



Remarks With Republic of Korea Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Yu Myung-hwan After Their Meeting

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Benjamin Franklin Room
Washington, DC
March 26, 2008

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(1:00 p.m. EDT)

SECRETARY RICE: It's a great pleasure to welcome Foreign Minister Yu of the Republic of Korea. I had an opportunity to meet with him when I was in Seoul for the inauguration of President Lee Myung-bak, but he was not yet officially Foreign Minister at the time and he has now taken up those duties.

We've had a really very good discussion, first together and then over lunch, about the very strong relationship that the United States and the Republic of Korea maintains. It is a relationship that has at its core democratic values and that sustains a global and a regional commitment to security, peace and democracy.

It is also, of course, a relationship that is built on a strong defense alliance, that has been a stabilizing force for the Korean Peninsula and for the region. For decades, it is a defense alliance that has been modernizing over time, and we are very proud of that work.

But, of course, the relationship is very broad. We've also had an opportunity to discuss the free trade agreement which is before -- will be before the Congress and which we hope to see completed and passed.

And we've had an opportunity to discuss regional issues of interest. In particular, we've spent significant time talking about the six-party talks in which we are both engaged, talks that, if they can lead to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, if all parties follow their obligations, would really be landmark -- have a landmark agreement in terms of a more stable Korean Peninsula and a more stable region.

So we've had extensive discussions. I think they're discussions that we'll have many more times in the future. But I just wanted to say to you, Minister, and to the Korean press that is here that, really, one of the most profoundly impressionistic times that I've had as Secretary was to go to the inauguration of President Lee because South Korea is such a vibrant democracy, such a vibrant economy. It was not always so, but we believe that the sustained support and the sustained friendship of the United States and South Korea has helped to bring South Korea to this point. And as a result, the United States has no better friend than the Republic of Korea, a great democracy and an ever more promising and prosperous economy.

And so thank you for the opportunity to have been with you on that very special day, and by the way, to listen to Beethoven done really quite beautifully by the national orchestra. Thank you very much.

MINISTER YU: Thank you, Madame Secretary. Secretary Rice and I had a very good meeting and followed by a working luncheon. We discussed matters related to the preparation for the upcoming visit by the President Lee Myung-bak to Washington and Camp David, and we discussed ways to make it a success.

Secretary Rice and I shared a view that our alliance relationship has played an important role in maintaining peace and security for Korea, thus promoting this economic development and democratization for the last several decades. And we also agreed to strengthen joint efforts to develop the traditional friendly and cooperative relations into a future-oriented partnership.

Secretary Rice and I also discussed North Korean nuclear problem and shared the view that six-party talks is a useful venue to pursue a peaceful denuclearization of North Korea. We agreed to increase our efforts, in close coordination with other members of the six-party talks, to persuade North Korea to submit complete and correct declaration so that the next round of six-party talks can be convened to go into next phase of dismantlement of North Korean nuclear programs.

And also we discussed about economic trade and economic issues, too. We agreed that Korea-U.S. FTA will provide an important institutional framework to expand national interest of both countries.

We also agreed to expedite the process of Korea's participation in the U.S. Visa Waiver Program to promote people-to-people exchange and mutual understanding between our two countries.

And last but not least, we agreed to extend the scope of our bilateral cooperation on key global issues such as climate change and clean energy development, and also fighting against terrorism and nonproliferation, as well as UNPKO activities, human rights and democracy and so on.

Thank you very much.

QUESTION: This question addressed to both the ministers. In your discussions, did you discuss the current impasse in the efforts to end North Korea's nuclear weapons drive, particularly in terms of the declaration?

And the question of South Korea easing its restrictions on U.S. beef, as well as any timelines in terms of visa procedures for those two countries?

SECRETARY RICE: I think that was three questions, Minister -- (laughter) -- but we'll take them.

First of all, on North Korea, as the Minister said, we had extensive discussions about the six-party talks. We have made some progress in terms of the shutdown of the reactor and the disablement of the reactor. But it is really time now for there to be movement on the declaration so that, with that declaration in hand, we can move forward on the next phase in the agreed statement, which is to actually dismantle the North Korean program and account for all of the programs and materials and the like. Because, ultimately, that is the only way that we are going to be able to realize the vision of a completely denuclearized and peaceful Korean Peninsula. And so we did have that discussion.

We did talk also about the visa issue. I think the Minister has spoken to that.

And as to beef, the United States believes that our beef is safe and that the markets ought to be opened to it all around the world. And this has been a trade issue, and we are very desirous of having beef accepted in markets, as should be the case given its safety and our adherence to international standards concerning beef production and shipment.

I should just say one other thing on the visa issue. We are delighted that the Visa Waiver Program has moved here, because South Korea is a really good friend and we want as many South Korean tourists and students and visitors and business people to come to the United States as possible with as great freedom as possible. It's important to us, just as it's important to South Korea.

MINISTER YU: Regarding North Korean nuclear issue and about the declaration, I think time and patience is running out. So I hope North Korea will submit a declaration as soon as possible, so as not to lose good timing.

Regarding beef, I think it's a longstanding trade issue and I hope the issue will be resolved as soon as possible through technical expert meeting. And regarding the visa, I hope it will be done as quickly as possible, hopefully within this year.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) from KBS. As a part of the strengthening the U.S.-Korea alliance, do you expect Korea to join the PSI program or MD program, and are there going to be any schedule to discuss about this subject?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, let me just say how much we've achieved already in the strengthening of the alliance with South Korea. I think we've modernized the alliance. I think that we have improved both the positioning of American forces, our ability to train and to be responsive to the concerns of the 21st century, not the way that we were structured in the 20th century. We've been able to, I believe, relieve some pressure on populations with these efforts to redeploy. So there's a lot going on in the defense alliance.

Obviously, as we continue to talk about the threats of the future, whether they be proliferation or the proliferation of missiles which leads to the need for missile defense, we look forward to consultations with our Korean partners. But of course, these will be decisions for South Korea. But I feel that we have an open relationship, we have good contacts between our defense officials, we have good contacts between our foreign ministry officials, and these are discussions that will be normal to as deep and broad a relationship as we enjoy.

MINISTER YU: Korea supports the purpose of the PSI, but because of the unique circumstances of where we are located, we are limiting our participation as of now.

QUESTION: Kim Ghattas from the BBC. Madame Secretary, we're wondering about the specifics of what is holding up the six-party talks and whether the issue of proliferation and Syria is still the sticking point.

Minister, you're also talking about the fact that time is running out. What are you suggesting to make this process move forward? What are you offering?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, as to what is holding it up, it is the declaration that is holding it up. And we expect that the declaration and any associated documents will show the full range of the North Korean programs and activities so that there can be an effort to verify and to deal with anything that has happened concerning North Korean programs and proliferation and the like. We've been concerned about North Korean proliferation for quite a long time.

The six-party framework should be able to deal with this problem – or these problems so that we can stay on course to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. But it requires, first, that there be an accounting for those activities and for those programs. And so that's the process in which we're engaged. And again, it should – it was supposed to have been completed on December 31st. I'm not one to say that exact deadlines are that important. To get it right is more important. But I completely agree with the Minister that we've been at this for quite a long time and we are prepared, the United States is prepared, to meet its obligations when North Korea has met its obligations.

MINISTER YU: North Korea was supposed to submit declaration by the end of last year, so in order not to lose timing and momentum of six-party talks, we hope that North Korea will submit declaration as soon as possible.

QUESTION: Thank you. My question is to both Madame Secretary and Foreign Minister Yu. What is the link, if there is any, between humanitarian aid to North Korea and the current impasse on the six-party talks? Given the delay in the declaration, are both governments still willing to go ahead with food assistance and other types of humanitarian assistance to North Korea?

MINISTER YU: To me or to Madame Secretary?

SECRETARY RICE: There's a very clear path ahead in terms of what is expected of North Korea and what is expected of the other parties to the six-party talks. And so as North Korea goes along the path that it is supposed to, fulfills its obligations, then other parties in the six-party talks will do the same. And for instance, the North Koreans have been disabling; fuel deliveries have therefore been available to the North Koreans. So it should be very clear, and this was laid out in a way -- it was the North Koreans who talk about action for action. It's been laid in a way that everyone knows what they need to do and they know in what sequence they need to do it, and so that's the path that we're following.

MINISTER YU: Well, food aid is basically humanitarian aid. But providing annually a larger scale of food is not 100 percent humanitarian. But if there is anything a big necessity in North Korea, I think we have to provide food aid without any conditions.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. And let me just say the United States has always believed that humanitarian needs of people need to be met wherever they are. So on that point, we're in complete agreement.

Thank you.

MINISTER YU: Thank you very much.

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Released on March 26, 2008

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