

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on North Korea
February 6, 2008

Mr. Chairman, I welcome this opportunity for the Committee to consider ongoing developments involving North Korea and the elimination of its nuclear program. Remarkable progress has been achieved since the Committee's last hearing on the North Korean situation in July 2006. Last year, through the Six Party talks, the United States, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Russia, and China reached agreement on shutting down and sealing North Korea's main nuclear facility. In addition, there was agreement that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) would be invited back to North Korea and that North Korea would declare its nuclear programs.

Last July, North Korea took the necessary steps in its Yongbyon nuclear facilities to stop producing plutonium. American technicians now are working at Yongbyon, observing and reporting on the disablement process. Personnel of the IAEA are present as well. These disablement activities go well beyond anything undertaken under the Agreed Framework of the 1990's or in this decade. Although it is too early to determine the technical details of how North Korea's nuclear program would be disassembled, a Nunn-Lugar cooperative threat reduction model could be applied in North Korea. Officials in Pyongyang have sought information about the Nunn-Lugar program.

I believe it is in the interest of North Korea, the United States and the other Six-Party Powers to preserve the significant progress that has been made toward a denuclearization of North Korea and a normalization of relations with that country that would be anticipated to follow. The United States continues to accept the "action for action" approach adopted through the Six Party Talks. In fact, Ambassador Hill and State Department colleagues had begun consultations with the Congress in preparation for possibly removing North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, as well as eliminating the designation of North Korea under the Trading with the Enemy Act. However, it was not prudent for the Bush Administration to proceed when North Korea failed to provide a complete and thorough declaration of its nuclear program by the end of 2007, as it earlier agreed.

I understand that all six powers are focused on distinct steps in the process. We are concerned with the pace of compliance with those actions that have been agreed on. Yet, ultimately the process depends on the commitment and will of the top leaders. This includes Chairman Kim Jong Il. He has written: "In any work it is necessary to identify correctly the main knot in the whole string and undo it first by a concentrated effort, which will make it easier to unravel the other knots and push ahead with the whole work creatively." Such an effort would be usefully applied by North Korea to the present situation.

In recent months, North Korean observers have noted the ascendancy of North Korea's Foreign Ministry in matters related to the Six Party Talks and negotiations with the United States. This is in line with the authority and confidence President Bush has placed in Secretary Rice and Assistant Secretary Hill. As conditions warrant, and in coordination with the Department of State and South Korea, Secretary Gates should be prepared to engage with North Korean military leaders on a wide range of issues, such as the POW/MIA joint recovery program, which the Defense Department suspended in 2005.

President Bush, Secretary Rice, Secretary Gates and Assistant Secretary Hill are committed to the implementation of Six Party agreements. A majority in Congress are prepared to work with President Bush on projects related to North Korea's weapons of mass destruction and on steps toward establishment of normal diplomatic relations. I do not believe that U.S. commitment to the Six Party Talks or its determination to ensure the peaceful denuclearization of North Korea will change with the election of a new Administration. Moreover, members of Congress, myself included, are following this situation intently to support and fortify a unified vision on policy toward North Korea within our own government.

As the Nunn-Lugar program demonstrated in the former Soviet Union, remarkable progress can be based on mutual interest and a joint resolve to achieve peaceful outcomes. We should not assume that a similar result cannot be achieved in North Korea.

I welcome and look forward to the testimony of Secretary Hill.

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