



Negroponte Meets the Press in Tokyo

John Negroponte, Deputy Secretary of State

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DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: It's a great pleasure to be here this afternoon, and I'm also honored that my first trip abroad as deputy secretary of state is to the country of Japan. I've had extensive experience dealing with Japan during the course of my diplomatic career over more than four decades, and therefore have been able to personally witness and personally experience the critical nature of the United States-Japan alliance. Japan is a good friend, a dependable partner, and one of our closest allies. Our close ties are based not only on our shared desire for peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region but also on our mutual desire to promote freedom and security throughout the world. Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula continues to be a key objective of United States foreign policy. The Initial Actions Agreement reached during the six-party talks in Beijing last month is a good first step but just the first step in a process that will lead to a more stable and secure Northeast Asia. As we move ahead with implementing the six-party joint statement and the Initial Actions Agreement, United States-Japan coordination and cooperation are even more important. We remain mindful of Japan's concerns including those regarding the abduction issue, and we share Japan's desire to resolve this issue. We also appreciate the Japanese government's strong support for the transformation of United States Armed Forces presence in Japan and in the region. We reached a comprehensive agreement with Japan last year on military transformation, and we look forward to further progress in implementing the agreement during the next two-plus-two meeting - that is the next meeting of our respective secretaries of defense and foreign ministers - and beyond. The United States and Japan are the two largest donors of development assistance in the world. We appreciate Japan's continued assistance and support for the people of Afghanistan, and we look forward to more cooperation on global issues based on our shared values of freedom and democracy. We are very supportive of Japan's regional diplomacy, including Prime Minister Abe's early visits to China and South Korea, as well as Japan's role in the six-party talks and our strategic partnership, which decreases the threat of conflict in this vital part of the world. We also understand the importance of the abduction issue, and our sympathy is with the families of the abductees. President Bush and Vice President Cheney have both met the parents of Megumi Yokota, who was abducted by North Korean agents in 1977 and remains unaccounted for. We share the anguish of the Japanese government and the families of the abductees, and we call for a proper accounting of their fate. Again, let me reiterate how pleased I am to be back in Japan, particularly as part of my first official travel since assuming the responsibilities of deputy secretary of state, and now I'd be pleased to try and answer any questions that you might have. Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, I'm Satoru Suzuki with TV-Asahi, Japanese television network. I do appreciate your comments on the abduction issue. Now under the February 13 agreement, the United States is beginning the process of removing the designation of the DPRK as a state sponsor of terrorism. If they are delisted, would that open the way for bilateral economic assistance from the United States and otherwise also huge loans from the World Bank and IMF? Your predecessor former Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage called North Korea's abduction of Japanese citizens as "acts of terrorism." Do you agree with him? What will the North Koreans have to do about the Japanese abductees who are still in North Korea if they are to be delisted?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Well, first of all, as I said in my comments, that we believe very strongly that these abductees must be accounted for, and we support your government's demands of the North Korean government that they comply with this request. So that would be my first point. My second point would be when it comes to such issues as lifting of sanctions or delisting North Korea from the sponsors of terrorism list, those are issues that we have simply agreed to begin to discuss as a part of this process that was launched by this Initial Actions Agreement. But as I believe Ambassador Christopher Hill has said already on more than one occasion, this is not a process that we would expect to move very rapidly and that we think there are many other aspects of compliance with this Initial Actions Agreement that would have to have moved forward substantially before you could expect significant movement on an issue such as removal of sanctions or the delisting from the counterterrorism list.

QUESTION: Pier Luigi Zanatta from the Italian News Agency. Are you going to meet Mr. Kyuma?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Mr. Kyuma is the minister of defense. I do not believe so, because he is very occupied with activity in the Diet today with respect to the budget, but I have already had a meeting earlier this afternoon with the deputy defense minister, Mr. Moriya, and we had an excellent meeting and went over a range of issues together and both recalled the fact that we had met twice before, once during Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to the United States and once when I was out here previously in my capacity as director of national intelligence. But no, I will not meet Mr. Kyuma.

QUESTION: I'm Yoshitake from the Asahi Shimbun. About North Korea's uranium enrichment capabilities, I know you had some evidence in the past, but I understand people in Washington started to use terms like "moderate confidence." So could give us your current assessment on the issue?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Well, I've been looking at some of the same material that you have, and I think that the judgment - as I understand it - of the intelligence community is that they are very confident that North Korea has had an enrichment program in the past, and they are moderately confident that this program still continues. I think the important point to make here is that whatever the case may be, the Initial Actions Agreement, as one of its first steps, calls for a full and complete accounting by North Korea of its various nuclear programs. So one of the activities which we would expect North Korea to account for is its uranium enrichment activities.

QUESTION: I'm Takashi Ono with TV Asahi. The US government insists that it is not planning to attack Iran, but according to some media reports, like BBC and other reports, senior officials at the Central Command in Florida have already selected their target sets inside Iran. Is that really true, and how do you see the crack in the Bush administration over the policy against North Korea and in Iran?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: We have repeatedly stated that our desire and our objective is to resolve the differences that we have with the government of Iran through peaceful means, and that is why we are engaged in such a significant diplomatic effort at the United Nations to persuade Iran to comply with the demands of the international community. One UN Security Council resolution, as you know, has already been passed several months ago, and the possibility now arises that there will be another such resolution in light of the fact that the International Atomic Energy Agency last week filed a report to the Security Council saying that Iran continues to be out of compliance with its obligations. This is not a unilateral view of the government of the United States. This is the view of the international community, but I would like to state emphatically that it is our desire and our hope that this issue can be resolved by peaceful means.

QUESTION: Hitoshi Oomae with Mainichi Newspaper. Mr. Secretary, I am very curious about your assessment of China, because your predecessor calls China a stakeholder, so in your coming to China, what do you expect of your conversation with China, and how do you describe your relationship with China?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: I will be going to China tomorrow as a continuation of my trip to the region, then after two days in China, I will be going to South Korea. My predecessor, Mr. Robert Zoellick, had established a dialogue, a senior dialogue, with the government of China to talk about a range of issues in our relationship and also to exchange views about various international issues. My intention, on this particular trip, is to reacquaint myself with Chinese leaders, get to know counterparts, and lay the basis for the continuation of the senior dialogue that was carried out by my predecessor, Mr. Robert Zoellick. I think as far as the content and the substance of those discussions, I would probably prefer rather than discussing them now on the occasion of this press meeting perhaps to wait until I have had a chance to go to China and carried out my conversations there, and then perhaps talk to the press about that aspect of my trip to the region after I've been there.

Perhaps one more question.

QUESTION: My name is Fernando Alvarez from EFE Spanish news agency.

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Buenos tardes. *[Short dialogue in Spanish]*

QUESTION: Some congressmen in the States lately were pushing a statement on Japan saying that there's overwhelming historical record of the Japanese usage of "comfort women" in the Second World War. And the Japanese ambassador said that it could harm the otherwise sound US-Japan relationship. And Taro Aso, foreign minister of Japan, said that this is extremely regrettable and definitely not based on facts. How does this affect the relationship between the US and Japan?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Well, maybe a couple of points here. First, my understanding is that in the past - I think in 1993 and again in 2001 - prime ministers of Japan have expressed apologies for what happened with respect to "comfort women" during the Second World War. I think our view is that what happened during the war was most deplorable but that as far as some kind of resolution of this issue, that this is something that must be dealt with between Japan and the countries that were affected. This is something - it's a historic issue that needs to become the subject of some kind of understanding between the affected countries and Japan itself.

I think what we would express is the hope that, notwithstanding this issue, that it not detract from the ability of these countries to move forward on the very, very important agenda that is before us here in this part of the world. There are many, many very important opportunities and challenges that need to be dealt with by Japan, other countries in the region, ourselves, China, South Korea, and so forth, and we want to move forward in a positive manner on these agendas. So to the extent that this issue disrupts our ability to do that, that's a cause for concern.

I think that - if there's one more question, that's fine.

QUESTION: John Brinsley, Bloomberg News. When you say that what happened during the war was deplorable, are you specifically referring to the forcing of women in Asia into sexual slavery by the Japanese army?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: I think I'm just going to stick to - I'm going to stick by what I said, and I don't think I'm amplify it or elaborate on it.

Again, I want to thank you all for the opportunity to be with you this afternoon. I appreciate it very, very much indeed. Thank you.

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 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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