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President Bush's Meeting with Chinese President

Background Press Briefing by a Senior Administration Official on the President's Meeting with Chinese President Hu
Evian, France

 [In Focus: G8 2003](#)

8:45 P.M. (Local)

MR. MCCORMACK: Good evening, everybody. We have a senior administration official here tonight to brief you and give you a readout on President Bush's meeting with Chinese President Hu, and to take some of your questions about that meeting. So I'll turn it over to our senior administration official.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: President Bush and President Hu had their third meeting, but the first since President Hu became President, today. The two Presidents discussed a wide range of international and bilateral issues, and discussed their joint desire to promote cooperation between our two countries around the world.

President Bush reiterated his vision of a candid, constructive, and cooperative relationship between the two countries. He also issued an invitation to President Hu to visit Washington as soon as he can make it; hopefully, perhaps in late 2003 or early 2004. President Hu thanked him for the invitation, suggested that the two sides would be able to work it out at their mutual convenience, and the two sides both said that they look forward to continuing and accelerating high-level visits between our two countries.

As you would all expect, the two discussed the situation in North Korea. This was, in effect, the President's third in a round of consultations with the key countries on the North Korea issue. As you remember, he met with President Roh the second week of May in Washington. He then met with Prime Minister Koizumi at Crawford last week. And now he has met with President Hu.

President Bush reiterated his strong desire for a peaceful diplomatic resolution of this issue, working with the concerned countries, including not only China, but of course, our good Northeast Asia allies, Japan and South Korea. He also specifically thanked China for hosting the trilateral talks in Beijing in April, and he underscored that we continue to believe that China's cooperation will play a key role in the peaceful resolution of this issue.

On the issue of SARS, President Bush once again expressed condolences to the families and friends

of the SARS victims in China, and he specifically praised Hu's President Hu's leadership in addressing this problem. He also discussed U.S. government contributions to China's efforts to eradicate SARS, and he specifically praised President Hu's willingness to become transparent on the issue of SARS.

On the war on terrorism, the two Presidents exchanged views. The President welcomed China's willingness to sign with us an agreement on the container security initiative, which should be happening in the coming weeks.

Finally, on north excuse me north proliferation nonproliferation, President Bush stressed how important bilateral cooperation will be if we are to get this scourge under control. The two sides expressed interest in continuing to work together to face this problem.

That's my brief readout, and I would take any questions that you may have.

Q Yes, did the President bring up the issue of Chinese assistance to Iran in its missile program? If so, did they discuss the sanctions that have been imposed on NORINCO and what was President Hu's response?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: There was no specific mention of the NORINCO sanctions. The President did bring up his concerns about Iran, stating very clearly that Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons presents a grave threat that China and the U.S. have to work together to address.

Q That was on the nuclear side. What about the missiles?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It was more on the nuclear, but it was basically the concept that Iran is a problem that we have to address, given its current policies. Those policies have to change.

Q Was there any response from President Hu on that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Not much, really.

Q Two things on North Korea and the discussion. First, the Chinese have indicated in recent days that they thought it was perfectly good to just get the same group together again, China, North Korea, the U. S. -- well, of course the U.S. is trying to get South Korea and Japan into it. They did discuss the configuration of the talks, the timing of the talks? And secondly, was there any discussion of what role China would play, if any, in any ultimate economic sanctions on North Korea?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The conversation did not go as far as economic sanctions. There was a little bit of back and forth on the question of possible formats. As I said, we ended with both sides agreeing that we have to work together on this, and with the -- both sides also acknowledging that the Japanese and South Koreans have a key role to play.

Q Can you tell us a little more about this back-and- forth?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Back-and-forth. Basically, the Chinese did tell us that the North Koreans are pushing for a bilateral conversation. They acknowledge that that is not only not likely, but also not productive. They did hope that in a multilateral format we would exchange views with the North Koreans.

Q How much pressure did the President put on the Chinese in general to just take a more aggressive stand with North Korea? You didn't get specifically the sanctions. Did you at least discuss the overall approach and the need to turn up the heat? And how did the Chinese react if you did talk about it?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, the push was that we cannot let this drift too long. The question, though, is how do we address that effectively. The Chinese made it clear that they think it's urgent to get North Korea back to the table, and we agree with that. We've got to look at how we deal with the North Koreans. We have to finish our -- we have finished our consultations, initially. Now we have to go back to our Japanese and South Korean allies and talk about the way forward.

Again, the emphasis was, as I said, we've got to resolve this diplomatically, peacefully, but from our perspective, of course, there has to be a little bit of encouragement to get the North Koreans back to the table.

Q When you said the Chinese said that it's unlikely and not productive to have a bilateral meeting, have they said that to the North Koreans, as well?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: What they say to the North Koreans is, look, you're going to have to find a way to meet; you cannot just hold out and say you're only going to meet in a bilateral setting. There is a little bit of to-and-fro here on this issue. I mean, the North Koreans are digging in, saying that they want bilateral talks. The Chinese are saying, look, that's not going to happen. What can we do? Can you express your concerns to the Americans in a multilateral format.

Q Two questions. One is, a senior administration official today said, we've been working on the issue of trying to get the Chinese to improve their export control rules so that they actually have something to sanction companies with. Can you just elaborate on exactly what you're talking about in terms of U.S.-Chinese cooperation on that? And the second question is, did the President raise Tibet, Falun Gong, or what Secretary Powell has recently described as alarming developments on the human rights front?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The -- excuse me. I forgot your first question. It's been a long day.

Q Sorry. The first one is about the attempt to improve export controls with the Chinese?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: When we about working together with the Chinese on proliferation issues, our understanding -- and I think the Chinese understand this, too is that there has to be an effective system in place and that it has to be implemented effectively.

The Chinese argue that they have put a system in place. In fact, that was what President Hu said to

President Bush, that we have put in an effective system, or we have put in a comprehensive system, was the word he used, to address our proliferation concerns. We, of course, want to see a little bit better implementation, and that was why you saw the sanctions.

Now, I won't say that those were the words of the President, but that's what the President was implying when he was saying that we have to fight proliferation together. It means that we both have to be effective in implementing our respective controls on proliferation. He acknowledged that even U.S. companies engage in some degree of proliferation around the world.

Q And on Tibet?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Oh, on Tibet. Excuse me. My aging memory here. I'll be honest with you. The issue didn't come up directly because we have been raising it with the Chinese already. We have raised our concerns both in Beijing and in Washington.

Q Did the issue of how much influence China actually has over North Korea come up? In the past, the Chinese have suggested that they don't have as much influence as they might have had in the past.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The President believes and continues to say to the Chinese that we think you have a lot of influence over North Korea and probably in many ways more than the U. S. has. He said that again today, and President Hu did not respond one way or the other.

Q You said it was critical -- that China and the U.S. agreed that it was critical to get the parties back to the table as soon as possible. There's a Japanese paper reporting today that there may be a meeting in Kuala Lumpur at the end of the month. Is there any talk of a meeting as soon as this month?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, because we haven't really finished yet. I mean, like I said earlier, we've done a preliminary round of consultations at the presidential level with the three leaders who are concerned. Now we're going to go back to our Northeast Asian allies and make sure that we agree on a way ahead.

Q It sounds like the way ahead is, what, another meeting?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Perhaps. And we haven't come to that conclusion, is what I'm saying. If you ask me; probably. But we do have to consult with the South Koreans and Japanese before we move forward.

Q You said that the Chinese President made clear that the North Koreans do want bilateral discussions. Did he say that basically anything beyond that at this point is definitely off the table, or did you talk about moving forward and, in fact, perhaps specifically about what meetings -- in the future?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The President said that he wanted to make clear that our policy is not changing on the question of bilateral talks versus multilateral talks. We don't think we have enough influence by ourselves to change North Korean behavior. Therefore, we firmly believe that we

need to go in in a group and let the North Koreans know that their nuclear program is not an issue just for the United States, but is an issue for all of the countries in their region. And he made that very clear to the Chinese.

The Chinese, like I said, were saying, well, can there be some sort of bilateral contact within a multilateral format. The President said, look, in a multilateral format, sure, the North Koreans can look us in the eyes and say something. But it's got to be within a multilateral format.

Q Did the Chinese President ask President Bush if it would be possible for a bilateral --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He said -- no, he didn't ask for a bilateral meeting. The Chinese have given up on that, and the Chinese acknowledge that that probably isn't the most effective way.

Q -- bilateral --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, bilateral contacts were the way they were putting it.

Q The Chinese have expressed concerns about unilateral actions outside of the U.N. Did that issue come up all? Did the President offer them any assurances about commitments to the U.N.?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, no specific talk about the U.N. In fact, the one mention of the U.N. was when the Chinese said that they had worked with us on the Iraq issue in the U.N. in the past, and they looked forward to cooperating in the reconstruction of Iraq in the future.

Q Could I ask one more on Iran? Did the President mention at all the impending IAEA report?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, that did not come up at all.

Q And can I ask you one atmospheric question? In the past, with Jiang Zemin, these things were fairly tightly scripted, there wasn't a conversational sense. Was it the same? Were their atmospheric at all different? Was Hu more conversational at all?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'm not going to compare this one with the past one. But I think the atmospheric were actually pretty good. There was a little bit more give-and-take than you traditionally get. And I think the President believes that -- and he said this to President Hu -- that he thinks Hu is doing a good job trying to take the reins under difficult conditions. The SARS epidemic has made the transition in China fairly complicated. The President understands that and thinks Hu is probably doing a pretty job at it.

Q Can I clarify two points? You mentioned bilateral contacts. Can you tell me exactly what you meant by that? Is that what the Chinese said the North Koreans are saying? Or what -- I don't want to blow up the context of that.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, let me be as clear as I can. The Chinese said that the North Koreans are saying that there has to be some sort of bilateral contact as the price for a multilateral meeting. And they were conveying that to us.

Q And did we have a reaction to that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It was just what I just said, that basically the President said there is no change in our stance of we have to have multilateral talks if this is to move forward. Within those multilateral talks, if the North Koreans look us in the eye on one corner of the table and say things directly to us, we're going to listen, obviously, and we will do the same thing back to them.

Q So you might do bilateral contacts in order to pave the way for a multilateral --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, no, let me be clear. It's got to be a multilateral meeting. We're not going to pull aside. We're not going to go into a separate room. We're not going to say, please, North Korea, you come and talk -- spill to us without the Chinese listening in on what's going on here.

Q One last clarification. What if anything did he ask of Russia when it comes to the question of North Korea?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No mention of Russia at all in the North Korea context.

Q But were you in the Russia the Putin-Bush meeting?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Oh, no I wasn't. Sorry.

Q Quick clarification. Were the Chinese simply conveying this North Korean request, or did they also indicate that they would endorse it or in any way favor the North Korean position?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: They were, in effect, conveying it and asking us to consider it. That was the word they use.

Q They asked you to consider it.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, as a possible way forward.

Q In your mind, is this a move a change in the North Korean position then? The North Koreans have in the past said it had to be bilateral. What you heard today was a change in the North Korean position? And similarly, when the President says, sure, in a multilateral format the North Koreans can look us in the eyes, sounds very much like what Secretary Armitage said in Congress that was not so welcome at the White House months ago.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: In terms of the North Koreans, yes, they've moved -- they

have moved a little bit. They were, as you recall, about two months ago saying that the only type of talks that would be possible would be bilateral talks. And now they've gone beyond that.

In terms of, is this a change for the President? No, he has said this in the past, that basically it has to be multilateral talks. And I want you to concentrate on that. We haven't changed; it has to be multilateral talks. And all he's saying in response to can there be bilateral contacts, he's asking, well, what does that mean? If it means the North Koreans sitting at a table with two or three or four other parties, look us in the eye and say what's on their mind, if you want to consider that a bilateral contact, then, sure, that will happen.

Q That's exactly what Rich said in his testimony, and you'll recall people came back and said this could undercut the concept of a multilateral meeting.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, no -- I'm not exactly familiar with what Rich said. I remember it caused a little bit of a stir at the time. But I will say that we, all along, have been saying that it's got to be multilateral. And that's really what I want you concentrating on. It's not whether we speak first to the Chinese, then to the Japanese or South Koreans if they're there, or maybe even to the North Koreans sitting across the table. It's the fact that you have to have the parties around a table, and it's not just going to be us talking to the North Koreans. And I hope we're all clear on that. Have I made that clear? Okay.

Q Did they push at all? President Bush said that that was -- bilateral contacts were not acceptable, that multilateral talks had to be the way. Did he push back at all and try to convince him at all, or just accepted it?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: They accepted it, and I think just the assurance that we'd be willing to listen to North Korean concerns, sitting around a table of four or five other parties -- the Chinese did not push back on that concept.

Q Did the Chinese leader emphasize peaceful solution of North Korea issues in specific words?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Did he stress peaceful resolution?

Q Yes.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Oh, absolutely, yes. Both sides did. I mean, we have that common area where we totally agree that we need a peaceful diplomatic resolution and that we have to be working together.

Q Could you clarify, was it the Chinese who proposed bilateral contacts within a multilateral format, or the North Koreans who advanced --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, we're covering the same ground here, I've said that already. Yes, it was the Chinese conveying the North Korean desire there.

Q The North Koreans are now, in effect, proposing --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes.

No questions on Taiwan? You guys asleep? (Laughter.)

Q What about Taiwan?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Okay. Glad somebody is awake out there. Which meant I forgot to include it in my opening remarks. On Taiwan, the President repeated our policy of a one-China policy based on the three communiques, the Taiwan Relations Act, no support for Taiwan independence. The Chinese basically accepted that, and said, okay, that's positive. They did say that they have concerns about forces on Taiwan moving towards independence. The President said, we don't support independence.

The President also said, however, within that context, if necessary, we will help Taiwan to the extent possible defend itself. We will, as we say in the Taiwan Relations Act, provide necessary defensive weapons.

Q Thanks.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'm out of here. See you.

END 9:07 P.M. (Local)

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