



Moving Forward in 2008: The U.S.-East Asia Relationship

Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

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MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Foreign Press Center. Pleased to have a group here today to hear from Assistant Secretary Christopher Hill from the State Department's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. He'll be discussing 2008 as we move forward throughout the year and the U.S.-East Asian relationship.

Just a reminder, when we move to the question and answer period, if you would please state your name and your news organization before you ask your question, we'd really appreciate it. Thank you so much and I will turn the podium over to Assistant Secretary Hill.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, thank you very much. Thank you all for coming today. I realized to talk about 2008, almost a fourth of 2008 has passed by, so I was thinking what is the anniversary of why we're meeting today and I figured it out. Tomorrow is the 100th, to the day, 100th year anniversary of the East Asian Bureau. (Laughter.) Well, I thought that was kind of newsworthy, but anyway. A guy named William Phillips was the first Assistant Secretary and he only lasted about nine months, but he wasn't dealing with a North Korean nuclear issue. I think he got promoted to something, but anyway. A pleasure to see you all.



My understanding is I'm supposed to talk for about 34 minutes and then leave a minute for questions. (Laughter.) Let me just say that I've just come back from -- about a week ago, I came back from a trip to the region. I spent -- I went to Vietnam for my fourth time, I think Thailand for my fifth trip, look forward to going back in about two weeks, I believe, where I'll make a trip to Indonesia and to East Timor. I would say that a lot of what is going on in East Asia is, indeed, very positive -- very positive. I know you're not interested in hearing that, so we can go right to the problems.

And the problem, of course, that I, unfortunately, have to spend most of time on is the issue of denuclearization in North Korea. I had a meeting just last week, as many of you know, in Geneva. It was a good substantive discussion. I had hoped that we could reach some conclusion about having the DPRK, the North Koreans go forward with their declaration, which they need to give to the chair of the six-party process. They were unable to do that or unable to put together something that would meet, I think, the definition that is set out in the October '07 agreement, that is complete and correct. And so we talked about this. And now, I think, the DPRK's negotiating team is back in Pyongyang and we'll give them a few days and see what the next step is.

I've said in a number of settings that I think we are at a point where we really do need to make progress soon to wrap up this second phase. I certainly would like to see it done in -- even in this month, in March, because I think if we're going to get onto the next phase, which is a very ambitious phase where we would like to see the fulfillment of the September '05 statement in which the DPRK is required to denuclearize and rejoin the Nonproliferation Treaty, we better get moving on that very quickly if we're to get that done in '08. So we are trying to get this done as fast as we can. We've devoted a lot of attention to it in recent weeks as we've been in this sort of overtime period since the end of December, but we're not there yet.

Let me just say, too, that in East Asia, I know there are some other issues that have cropped up, and one of which, of course, is the violence in Timor -- sorry, the violence in Tibet. Obviously, it's something that we've been following very closely. I think, you've all seen Secretary Rice's statement on Tibet and, in particular, the call for restraint and the call to renew the dialogue with the Dalai Lama. I don't have anything new for you on this -- on our views, which are set forth by Secretary Rice, except that we are really monitoring the situation very closely and are, of course, in touch with the Chinese on this.

So with those sort of opening comments, let me maybe turn it over to your questions. There was violence in Timor, too, but that was earlier. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Thank you, Ambassador. My name is Donghui Yu with China Press. Last week, the Pacific Commander Keating said, it's very unlikely that something will happen in the Taiwan Straits. Do you agree with that comment? If you do, does it mean the United States and China have reached a common sense that both countries will maintain the stabilities of the Taiwan Straits, particularly when referendum and election are coming? And also what prevented measure the United States would take to prevent any contingency in this area? Thank you so much.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, first of all, I think, Admiral Keating is offering a forecast of how he sees events unfolding. I mean, I would -- I'm not in any position to contradict what Admiral Keating has said. I will say that Taiwan will have elections on the 22nd of March. How these elections come out, how they're conducted is a matter for the people of Taiwan to accomplish. I'm not going to give them advice on what to do in their elections.

I think, Secretary Rice has spoken on a couple of occasions, including just when she was in Beijing just a few weeks ago, our views on the referendum idea. And so I don't really have much to add to that. Our position with respect to the Taiwan Straits, indeed with respect to the relationships with Taiwan are pretty much the same and you've heard them many times, where we have called for peaceful dialogue, no unilateral change of status, and where we've made clear that we do not support calls for Taiwan independence. So I have really nothing new to say to that.

Obviously, we call for these things because we think they're not only in our interest, but they're in everybody's interest to maintain calm and to deal with the situation through peaceful dialogue. And I think that remains true today as it was the first day it was uttered.

QUESTION: Daguchi with Kyodo News. On your meeting with Kim Gye Gwan in Geneva, how was the discussion on sequence and timing of delisting them from the state sponsor of terrorism list? Are they still insisting on seeing delisting prior to the declaration? And can you be flexible on that timing and sequence issue?

AMBASSADOR HILL: You know, I'm not sure I want to get into the specifics of what we talked about except to say, as I've said before, that I don't see sequencing and timing as a problem. I think that can be worked out. And when you look at the issues that we're dealing with there, sequencing and timing has not emerged as a problematic element in the discussions. I think the really problematic element is we don't have a commitment from the DPRK to provide a complete and correct declaration. They'd rather have one that misses a few elements; that is, that's rather incomplete.

And I think the declaration, while some people think it's just a paper exercise, after all, one of the main issues has been the continued disablement of the Yongbyon nuclear facility, disablement that followed the shutdown of that facility in the latter part of '07. So a lot of people say, "Well, why are you so concerned about the declaration when the real issues should be happening on the ground?" And I think the answer is very clear that as we move forward and as we achieve complete denuclearization, we need to have transparency in the process. We can't have a situation where they, you know, are - fail to list some of their nuclear programs, where they fail to list some of the experiences they've had, especially in their interest - in one case, in their interest in a uranium enrichment program. We need this to be clear.

So I know there's a great deal of impatience about it. People say, "Well, why can't you just accept something partial and work on the rest later?" And I think we are really at a point where we have to have a complete and correct declaration. That will be what enables us to wrap up phase two and then we will go to what I described earlier and what I continue to describe as a very, very difficult phase three. Getting a country that has produced fissile material on its own and getting that country to relinquish that fissile material is obviously going to be difficult. Again, I don't think we're asking the DPRK to do something that's not in its interest. I think it is very much in its interest to keep on this program. There will be a lot on the table in this next phase and so, a lot on the table in terms of their access to economic assistance, in terms of their diplomatic recognition, in terms of their security situation because we're prepared to replace the armistice with a more durable peace instrument.

So there is a great deal on the table that is in their interest, but they have to understand that we cannot, at the end of the day, permit them to hold on to nuclear material. So we're just going to have to keep making that clear and I've said it to them 50 times and I'll be happy to say it another 50 times. So this is where we are and I hope they will come to understand that they need to complete this phase two before we get on to phase three. And I can assure you that issues such as sequencing and, you know, who's going to step first and this sort of thing, that's not the issue. That really is not the issue. Those are issues that may come up in other negotiations, but not in this one.

Yes, ma'am. Oh, I meant the other ma'am, but we'll come back to you. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: There are more than one. Sorry. (Laughter.)

AMBASSADOR HILL: Yeah, well.

QUESTION: Yes, I have a question about Tibet. I know maybe you don't have any new position, but we have heard many contradictory information on the reason caused this violence. Since U.S. is contacting, you know, all the related parties, so I wonder, can you inform us, update some information on, you know, what really happened there and how many people actually died and what's the reason caused this violence.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Yeah, I mean, we don't have diplomats on the scene there, and this is a problem. We prefer to have our own people on the scene in these types of situation. The reason we like to have our own people is we feel very assured of the accuracy of the information, and we believe that's in everyone's interest that our information is as accurate as possible.

So, in the absence of having our own people, we have relied on a number of contacts, we rely on different pieces of information from different people. I think I don't want to be in the position right now to be giving you things that I know are available at the State Department podium, but what I would suggest is we could give you what we have in terms of facts as we know them on the table.

I don't think we are in a position, though, to give you accurate casualty reports of the kind that you've just requested. But I do know that we have some cleared press guidance -- Ken?

MR. BAILES: Yeah, they're -- well, there -- and you were saying there are conflicting reports about casualties and precisely what may have happened. In the Secretary's statement she referred to -- or the fact that we were disappointed that what started as peaceful demonstrations that became violent and then there were -- there were, apparently, some casualties there. Everybody reports that, but there are different numbers and there are different sources and causes that are reported.

And as Mr. Hill was saying, we don't have people on the ground there. We've asked to have our people be able to go in, but so far we've not gotten permission from the Chinese to do that. So we're not really in a position to do really what's, as Mr. Hill was saying -- you know, to do what's in your question, you know, sort of give you an authoritative, you know, this is what really happened because we're -- you know, to some extent, we have some of those kinds of questions ourselves.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Thank you. Maybe the lady who's not wearing a green dress. Yeah.

MODERATOR: Just a reminder, everyone, please state your name and news organization for us, too. Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you. Dong Min Lee of Yonhap News Agency. There's a lot of speculation about the format, your willingness to be flexible about how many pieces of paper need to be exchanged (inaudible).

AMBASSADOR HILL: Yes.

QUESTION: Can we assume that to mean that you will accept North Korea making separate -- I know you don't like the word "separate," but separate pieces of paper of declaration, separating -- separate between plutonium, uranium, proliferation? And also, would you be willing to accept the declaration directly from North Korea to the U.S. instead of insisting that it be given to the chair, China?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Again, I don't think formatting is a problem. I really don't think how many pieces of paper are the issue here. Moreover, China has worked very hard in this process. China has taken their responsibilities very seriously. They have put together a very good diplomatic team. They are the chair of the six-party process. I don't quite see the purpose in having the DPRK give the U.S. the declaration when, in any other multilateral diplomatic process, you would provide it to the chair. So I don't think -- I don't see the purpose of it, nor has the issue really come up. The North Koreans have not said, well, we'll give you the declaration but not the Chinese. So it's really not an issue.

So, again, what it finally looks like in terms of numbers of pieces of paper, I don't know now. I mean, I have an idea of what it's going to look like, but it's not the problem. The problem is we don't have all the elements of their nuclear program. And if they give to the Chinese as the chair an incomplete declaration that skips elements of the nuclear program, it is not politically sustainable for us or for other members of the six parties to say that we accepted a declaration, to say it fulfills the requirements in October to be complete and correct, when, in fact, it's incomplete and incorrect.

So this is a moment where I think we have to be pretty clear about what we need. Now, I know there's a lot of discussion about are there models, are there diplomatic models out there that can save people's face, are there ways to handle things that don't require people to be -- you know, to feel that they have had to change their position or something. Of course, there are things like that. And probably, in the end, some of these things can be put to use. The basic problem, though, is that the DPRK is not yet prepared to provide the complete and correct declaration.

I've also said that as difficult as this issue is, I think the next phase will probably be even more difficult, and therefore it's in -- it's my judgment that as we -- as we go forward here, I predict that if the six-party process does not work finally, the problem will not be the format of the declaration or even the scope of the declaration, because I think we will figure out a way through the declaration. I am much more focused on the next set of problems, which is what we're calling phase three.

Yeah, let me go for some geographic distribution in the back there. Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Daniel Dombey, *Financial Times*. Ambassador, you said that last week you met with your North Korean counterpart in the kind of meeting that few people would have imagined at the beginning of the Bush Administration, the kind of bilateral meeting that few people would have imagined. How would you characterize the Administration's evolution of its North Korea policy over the last seven-plus years?

And if I may, a slightly more specific question. How -- regarding two of the issues that you talked about in your testimony towards the Senate Foreign Relations Committee a few weeks ago when you talked about the go -- the North Korea go slow on removing the fuel rods and you also talked about not having -- the West and other countries not having met so far the full -- their full commitments in the shipment of fuel oil, have there been any developments in those areas over those pictures -- those issues still more or less where you left it with the lag on both counts?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Yeah, I think those issues -- with respect to your second question, I think those issues are moving forward. I think we just made another shipment of about -- I think it was 54,000 tons of heavy fuel oil that arrived in DPRK within the last week or so. So I think in terms of our commitments, we have done more than when I last reported on this a few weeks ago.

I think there are so-called heavy fuel oil equivalents that the ROK and PRC -- South Korea and China -- are working on. I think those are also arriving, so I think the record from our side is probably better. I would hasten to point out that part of the problem in delivering the fuel oil had to do with the type of fuel oil you have to go buy on the market; secondly, with a limited storage capacity that the DPRK has had in the single port through which you're supposed to deliver it. So it hasn't been a reluctance on our part to fulfill these requirements.

In terms of the DPRK's continued disabling of the facility, you know, it is going forward. Probably you could more quickly pull out the fuel rods from the reactor than they are being pulled out. You know, this is not a really crucial point at this time, so I think in terms of the disabling activity and the provision of heavy fuel oil or heavy - the provision of this kind of economic assistance, things are going well. Where they are - where things are going less well is on the key issue of the declaration.

Now with respect to your first question, my meeting with the DPRK, first of all, I think the six-party process is pretty well-established now. I think it's shown that it can take on some of the tough issues in this tough problem. We have, I think, a pretty good chemistry among the various members of the six-party process. I mean, as soon as I met with the DPRK representative, I also - we reached out and briefed the host on it. We also briefed the other members. I did it personally in the case of the Japanese and the South Koreans. I think we briefed others through the embassies. So I think the overall sort of cohesiveness and capacity of the six-party process is going well.

It has always been, for me, since I came on the scene in '05, a long time ago - I think William Phillips was still alive then - when I came on the scene in '05, you know, we have had a six-party process, a multilateral process in which we embed bilateral meetings. The bilateral meetings, at first, all took place in Beijing. We started expanding that. I think I met the - my DPRK counterpart in January in Berlin, January '07 in Berlin. I've also made a couple of trips to the DPRK, but I had numerous bilateral meetings with the others. So it's a multilateral process and like most multilateral processes that I've been involved in, you don't just sit there with six delegations in the room. You have bilateral meetings.

I don't think there's any - there should be any doubt that this is - that if we get to the end of this and if this is successful, it will be a success of multilateral diplomacy in Northeast Asia, so much so that one of the elements we really want to see go forward is the idea of creating a permanent mechanism, a permanent peace and security mechanism in Northeast Asia, because we believe this region of the world, which is such a productive region in the world, ought to be some - producing some multilateral structures as well.

So I think the multilateralism is alive and well. It's fledgling, but I think the six-party process has been the catalyst for it. That's about three different metaphors. Sorry about that.

All right. Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Rodney Jaleco, ABS-CBN News, Philippines. The Philippines, China and Vietnam signed a joint exploration treaty for the South China Sea, specifically the Spratly Islands. And apparently, there has been some problem with the Manila side over ratification of that agreement. May we know how much weight the U.S. gives to this kind of arrangement to promote stability in that part of Asia?

AMBASSADOR HILL: These types of --

QUESTION: That joint exploration approach to resolve the conflicting territorial claims over the Spratlys.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Yeah, obviously, when you reach agreements of this kind, you don't want to open up new agreements - I mean, new problems that will be caused by the agreement. I would rather not respond, though, to this particular issue without doing a little more research on it. I know that our embassies have followed this issue very closely. I know that, you know, we want to make sure that this is an agreement that, again, doesn't create any perception of unfairness on the part of another party. But I think I'm going to have to take the question and get back to you on that.

Ken, any help on that?

MR. BAILES: Well, I'm not familiar with the specific agreement --

AMBASSADOR HILL: Yeah.

MR. BAILES: -- but our general position is that we don't have a position on the various things, that our concerns relate to the claimants resolving things in a peaceful manner. And we also have concerns with respect to freedom of navigation in the area. So that's been one general position.

AMBASSADOR HILL: But his question has to do with when you deal with an issue between a couple of parties.

MR. BAILES: Well, the question is all - that there are many claimants. I don't know which claimants, you know, may have claim on the area that, you know, you're referring to in your agreement because I'm not familiar with the agreement. But that's our - that's our general position.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Can we get some guidance for this gentleman?

MR. BAILES: Okay.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Okay.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Paul Eckert of Reuters. The - you mentioned multilateralism in the context of North Korea. There has been talk, at least in the realm of think tanks, of reviving the so-called TCOG, the Trilateral U.S.-Japan-South Korea process. Are you, indeed, moving in that direction and is that something that you've heard anything from the North Koreans about in terms of fearing that they're being ganged up on or anything like that? Have you floated it with Kim Gye Gwan?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, I don't need to get their permission to have meetings between the Japanese and the ROK and the U.S. I would like to proceed with that. I think all three sides would like to have these kinds of meetings. You know, it's an effort to try to discuss our strategies and see how we can go forward. So we have discussed the idea of doing it. Traditionally, we would do it ahead of a six-party meeting. And so I think we would -- we would anticipate that before the next six-party meeting, we'd probably do one of these trilateral meetings.

I participated in a few of them in '05 and from our vantage point, we'd like to do more in that. And I'm pleased that both the ROK and the Japanese Government also have shown a greater interest. So we will definitely do it. And having these meetings doesn't mean we're ganging up on anybody, so no one needs to worry about our having these meetings. We are the three baseball-playing countries of the six-party process; we have some things to discuss. But no, I think we will do that and, you know, when we get to a next six-party meeting, you'll see us arranging something like that.

Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: Thank you. Naichian Katz from Phoenix Satellite Television of Hong Kong. Ambassador Hill, you talk about Tibet and Taiwan's election. My question is: Are you concerned that the way China dealt with Tibet and protestors may have unexpected implication on Taiwan's upcoming presidential election and maybe negative implications on the cross-strait relations? Thank you.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, I'm -- first of all, I'm not going to handicap the -- I'm not going to, you know, make judgments about how the Taiwan -- people in Taiwan are going to make their vote. I mean, they have information they'll look at, information -- and I'm not going to start predicting, you know, what things that happen in the world can affect the vote. Obviously, you know, we think -- you know, we look forward to a free and fair election in Taiwan. We have every reason to expect it to be. It'll be happening in just a couple of days from now. But I'm not really in a position to tell you what is affecting the vote and what is not affecting the vote.

Yes.

QUESTION: Hello, I'm (inaudible) working for the (inaudible) of South Korea. Last year, you visited Pyongyang twice and you delivered President Bush's president letter to Mr. Kim Jong-il and you -- you went to Berlin and you went to Geneva. It seems like you tried every means possible to negotiate with them. What else do you have to persuade them to do with a full and (inaudible) for declaration? And did you set new deadline for declaration at this meeting with Mr. Kim Gye Gwan?

AMBASSADOR HILL: No. I mean, I certainly expressed my concern about the timing and the urgency of getting this done quickly. I have tried a lot of ways to try to move this -- to move this along, as you suggest. I've traveled a long way. You know, I have -- this is -- this diplomacy is a team sport. I have a lot of people who are doing a lot of work on this issue. I mean, if you look at, you know, the number of trips that Sung Kim and Paul Haenle made to DPRK, people are really -- you know, in the U.S. delegation, we are doing all we can and working as hard as we can. And you know, it's true in diplomacy but it's true in life generally: You should do the best job you can so that, you know, if something doesn't work out, you won't spend the rest of your life sort of wondering, did I -- could I have done something more, could I have tried a little harder, worked a little harder. And I feel very positive that, you know, all the members of our team have done everything they can do. And so we'll have to see.

Again, I would not ask people to do something that's not in their interest, and I think it's very much in the DPRK's interest to get going on this. When you look at the problems that country is facing, they need to get moving on this. They have many, many problems. None of them is being helped by the presence of nuclear weapons. So we'll see.

MODERATOR: We have time for one last question.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Mike, better be about the Red Sox. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Mike LaVallee, TBS.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Okay. I know in Geneva, you said that there were a lot of issues of substance that weren't cleared up, but you seem to be - have - be a little bit more optimistic on format. I'm wondering if you came to an understanding or close to an understanding on format in Geneva. And on the format, the issue of a secret document on the sensitive issues of uranium and proliferation, it's still in the press, it refuses to die down. Can you definitively say that the United States will not accept a secret - a separate, secret document on these issues? (Laughter.)

AMBASSADOR HILL: I can definitively tell you that format is not the problem. How - you know, these things have to be explainable to our public, so the idea of a secret document secretly arrived at that one can never describe, you know, that's not what this is really about. I mean, this is about seeking transparency. So again, how we do that and the format, what documents are actually, you know, put out for people's perusal, you know, I'm not in a position to say with any great - in any great detail. But you know, we are not interested in more secrecy. We're interested in more openness.

And - I mean, that's what the declaration is all about too: Put things on the table, resolve issues that have taken place and move on. I think the - to some extent, one of the problems we seem to get from the DPRK is that as we ask questions, they feel that somehow, this will be a never-ending series of questions. They think that I have nothing better to do in my time or in my life than to keep asking them questions. And they're kind of misunderstood where I am. We ask questions because we need answers and when we get the complete and correct answers, we'll move on.

So the DPRK does not need to worry that our efforts to get clarity on this will somehow boomerang, will somehow come back to cause problems for them. They need to understand that this is how we resolve things and when we resolve them, we will move on and try to resolve the next problem. So it's a sequential, step-by-step approach and people always say, "Why are you going step by step?" And the answer is you can't just do it in one leap. You've got to, you know, work on each of these problems, resolve them, move on to the next.

And again, I think people do need to remind themselves that we have made some headway. We got Yongbyon shut down, we've got it disabled and with every passing day, it's more and more disabled. Now we've got to get a complete declaration in order to get on to some of the continuing -- the next elements and we'll continue to work that. And I'm telling you, at the end of the day, if this doesn't work, it's not because we didn't try hard enough.

QUESTION: Did you (inaudible) format?

AMBASSADOR HILL: We have discussed format and we anticipate we will not have a problem on format.

MODERATOR: Thanks so much, everyone, for coming.

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