



Interview by the BBC World Service

Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
 Jakarta, Indonesia
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QUESTION: First of all, just explain for us why you've come back to Indonesia this time.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, first of all, this is a very important country for us, very important relationship for us, and the opportunity to come here and to exchange views with the Foreign Minister, with the President, with the Defense Minister is something we very much value. We look forward to working with Indonesia on some important problems, including Burma. We look forward to working together on problems such as how to strengthen ASEAN. In particular, Secretary Rice is very much looking forward to participating in the ASEAN meeting this year.

QUESTION: What would you like Indonesia to do on the issues like Burma? It's been a very active time in the region. Is Indonesia doing enough? What else would you [want] them to do?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, first of all, Indonesia is a great friend, and we really listen to what Indonesia has to say on these issues. Clearly we have a situation with Burma where they're not listening to anybody. They have made it very difficult for Mr. Gambari to do his job. They have come up with a political process that clearly is not going to get them anywhere and is not going to take care of the problem. So for me, it's an opportunity to come here and listen to what the Indonesian authorities say about this. And I think we are in sync in terms of what Burma has to do.

QUESTION: You're in sync about what Burma has to do, but what about the plans to get there? What plans have you come up with jointly with Indonesia?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, Indonesia is in the Security Council. So we are working with Indonesia there. I think Indonesia has great interest in seeing Gambari succeed. I've talked that over with the Foreign Minister here. So, we'll see. This is not an easy problem. There's nothing that Indonesia or anybody else can just snap their fingers and get the Burmese junta to come along. But I think what's important is that Indonesia is a key member of ASEAN, and I do believe that ASEAN will be part of the solution in this overall problem.

QUESTION: Would you like to see Indonesia use its influence within ASEAN more to try to get that to happen?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, it's not for me to say how much influence Indonesia should use within ASEAN. I will say Indonesia has a key role to play in ASEAN. I think it's one of the stronger, one of the oldest members of ASEAN, and I think the role that Indonesia plays in ASEAN has been very positive.

QUESTION: Let's talk a little about North Korea. It's got a little bit hectic over there recently. How serious is the downturn, I suppose you could say, in the relation at the moment?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: We have been working with the North Koreans in recent weeks to try to see if we could resolve this issue of the declaration that would enable us to move on to what we hope would be the final stage, which is their giving up or abandoning their nuclear ambitions. So it is not an easy process. Certainly there has been some very unhelpful, one could even say some intemperate remarks from North Korea about the South Koreans, in particular some ad hominem remarks concerning the South Korean President. They are not only inappropriate but they are truly unhelpful.

But what is interesting is to see, as I was just there, is to see how calm and relaxed the South Koreans are if you compare that to 1994, when North Korea famously threatened to turn South Korea into a "sea of fire." At that time there was a lot of concern in South Korea, people buying products off of supermarket shelves in the event that there'd be some crisis. And you did not get that sense at all this time in South Korea. So, there is a body of thought that says the North Korean are really trying to affect the South Korean parliamentary elections which come up on April 9th. Whatever it is, it's not working.

QUESTION: There been some rumors about the way to solve the impasse over declaration -- perhaps there would be to have one official document and one secret document, and the secret one would look at relations with Syria, for example; they would look at the uranium program. Is that going to happen?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: First of all, I'm not in the position to tell you what kind of format we are going to use. My own view is we should be flexible on format, but pretty firm on the content. I'm not so worried about what the format looks like. But at the end of the day, we need to be able to explain to people what we are doing. We can't have a situation where they pretend to give us a complete declaration and we pretend to believe them. We need a seriously arrived at process. So we'll see.

We've had some discussions with them in recent weeks. The discussions would lead us to believe that we are closing some of the gaps we've had. People always ask me, "Are you close to a solution?" And, the answer is, "I won't know until we actually reach the solution." Then I can tell people how close we were.

QUESTION: But the talks you've been having, have they been talks along those lines?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, they have been along the lines of trying to deal with our concerns about their activities. I would say format, how we solve this, has not been the problem. The real problem is whether they are going to acknowledge what they have been up to.

QUESTION: But the solution that you've been working on, would it be perhaps they acknowledge to you, but not publicly?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I would caution you in thinking that they can just make secret acknowledgments to us. We've long since passed the time when we have secret agreements, secretly arrived at. Whatever is arrived at needs to be explained to our publics. Our public needs to know what has actually transpired. So I think we can work on that in a way that we can find some face-saving solution, but we cannot do that at the expense of the truth.

A lot of people ask, "Well, why are you so worried about this? After all, if we can just get through this, we can go onto the next stage." Actually, as we go on to the next stage, we do need some real transparency in this process. We need a situation where the North Koreans understand that they're going to have to acknowledge what they've been up to and that that acknowledgement will allow us to go further. So being open and being North Korea are not synonymous concepts. It's going to take us a little while, but we'll see if we can get there.

QUESTION: And when you say that you're making progress, does that mean that North Korea has acknowledged its uranium program?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, again I'll tell you about it when we make an agreement. But the more I talk about it now, the more difficult it's going to be when I next meet them.

QUESTION: Fair enough. Meeting early next week, it is going happen in Jakarta?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: First of all, we don't have any announcement to make at this time, when and where the meeting will be -- except I can tell you it won't be here in Jakarta.

QUESTION: In Indonesia?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Again, I don't want to be speculating, but we're not expecting it to be here.

QUESTION: The situation in Tibet has drawn the attention of your government recently. Yesterday China jailed a human rights activist for three and a half years. Where do you stand on the position of China's hosting of the Olympics now? It was supposed to improve their human rights track record, and it doesn't seem to have done that.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, first of all, we're obviously very concerned about the developments in recent weeks. We've been especially concerned about the outbreak of violence and the apparent lack of restraint we've seen. The amount of destruction in Lhasa was certainly cause for great concern. We would like to see a much greater effort in dialogue. We know there were some efforts in the past between representatives of the Dalai Lama and the Chinese authorities. We think this is the way to go, and we'd like to see some greater restraint.

With respect to the Olympics, our President has been pretty clear that we don't think it is appropriate to be boycotting Olympics or Olympic ceremonies. We don't think this is going to solve a problem. And, as Secretary Rice made clear, we think that sort of activity can really be taken as great insult by the Chinese people, by 1.3 billion Chinese people. And I think it's very important for people outside of China to understand the degree to which the Chinese are very proud of hosting these Olympics. This is not some government issue versus a popular issue. Everyone in China is very proud of this. And so people who sort of put this issue at play -- that is, talk about boycotting the Olympics in some respects -- need to understand that they are doing so in a way that could really cause problems with the sensitivities of Chinese people at large, not just the Chinese government.

QUESTION: But the Chinese Government itself linked those two issues when it bid for the Olympics. It said this is going to help us sort of open up, human rights, and all this stuff.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I want to emphasize that we are not the Olympic organizing committee, the International Olympic Committee. It was not the United States Government, it wasn't the British Government that was the arbitrator of the procedures by which China secured the Olympics. The fact is, the IOC gave the Olympics to China. China is going to have the Olympics this summer. And our job is not so much to deal with the Olympics; that's where athletes operate. Our job is to see what we can do to lessen tensions in Tibet and look for ways to get some progress there.

QUESTION: You're going on to East Timor after this, I think. Why are you going there?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, if you go back to see what happened in East Timor in the late 90s, it was an issue that everyone in the world was very aware of as an international issue, as so many countries were involved in trying to make sure there was a good outcome there. I remember very clearly a year or two later, when they had the independence celebrations in East Timor, the importance so many countries attached to it. So many countries sent representatives to the ceremonies there. And yet today, here we are in 2008 and how many countries are really thinking about East Timor? And yet, if you look at what East Timor has been through in the last couple of years -- some real terrible outbreaks of violence, continued internally displaced people; you can go right downtown Dili as I did a couple of years ago and you can see people living in tents --well I think for all of us who worried so much about the attainment of East Timor's independence back in 1999, we all should continue to think about what is happening in East Timor. Is the goal that we all thought was the right thing to do -- that is, a proper referendum and their right to take their place in the international community? I think it behooves us all to continue to pay attention and not to move on to some other issue.

So this will be my second trip there. I was there about 18 months ago, and I'd like to see how they are doing. I'd like to hear from the authorities what their plans are. I want to see whether governance issues are improving, whether capacity building is improving. And most importantly, I'd like to see if there is anything more we can be doing. I think countries that supported this whole process shouldn't be forgetting about it now. So that's why I'm going.

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