



Joint Press Availability with Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Tokyo, Japan
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FOREIGN MINISTER KOUMURA: Well, sorry we kept you waiting, the members of the press. Through the meeting this time, we were able to reaffirm the importance of the Japan-U.S. alliance with Secretary Rice. At the outset, Secretary Rice, in connection with the most regrettable incidents that happened in Okinawa, stated that she most regretted them, and we agreed that implementation of comprehensive and effective measures to prevent a recurrence will be important. And Japan and U.S. should cooperate with each other and do our best to prevent their recurrence.

Although we have these problems, thanks to the efforts of both sides on BMD and others, Japan-U.S. security cooperation has continued to progress in a positive direction. And I agreed with Secretary Rice that further progressing these relations would be in the interests of both Japan and the United States.

And I explained to Secretary Rice, Japan is determined to discharge its responsibility as a peace-fostering nation in the international arena and stated that we shall cooperate in the fight against terrorism, including refueling operations in the Indian Ocean, and carry out studies toward a possible legislation of a general statute.

On the East Asian situation, we also on the need to respond to situations on the basis of the Japan-U.S. alliance, and also agreed to further -- agreed on the importance of further stepping up trilateral cooperation, including with the Republic of Korea on issues of common issues or concern such as the DPRK issues.

With regard to DPRK, unfortunately the Six-Party Talks are stalled and so the Japan and U.S. will work closely in coordination so the denuclearization process can move forward with an early submission of a complete and correct declaration by DPRK and progress can be made on Japan-DPRK relations, including the abduction issue.

Also with regard to Japan-U.S. cooperation on global issues, we shall have discussions over dinner.

That is all for me. Secretary Rice, please.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much, Minister. Thank you for welcoming me here. When you were in Washington last fall, you invited me to come to Japan and I am pleased to be here and I look forward to returning in June for the ministerial of the G8.

I did begin my discussion with the Foreign Minister by expressing the regrets of the United States. I earlier had had a chance to express the regret to the Prime Minister on behalf of President Bush, on behalf of myself and of the people of the United States for the terrible incident that happened on Okinawa. We are concerned for the wellbeing of the young girl and of the family and express our sympathies to them.

We did very much underscore our intention to follow through on the task force that General Wright set up before he left, and that General Rice will now carry forward, so that we can look for ways to prevent such incidents in the future. So again, I expressed to the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister the regrets of the United States.

We do have a strong partnership. The defense alliance with Japan and the alliance based on values with Japan is one of the strongest pillars of security in the Asia-Pacific region, but also a strong pillar of America's own security. We had an opportunity to talk about the progress that we have made in modernizing the alliance over these last few years, about the need to continue with our efforts at realignment.

I welcomed the return of Japan to the Indian Ocean refueling operation in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and in the global war on terrorism.

We also had an extensive discussion of the Six-Party Talks here in the Asia-Pacific region, the Korean Peninsula. I agree with the minister that we look forward to the further movement on those talks. I had a chance to discuss the conversations that I've had in South Korea and in Beijing. We have made progress on disablement. But we do now need the declaration of the North Koreans that would be complete and would, in its accuracy, show us that there is a way forward to the third phase, which should take on the further denuclearization and indeed the dismantling of the North Korean nuclear program.

I assured the minister, as President Bush did when he was with the Prime Minister in Washington, that the abduction issue continues to be of a very high priority for the United States, because this is really a terrible humanitarian situation when people have disappeared and are unaccounted for. And I pledged the continued support of the United States as the Japanese work with the DPRK to make progress on this issue. It is extremely important not just to Japan but also to the United States.

Finally, we had a chance to discuss the situation in Burma, the importance of the junta engaging the opposition in a real process of national reconciliation. We will have further talks about global issues, about Iran and about other issues tonight, as well as about the G8 agenda. And I look very much forward, minister, to talking to you about common issues like climate change, Africa and further development in Africa, and to discussing the very large but common agenda that we have for this important alliance. Thank you very much.

FOREIGN MINISTER KOUMURA: I would like to entertain questions. Japan, U.S., Japan, U.S., in that order. When recognized, please state your name and affiliation before asking your question.

Please proceed to a microphone, anyone with a question, please.

QUESTION: Sakamoto with Kyodo News Service. A question for Secretary Rice.

U.S. service members have caused incidents even after the rape of a junior high school girl in Okinawa. So much so that there is concern that it might seriously, negatively affect the Japan-U.S. alliance. I wonder what sort of discussions you had with the foreign minister and what is your own take of this problem?

And also a question about North Korea. We are already far beyond the deadline for the second phase actions, including DPRK's submission of the complete declaration of nuclear programs. And I wonder how you intend to make progress.

SECRETARY RICE: Okay, just wanted to make sure you knew there were two questions there.

First on the incident in Okinawa and incidents of that kind, I have given our deepest regrets. As I mentioned, General Wright set up a task force. That task force is really

to try to look to what we can do to prevent those incidents. He is carrying out widespread consultations around the country. Here, in the capital, General Rice now, who has taken over command, and the ambassador has been very involved, had conversations on Okinawa.

And so you can be certain that we have no desire to see this sort of thing happen. And so the United States is going to be very active with the Japanese government in trying to prevent incidents in the future.

I should mention also that, of course, we want to see justice done. And, of course, that process will continue as well.

As to the Six-Party Talks, yes, we are beyond the deadline of December. I have always felt that the deadline was important. It is also more important, though, to get this right. And given that we are going to move on to a more difficult phase even than the disabling phase, which will have to have the accounting for the material that was made, for weaponization and for dismantlement in a verifiable way, we need to establish confidence in this phase that there is the prospect for real denuclearization in the next phase.

That is also the phase in which there is anticipated to be considerable talk about political engagement on the way to normalization. And I want to underscore again that we are in very close consultation with our allies as we go forward. And any steps that the United States will take, we will be consulting with our allies as we contemplate taking them.

QUESTION: Yes, Madame Secretary, can you give us a progress report from Chris Hill today that gives you any hope that you will overcome the deadlock? And more generally, what do you think is realistically achievable before President Bush leaves office?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we are going to work as hard as we possibly can to carry through on the framework agreement that was first put forward in September of 2005 and then the follow-on agreement of February 19 of a year ago, last year. We believe that if all parties are prepared to exercise political will, that we can achieve considerable progress toward the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, that we can make progress toward ending the state of war on the Korean Peninsula and the moving to a more normal condition there, and that indeed it would be worthwhile to build on the habits of cooperation that we have attained in dealing with the nuclear issue in North Korea to begin to institutionalize some of the cooperation among the various parties who have been a part of the Six-Party Talks.

I want to be very clear about this northeast Asia peace and security mechanism that is contemplated in the framework agreement. We are not talking here about an alliance, we are not talking about a treaty. We are certainly not talking about anything that would implicate or look anything like the very deep alliances that we have with Japan or South Korea. But clearly, cooperation among the major powers in this region on issues like counterterrorism, proliferation, perhaps even disaster relief could benefit northeast Asia. And so we believe we can make progress on all of those. But we are going to need to complete the current phase.

As to what Chris Hill has been doing in Beijing, I have actually not had a chance to catch up with him. But as I said to you, we had constructive discussions yesterday and I thought it was worthwhile for him to continue those discussions. And we've had constructive discussions here today and those will add to our ability to perhaps build some momentum toward the completion of the second phase.

QUESTION: I'm Saito with (inaudible) Television. Question for Minister Koumura. There is lingering concern in Japan in connection with the abduction issue that U.S. might take DPRK off the list of state sponsors of terrorism before the abduction issue is resolved. Did you once again explain Japan's position to Secretary Rice in the meeting?

FOREIGN MINISTER KOUMURA: Yes, once again, I explained Japan's position to the secretary. And between myself and Secretary Rice -- also between President Bush and Prime Minister Fukuda, this matter was discussed as well. And on the question of the delisting from state sponsors of terrorism, once again you heard that the U.S. will fully consult with Japan.

QUESTION: Well, everything I was going to ask has already been asked, so I'll have to do this on the fly and wing it. (Laughter.) Let me try to put a finer point on (inaudible) question and that is, you've now just finished meeting with the leaders of three major players in the Six-Party Talks. Is there anything that you can point to specifically and concretely that you heard from them or that you discussed with them other than just a simple restatement of everyone's commitment towards getting to the end point that gives you this hope that you talked about for more momentum? What exactly did you accomplish on this trip?

SECRETARY RICE: I think you know the answer that I am going to give you. So, I heard a lot. We discussed a lot. We talked about how to encourage progress from the DPRK, we talked about our own commitments and how those would be fulfilled. But obviously, these are diplomatic communications and I am not going to go into great detail about what we've talked about.

I can tell you that I have affirmed at every stop that I believe that the progress that we have made thus far, particularly on the disablement, is worthy of our continued efforts to move this process forward. We have already, in making these steps, having the North make these steps toward disablement, achieved something very important, which is that we've begun to make it difficult for North Korea to continue its plutonium nuclear program.

There are still many issues to be resolved. It is not surprising, given the difficulty of what we are trying to do, that this can take some time. And it's also not surprising that the -- all of the parties to these talks have different ways in which they can encourage progress, and that's some of what we have been discussing.

But my hope for momentum, for progress, comes largely from the fact that everybody understands the importance of denuclearization, everybody is committed to the denuclearization, everybody understands that we all have obligations, but that everybody understands too that the DPRK has some work to do. Now, I want to reaffirm that if the DPRK does carry through on those obligations to disable and to also file the declaration, the United States stands ready to carry out its obligations, too. We have been exercising our obligations along the way, as have other parties to the Six-Party Talks.

But we need to get to the end of this phase and we need to move on to what I think will be a more difficult but, in fact, more consequential phase. And those are the discussions that I have been having here.

FOREIGN MINISTER KOUMURA: Thank you very much.

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