gibbs denied the (North) Korean Central News Agency's claim that former President Bill Clinton expressed words of sincere apology to North Korean leader Kim Jong-il for the hostile acts committed by the two journalists. (Dong-a, Hankook, Segye, Seoul, KBS)

MEDIA ANALYSIS

North Korea Releases U.S. Journalists

All media gave prominent coverage to yesterday's release of the two U.S. journalists after 141 days of detention in North Korea.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was widely quoted as telling reporters in Nairobi, Kenya yesterday that the release of the two journalists is a totally separate issue from efforts to re-engage North Korea, to have the country return to the Six-Party Talks, and work toward a commitment for the full verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. She was further quoted: "The future of our relationship with the North Koreans is really up to them."

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Conservative Chosun Ilbo carried a front-page article noting that former President Bill Clinton, after his return to the U.S., made no mention at all of U.S.-North Korea relations or his meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. Chosun interpreted this as his intention to support the USG's official position that his mission was private and that his meeting with the North Korean leader did not involve any issues beyond the release of the U.S. journalists - issues including the stalled Six-Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear disarmament.

In another inside-page story entitled "U.S. North Korea Policy Hinges on Clinton's Mouth," Chosun Ilbo speculated that former President Clinton's expected briefing to President Obama about his meeting in Pyongyang with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il would have some influence on the Obama Administration's North Korea policy, because Clinton is the first high-ranking U.S. official to meet Kim since the North Korean leader began showing signs of ill health last summer and the USG is currently preparing contingency plans to deal with sudden changes in the North following Kim's death.

Right-of-center JoongAng Ilbo, in an article titled "Kim Jong-il Demonstrates that He is in Good Health and Obama Rescues Fellow Citizens," evaluated Clinton's visit to North Korea as a "win-win" approach. In an accompanying article, JoongAng quoted an ROKG official as cautioning against reading too much into Clinton's North Korea visit, saying: "It will be difficult for the U.S. and North Korea to resume dialogue for the time being."

Conservative Dong-a Ilbo wrote in their headline: "Smiling Kim Jong-il, Solemn-faced Clinton... (Clinton's 21-hour Stay in Pyongyang) Reveals 'Same Bed, Different Dreams Situation' for North Korea and U.S." Dong-a also ran an editorial and said: "Some experts raised the possibility that Clinton's visit may undermine international sanctions against North Korea. Others criticize (the USG) for rewarding North Korea for its bad behavior. If the U.S. shows a conciliatory attitude toward the North following its 'small achievement' of getting the female journalists released, it will ruin international cooperation to enforce sanctions against North Korea. If the U.S. backs off, it may lead China and Russia to stop implementing sanctions against the North, which have been imposed under UN Security Council resolutions."

Moderate Hankook Ilbo editorialized: "If North Korea wants to take the release of the U.S. journalists as an opportunity to get out of international sanctions and isolation, it should also free an ROK worker - who has been held in the North for 130 days - and the four sailors who were recently seized for straying into North Korean

waters."

OPINIONS/EDITORIALS

U.S., ROK Should Not Tolerate Nuclear-Armed N. Korea
(Dong-a Ilbo, August 6, 2009, page 31)

Two U.S. journalists, who had been held in North Korea for 141 days, have been released. Now, international attention is focusing on the ramifications of a meeting between former U.S. President Bill Clinton, who successfully secured their release, and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. Some observers say that since the former President's visit to Pyongyang led to the release of the U.S. journalists, it will serve as a breakthrough for bilateral talks between the U.S. and North Korea.

However, the issue of the U.S. journalists is not directly related to North Korea's nuclear development and tests, or the international sanctions imposed on it. The White House and the U.S. State Department reiterated multiple times that the release of the two journalists is a separate issue from other concerns, such as the North Korean nuclear issue. Also, the U.S. government made it clear that Clinton's visit was a humanitarian and a private one. If this position is true, the U.S. has no reason to change its approach in

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dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue following the Clinton and Kim Jong-il meeting.

Still, people voice concerns in the U.S. Some experts raised the possibility that Clinton's visit may undermine international sanctions against North Korea. Others criticize (the USG) for rewarding North Korea for its bad behavior. If the U.S. shows a conciliatory attitude toward the North following its 'small achievement' of getting the female journalists released, it will ruin international cooperation to enforce sanctions against North Korea. If the U.S. backs off, it may lead China and Russia to stop implementing sanctions against the North, which have been imposed under UN Security Council resolutions. The ROK and the U.S. governments should closely cooperate to make sure that this meeting will not adversely affect their response to the North Korean nuclear issue.

U.S. governments have often been outmaneuvered by North Korea. While in office, former President Clinton reached the Geneva Agreed Framework with North Korea, but was stabbed in the back when North Korea pursued nuclear development. President Barack Obama vowed to break the pattern of rewarding North Korea for its bad behavior. If the U.S. backs away from its position of not tolerating North Korea's nuclearization, Obama's promise will become empty.

ROK people also should not have illusions. Some people criticize the ROK government for not doing anything when the U.S. and North Korea are moving toward direct dialogue. But this will only draw them into North Korea's scheme. When freeing the U.S. journalists, North Korea stressed that the release was (based on) "humanitarianism and peace policy." (It is absurd that) North Korea mentions humanitarianism and peace when it has detained a Kaesong Industrial Complex employee for 129 days and four crewmembers of an ROK ship for seven days.
History Repeats Itself
(JoongAng Ilbo, August 6, 2009, page 35: EXCERPTS)

By Editorial writer Bae Myung-bok

The truth behind former President Clinton's visit to North Korea won't be revealed for quite some time. It is too early to decide whether his visit was a one-time humanitarian event to secure the release of the U.S. journalists or a sophisticated political act to find a breakthrough for negotiations. However, looking back on what happened 15 years ago, there is a greater likelihood that the latter is the truth. During a meeting with North Korean leader Kim Il-sung, former President Carter presented a proposal that called on North Korea to freeze its nuclear program in return for receiving light water reactors. This proposal concretely was laid out during high-level talks between the U.S. and North Korea that ensued shortly thereafter.

It is hard for the U.S. to attack North Korea first due to the geographical proximity of the ROK, Japan and China. The U.S. has no choice but to wait for the North Korean regime to collapse or to resolve the North Korean issue through dialogue. But if the current

course is continued, North Korea is increasingly likely to "consolidate" its status as a nuclear state. North Korea is also suspected of spreading its nuclear technology to Myanmar. Against this backdrop, the U.S. cannot just wait.

Due to Clinton's visit, Kim Jong-il saved face and found a justification to stop his government's brinkmanship tactics. Kim Jong-il achieved huge success internally and externally. Now he joyfully is tamping down public anxiety that has been rising because of his ill health, the succession issue, and international sanctions.

Whether Six-Party Talks or bilateral talks, the format is not essentially important. When the summer vacation season is over in Washington, the U.S. and North Korea may sit at a negotiating table talking over a "comprehensive package," with China's mediation. If North Korea has any intention to negotiate, any format can work. This has been proven by 20 years of North Korea's nuclear history.

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History repeats itself.
A Shameful Moment for Kim Jong-il
(Chosun Ilbo, August 6, 2009, page 35)

Following his daylong visit to North Korea, former U.S. president Bill Clinton arrived in Los Angeles with Euna Lee and Laura Ling, the two American journalists who had been arrested and sentenced to hard labor in the North. The U.S. government is stressing that the sole purpose of Clinton's visit was to secure the release of the journalists. It has denied North Korean media reports that Clinton conveyed a verbal message from President Barack Obama and the North's claims that the United States apologized for the problems caused by Lee and Ling.

One photograph taken during Clinton's visit caused ROK people to blush in embarrassment. In it, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il displays a wide grin as he talks to Clinton, who listens without expression.

North Korean security forces arrested the two ambitious U.S. journalists at the border with China, and they were sentenced to 12 years of hard labor in a detention camp. How can a country, even a renegade like North Korea, hold two women hostage to achieve its political goals and issue a photo to the world of its leader smiling in content that his country has succeeded?

Petitions by the family members of the two journalists are said to have played a major role in Obama's decision to send a heavyweight like Clinton to North Korea. In the eyes of the international community, the image of the incumbent and former U.S. presidents engrossed in securing the freedom of two fellow Americans must have contrasted starkly with the image of Kim beaming at the success of his hostage-taking operation.

North Korea pardoned the two U.S. journalists - both of whom crossed over the border - on purpose while refusing to free ROK fishermen who were towed to the North six days ago after accidentally straying into the North's waters. What kind of hostage scheme does Kim have in mind this time? A North Korean fishing boat that crossed over into ROK territorial waters on that same day was sent back without any problems. And North Korea has been holding a Hyundai Asan staffer for over four months without explaining why he was arrested.

The North held the U.S. journalists at a hotel and let them call their family back home. But Yoo has been denied the right to see anyone. It gives special treatment to American hostages while trampling on the basic rights of South Koreans.

Many people who visited North Korea say they witnessed government workers shouting at citizens and bullying them. Yet they give preferential treatment to Americans. This is the true face of North Korea's so-called Juche ideology of self-sufficiency.

And it is not just America that gets the special treatment. In 2007, Kim took 10 of his highest ranking officials in the Workers' Party, the government and the military to the Chinese Embassy in Pyongyang and threw a party. Before that incident, he often held parties at the Chinese Embassy that lasted five hours. In 2005, Kim paid a personal visit to the Russian Embassy to receive a medal. This is the behavior of a leader of a vassal state or a colony. Of course, Kim may have been unaware that deep inside, Clinton could despise his regime, and perhaps that is why he was so happy.

In foreign countries, people refer to both North and South Koreans as just "Koreans." North Korea and Kim Jong-il are the main reasons for the depreciating value of the Korea brand. The image of Kim smiling in content at the success of his hostage operation makes South Koreans cringe in despair and shame.

Changed Korean Peninsula Situation Should Lead to Changed North Korea Policy
(Hankyoreh Shinmun, August 6, 2009, Page 27)

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Former U.S. President Bill Clinton returned to the U.S. yesterday, along with the two U.S. journalists who had been detained in North Korea for 141 days. This is a significant development which heralds a sea change on the Korean Peninsula, such as the resumption of the nuclear negotiations.

While describing the Clinton's visit as a "private" mission, the USG is taking a careful approach. This seems to be designed to gauge public opinion in the U.S. and to take into account concerns by the ROK and Japan about the U.S.'s unilateral move. Still, a big change is anticipated in U.S.-North Korea relations. First of all, North Korea's Korean Central News Agency reported that Kim and Clinton had extensive discussions and they agreed to resolve (pending issues) through dialogue. This means that they discussed a wide range of issues, including nuclear and missile programs, diplomatic normalization, and the resumption of negotiations.

The Kim-Clinton meeting was attended from the North by First Vice Foreign Minister Kang Sok-ju, who is at the helm of North Korea's policy toward the U.S., and Kim Yang-gon, Director of the United Front Department of the Workers' Party of Korea, who is in charge of North Korea's policy toward the ROK. This suggested that not only the nuclear standoff but also overall issues related to peace on the Korean Peninsula, such as inter-Korean ties, may have been discussed considerably. From the U.S. side, President of the Center for American Progress John Podesta, who served as Clinton's White House Chief of Staff and as chief of Obama's transition team, attended the meeting. This is evidence that shows that the meeting carried weight with the Obama Administration. Furthermore, Pyongyang said, "Mr. Clinton conveyed a message from Mr. Obama reflecting views on ways of improving the relations between the two countries," although the USG denied it.

Now attention is being drawn to how the two nations will use the current atmosphere - which has become favorable to dialogue - to achieve specific results. At present, the U.S. and the North are at odds over whether bilateral talks or the Six-Party Talks should be adopted as the format of dialogue. It is not easy, either, to coordinate the stances of both sides on topics regarding nuclear dismantlement, diplomatic normalization, and economic assistance. In order to resolve these issues, the two sides should become more flexible. Above all, the North needs to willingly accept bilateral dialogue within the Six-Party framework. This is because, if the ROK, China, Japan, and Russia are excluded, it will be difficult for the North to secure a security guarantee and economic aid. The Obama Administration, for its part, should not be swayed by hard-line opinions in and out of the U.S. but make clear its commitment to negotiations. It is important for Washington to give concrete shape to a "comprehensive package" as early as possible. Since the September 19 Joint Statement effectively covers all issues to be discussed with North Korea, (Washington or Pyongyang) has no reason to drag its feet and lose momentum for dialogue.

(Mr. Clinton's visit) has put the Lee Myung-bak Administration in an awkward position. A growing number of people are criticizing the ROKG, asking what it has been doing to free an ROK employee of the Kaesong Industrial Complex and the crew members of the ROK fishing vessel "Yeonan" while the USG won the release of the journalists. Furthermore, Japan's Liberal Democratic Party, which has taken a hard line toward the North, is highly likely to lose the general elections at the end of this month. The global situation is asking for an immediate overhaul of (Seoul's) policy toward the North. The ROKG should accept a growing call for a swift change in inter-Korean ties.

FEATURES

Bill Clinton Gains Reporters' Release
(JoongAng Daily, August 6, 2009)

By Reporter Ser Myo-ja

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White House, Pyongyang differ on nature of mission

After talks with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il yesterday, former U.S. President Bill Clinton obtained the release of two American journalists held for five months in the reclusive state.

An aircraft carrying the three and others was scheduled to land in Los Angeles Wednesday morning, California time.

According to the Japanese broadcaster NHK, the plane carrying Clinton, Euna Lee and Laura Ling took off from the Misawa Air Base shortly after noon. It stopped at the U.S. military air base in Aomori Prefecture for refueling, the broadcaster said.

Clinton arrived in Pyongyang Tuesday on a mission to secure the release of the journalists who were arrested near the Chinese border on March 17 while working on a story about North Korean defectors. The two were subsequently convicted of crimes against the North Korean people and sentenced to 12 years each in a labor camp.

The former American president sat down for dinner with "Dear Leader" Kim on Tuesday to discuss matters of common interest, the North's state-run media reported. The North's Korean Central News Agency reported that Kim granted special pardons to the two jailed reporters.

"Clinton expressed words of sincere apology to Kim Jong-il for the hostile acts committed against the DPRK by the two American journalists after illegally intruding into it," the KCNA said in its English report. "Clinton courteously conveyed to Kim Jong-il an earnest request of the U.S. government to leniently pardon them and send them back home from a humanitarian point of view," DPRK stands for the North's formal name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

A senior U.S. official in Washington denied yesterday that an apology was made by Clinton, according to international newswires. The official told the AFP that the two TV reporters are in "very good health."

The North's media outlet said Kim issued an order to grant a special pardon to Lee and Ling, and "Clinton courteously conveyed a verbal message from U.S. President Barack Obama expressing profound thanks for this and reflecting views on ways of improving the relations between the two countries."

"The DPRK visit of Clinton and his party will contribute to deepening the understanding between the DPRK and the U.S. and building bilateral confidence," the report said.

The White House also denied that Clinton delivered a message from Obama. The presidential office said Clinton was not Obama's special envoy and his trip was a private, humanitarian mission.

According to wire reports, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said yesterday that the two journalists released from North Korea are "extremely excited" to be on their way back to America. Secretary Clinton told reporters in Nairobi that she had spoken with her husband, saying she would talk more about his mission after Ling and Lee were reunited with their families.

In Los Angeles, the families of the journalists issued a statement, saying: "We are so grateful to our government: President Obama, Secretary (Hillary) Clinton and the U.S. State Department for their dedication to and hard work on behalf of American citizens. We especially want to thank President Bill Clinton for taking on such an arduous mission and Vice President Al Gore for his tireless efforts to bring Laura and Euna home. We must also thank all the people who have supported our families through this ordeal, it has meant the world to us. We are counting the seconds to hold Laura and Euna in our arms."

Michael Saldade, Lee's husband, picked up their daughter, Hana, earlier than usual from a kindergarten in a Korean area in Los

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Angeles on Tuesday following the news about the two reporters' release, a staffer for the education center told the JoongAng Ilbo's

Los Angeles edition. "Other parents congratulated him. He was overjoyed and told everyone that Hana's mom will arrive tomorrow."

"The family had an excruciatingly difficult time, and we are so happy that she is coming back," Jina Lee, a younger sister of Lee, said in a phone interview with the newspaper. "I still feel very cautious because she hasn't arrived here yet. She will need time to recover from her mental and physical ordeal."

Clinton Debriefing Could Prove Key to N. Korea Policy
(Chosun Ilbo, August 5, 2009, page 4: EXCERTPS)

By Correspondent Lee Ha-won

Former U.S. president Bill Clinton's unofficial debriefing about his meeting with Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang, which lasted more than two hours, is expected to have some influence on the North Korea policies of the Barack Obama Administration.

Clinton is the first high-ranking U.S. official to meet Kim since he began showing signs of ill health last summer. The U.S. government is currently preparing contingency plans to deal with sudden changes in North Korea following Kim's death. Clinton's briefing on the state of Kim's health could lead to changes in the U.S. government's contingency plans, observers speculate.

North Korea's state-run media reported that Clinton and Kim held "candid and in-depth discussions on pending issues" involving the two countries. It appears that Kim led the meeting and used the opportunity to discuss his plans to improve U.S.-North Korean relations. Kim is widely expected to have used Clinton as a medium through which he is trying to deliver a message to Obama.

The official stance of the U.S. administration is that Clinton's trip to North Korea was a "humanitarian" and "personal" visit and does not involve the U.S. government. But for the administration, which lacks primary information on the North, Clinton's debriefing will be very useful.

The contents of Clinton's unofficial report are apparently to be compiled by John Podesta, a former White House chief of staff, and David Straub, a former director of the Office of Korean Affairs at the State Department. Podesta is the head of the Center for American Progress, which has a major influence on the policies of the Obama Administration. Podesta served as the head of Obama's presidential transition committee.

Straub is fluent in Korean and visited North Korea in October 2002 with James Kelly, a former Assistant secretary of State. Straub was the one who reported to Washington comments made by North Korea's first vice foreign minister Kang Sok-ju regarding the communist country's uranium enrichment program.

(This is a translation provided by the newspaper, and it is identical to the Korean version.)

Seoul Still Baffled by Clinton's N. Korea Trip
(Chosun Ilbo, August 6, 2009, page 4)

By Reporter Ahn Yong-hyun

The ROK government was still reeling Wednesday after former U.S. President Bill Clinton's surprise visit to North Korea.

A senior government official said, "The worst-case scenario for us would be to see the repetition of the nightmare of 1994." At the time, the ROK government was completely left out in the cold as the U.S. and North Korea concluded the Geneva Agreed Framework in the wake of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's visit to Pyongyang.

Under the deal, the ROK had to bear most of the construction costs for a light-water reactor that was to be traded for the North's closure of its plutonium-producing nuclear plant in Yongbyon.

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"It's important for us to maintain close cooperation with the U.S. to prevent us from being left out in the cold as in 1994," the official added.

But a Unification Ministry official said a repeat of that disaster is unlikely. "At the moment, North Korea is excited with memories of 1994, but it seems most likely that Clinton's visit was a kind of one-point relief pitch aimed at winning the release of the American journalists. We need to watch how Washington and Pyongyang will go ahead with their dialogue," he said.

His rationale was that Carter visited Pyongyang in 1994 expressly to find a solution to the nuclear issue, while Clinton visited to seek the release of the two U.S. reporters who had been sentenced to hard labor for illegally entering the country.

The government is especially concerned about the possibility of critical public opinion seething over Seoul's failure to seek the release of a South Korean man detained at the Kaesong Industrial Complex.

A Cheong Wa Dae official claimed there had been a "sharing of views" between the ROK and the U.S. over humanitarian issues such as the female journalists under detention and the South Korean man held incommunicado at Kaesong, before Clinton went to Pyongyang. "I believe there'll also be progress in the issue of the South Korean man under detention," he said.

So far, however, North Korea has said nothing about the man, identified as Yoo, who has been held incommunicado for 129 days, and the crew of an ROK fishing boat, 800 Yeonan, who were towed to the North on July 30.

In a press briefing, the ministry said, "The government is watching closely how the release of the female journalists will affect the issues of the ROK staffer at Kaesong or the Yeonan. It's still too early to judge what kind of effect their release will have on these issues."

Clinton's Visit to Pyongyang Could Be a Turning Point in N. Korea-U.S. Relations
(Hankyoreh Shinmun, August 6, 2009, pages 4 and 5: EXCERPTS)

By Reporters Jeong Eui-gil, Son Won-je, and Lee Je-hun

Although the White House says Clinton's visit was a private mission, a KCTV report suggests it is a sign of possible improvement in relations

Former U.S. President Bill Clinton left Pyongyang Wednesday morning with the two U.S. reporters who had been detained in North Korea, and arrived in Los Angeles late at night (Korea time).

The visit to North Korea lasted only two days and one night, but its significance is great. The visit has provided a possible stepping stone for a turning point in the political situation on the Korean Peninsula, which has been growing increasingly tense since North Korea's long-range rocket launch and second nuclear test.

The Obama Administration's decision to approve Clinton's visit is a "gift" to North Korea to see if a change in the North Korea-US relationship is possible.

In a report on the results of the visit, which was released Wednesday morning, (North) Korean Central TV (KCTV) said Clinton had respectfully conveyed a verbal message from President Obama on his views on plans to improve relations between North Korea and the U.S.

There is controversy over whether there was a verbal message from Obama, but it appears that Clinton may have conveyed an outline of the Obama Administration's North Korea policy. One diplomatic expert said he must have explained at least as much as his wife, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, did last month at

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the ASEAN Regional Forum. At the time, Secretary Clinton said if North Korea gives up nuclear weapons, everything was possible, including economic aid and the construction of a peace regime and normalization of relations with North Korea.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-il's "return courtesy" for former President Clinton's visit, in addition to the pardon of the two U.S. journalists, has not yet been released. Some believe it is possible that North Korea, which has been claiming it would never abandon nuclear weapons, may have made a gesture of good faith concerning denuclearization. On the matter of "dialogue," some believe Kim may have indicated some direction for possible follow-up by saying something along the lines that North Korea has only rejected a Six-Party framework that abandons the spirit of mutual coexistence as embodied in the September 19 Joint Statement made in 2005, and not the Six-Party Talks themselves.

In addition, KCTV reported that Kim and Clinton shared a frank and

deep discussion concerning pending issues between North Korea and the U.S. and that both agreed to resolve issues through dialogue. Some see this as suggesting Kim is promising not to take additional actions to aggravate the situation in order to contribute to building the necessary atmosphere needed to for North Korea-U.S. talks.

Thanks to Kim and Clinton's "unofficial dialogue," moves toward official talks between North Korea and the U.S. are expected to take place. Some analysts suggest changes may be made in the internal power structure of the Obama Administration concerning North Korea policy. Kim Yeon-cheol, the head of the Hankyoreh Peace Research Institute said until recently, those in favor of sanctions had been the loudest. He said that while arguments for sanctions would not completely go away, the atmosphere in Washington for a resolution through dialogue might gain strength.

Meanwhile, at a briefing Tuesday afternoon (local time), White House press secretary Robert Gibbs repeatedly stressed that the issue of the journalists' release is seen separate from North Korea policy matters, and Clinton's visit was "solely (a) private mission."

Kim Jong-il Demonstrates that He is in Good Health and Obama Rescues Fellow Citizens

(JoongAng Ilbo, August 6, 2009, Page 4)

By Washington Correspondent Choi Sang-yeon and Reporter Ye Young-joon

Profit and loss statement of Clinton's visit to Pyongyang

It is presumed that former U.S. President Bill Clinton's surprise visit to North Korea does not have a "big deal" that could change the tone of U.S.-North Korea relations. This is why both the White House and the Department of State are working hard to emphasize that Mr. Clinton's visit was a "private mission." Still, observers say that the North and the U.S. have secured their respective benefits. In other words, the visit was a "win-win" event for both sides.

On August 5, domestic and foreign media outlets, including Newsweek, released their analysis about what was gained and lost in Clinton's visit to Pyongyang. Above all, they said that North Korea and its leader Kim Jong-il succeeded in asserting themselves on the global stage once again.

Profits for North Korea

(The U.S.) said that Mr. Clinton went to Pyongyang as a "private citizen," but given his political weight, the meeting between Clinton and Kim Jong-il looked like U.S.-North Korea bilateral dialogue, which Pyongyang has sought. Consequently, this could change U.S.-North Korea relations - which have seen no way out due to North Korea's nuclear test and U.S.-led UN Security Council sanctions - from confrontation to dialogue. This also seems to be related to the reason why North Korean media outlets stressed, "The meeting featured candid and in-depth discussions on the pending

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issues between North Korea and the U.S. in a sincere atmosphere." Although U.S.-North Korea relations are not close to the negotiation stage, Pyongyang hinted at its intention to pave the way, at least, for dialogue with the U.S.

In addition, Kim dispelled rumors, rampant in the international community, of North Korea's imminent collapse and demonstrated that he is still in control of the state. Furthermore, Clinton's visit presented an opportunity for Kim to flaunt his leadership inside the North and trumpet victory over the U.S.

Profits for the U.S.

Foreign media reported that the U.S. successfully won the release of the journalists without upsetting the sanctions. Indeed, after Clinton's visit to the North, the White House and the Department of State reiterated that sanctions on the North will continue until North Korea takes "irreversible" steps toward denuclearization. In particular, they clearly cautioned against viewing Clinton's visit as a thaw in U.S.-North Korea relations. This means that Washington is adhering to a "two-track" approach of sanctions and dialogue on North Korea.

Through his visit to the North, Mr. Clinton himself achieved the result of making his mark. Newsweek said that Mr. Clinton is back on the diplomatic stage with his successful visit to Pyongyang, a

feat that was not realized during his presidency.

Prospects for U.S.-North Korea relations

It is clear that the atmosphere between the U.S. and the North has improved. Now that Pyongyang's conciliatory gesture has been confirmed, it will likely give a boost to the resumption of dialogue. Through Clinton's visit, the U.S. showed the North that, "The door to dialogue is open." However, it is expected to take some time until negotiations over the North Korean nuclear issue begin in earnest. An ROKG official predicted, "Unless North Korea changes its attitude with sincerity, the U.S., for the time being, will stick to pressure rather than dialogue," adding, however, "The key is what decision the North will make. Therefore, the true nature (of the current situation) has not changed."

STEPHENS