



## Press Conference

### Secretary Colin L. Powell

Hyatt Hotel □ Regency Ballroom  
Seoul, Korea  
February 25, 2003

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I am very pleased to be with you this afternoon, and especially to be joined by two distinguished American Senators who were part of the official delegation to President Roh's inauguration. On my right is Senator Ben Nelson of Nebraska, and on my left is Senator Sam Brownback from Kansas. I am very pleased that they were able to take time out of their schedules to be with me today. The three of us have just returned from a meeting with President Roh. We're all honored to have been able to represent President Bush, the United States government, and more importantly, the American people at the inauguration of Mr. Roh Moo Hyun as President of the Republic of Korea. We congratulate President Roh on this important day for him and this important day for the Korean people, and we look forward very much to working closely with him and his administration to deepen what is already a very special relationship, a very special friendship, between two countries.

This year the United States and the Republic of Korea commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of our bilateral alliance, an alliance that has given peace and security to the Korean people and to the region. The United States will spare no effort in the future to strengthen our alliance. We have made a good start. President Bush and President Roh, even before the inauguration, have exchanged envoys to begin exchanging views. I told President Roh today that President Bush looks forward to seeing him in Washington as early as it is convenient for him to travel to Washington.

Today President Roh and I and my two colleagues discussed how we can work with friends and partners to address issues of peace and security through diplomacy. We are making sure that North Korea understands that its future relations with the world hinge on abandoning any nuclear weapons ambitions. And you'll notice that President Roh made a similar statement in his inauguration speech. President Bush and President Roh, as well as other leaders, are in complete agreement on this point. Both of our countries and many others have a stake in a peaceful Korean peninsula that is verifiably free of nuclear weapons. That is why we believe strongly that multilateral talks are the appropriate way to begin to resolve this difficult issue.

As President Bush made clear when he visited Korea last year, we are also concerned about the people of North Korea, people who are in very great need. Every year we have responded generously to the World Food Program's call for contributions, and this year also Secretary General Kofi Annan made a special call. I told President Roh earlier today and I will announce now, that we will begin with an initial shipment of 40,000 tons of food for the people of North Korea. We are looking at another 60,000 tons or more, and will be working with the international donor community to ensure that needy people receive the food that is intended for them.

Our partnership with the Republic of Korea goes far beyond our alliance relationship. We applaud South Korea's important contributions to stability and well-being all across the globe. For example, we value South Korean military support to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. South Korea remains an engine of growth in East Asia, and is one of our top trading partners. And as the peaceful transition of power to President Roh attests, the Republic of Korea is a leader in the expanding worldwide community of democracies.

Let me conclude once again by congratulating President Roh on his inauguration today. He represents a new generation and a new partner in an alliance that has already prospered over several generations. We look forward to the years ahead with confidence that our partnership will endure and expand.

Thank you very much and I'll be prepared for your questions, as will my two colleagues.

**QUESTION:** George Gedda of AP. Did you exchange thoughts with President Roh on ways to curb North Korea's nuclear ambitions?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Yes, we of course are united that these ambitions must be stopped and North Korea's energy directed in new ways, into new fields that will benefit their people and not threaten the region. President Roh understands our position with respect to the importance of doing it on a multilateral basis. I think that I can say that he supports that approach. Of course, he is anxious to see dialogue take place quickly between the two sides, but he understands our position with respect to that dialogue beginning in a multilateral setting. And we feel strongly about that because it affects not just the United States and North Korea, but South Korea, Japan, Russian, China and other nations in the region and frankly, throughout the world. It is an international issue. That is why the International Atomic Energy Agency took the action that it did recently by referring the matter to the Security Council.

**QUESTION:** Kim Hee Jun from YTN. I'd like to begin my questions by quoting from President Roh's recent interview with Newsweek. President Roh said that North Korea is already in the midst of changes and that we need to view them as negotiating partners rather than as criminals. He said, "If we give the North Korean regime what they want, including a guarantee of the survival of their regime and economic aid, they could possibly give up their nuclear ambitions." However, I think this is a very different view from that of the United States, which views North Korea as not having changed, and as part of the "axis of evil." How would you qualify the difference in view with President Roh?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** North Korea was believed to have given up its nuclear ambition back in 1994 when it entered the Agreed Framework. This bilateral agreement with North Korea gave hope to the world that all of their nuclear activities were now contained at Yongbyon, and under supervision until such time as the fuel rods could be permanently removed after the light water reactors were put in place. But what we discovered, unfortunately, over the past 18 months or so, was that North Korea did not cap its nuclear ambitions at Yongbyon. In fact, during almost the entire period of the Agreed Framework, North Korea was beginning work on an enriched uranium program, an alternative way of developing the material needed for nuclear weapons.

We must now cap this new expression of their ambitions. And we've got to do it in a way that is permanent, in a way that involves all members of the international community who have an interest in this, within the IAEA, and especially the neighbors in the region. We believe that if North Korea would just come to the realization that the world is not going to be threatened in this way, that we will stand firm, that we stand ready to use diplomacy to find a solution, but we do stand firm. And we stand firm in the knowledge that if they give up this nuclear ambition once and for all, in a way that the world can verify, a better future awaits the people of North Korea.

The United States, South Korea, Japan, China, Russia – so many nations – want to help the people of North Korea: to feed them, give their children an education, to invest in North Korea. Japan was ready to begin normalization talks and make significant financial contributions for the welfare of the North Korean people and to help the North Korean economy. South Korea has certainly indicated its desire to do that, and the United States is willing to help. But it must begin with North Korea giving up its nuclear ambitions, and we cannot pay them to give up something they were supposed to have given up in 1994. And so I believe sooner or later there will be a dialogue involving all of the interested parties and the United States will participate in that dialogue and hopefully we will find a peaceful solution to this problem. And we will stay in closest coordination with our friends in South Korea and our other friends in the region as we move forward seeking this peaceful diplomatic solution.

**QUESTION:** Rebecca McKinnon, CNN: My question to you is President Roh has also said that he opposes the idea that military force should be kept on the table, and you have said that, just in the past few days, all options are still on the table. Did this issue of the possible use of military force get discussed in your meetings with him,

and is there a disagreement?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Yes. What I said to President Roh is that you cannot ever remove an option that is always available to you. But that the United States has no plans to invade North Korea. There are no armies on the march. We conduct our usual routine of exercises with South Korea. Such exercises are taking place now. But we have not heightened alert status. We prudently conduct exercises and things of that nature. We make sure we're watching the situation, but I don't think there should be any concern that the United States is on the verge of entering into some kind of conflict with North Korea. Far from it. President Bush has repeatedly said we are interested in a peaceful solution using diplomacy. I also reassured President Roh that we fully understand our obligations as members of a great alliance with South Korea, and that anything we might do would be in coordination and consultation and cooperation with South Korea. It is a unified command here on the Peninsula, and I think he was reassured by my comments.

**QUESTION:** Kwon Jeong Bok, Chosun Ilbo: During the presidential campaign, President Roh Moo Hyun had publicly promised a revision to the SOFA as one of his campaign pledges. However, I understand that the U.S. Government's position is that you oppose any revisions to the SOFA. I would like to ask whether there have been any changes to your position, and what plans you have for the future.

**SECRETARY POWELL:** We touched on the SOFA in our meeting but we did not get into a discussion of it. In this first meeting with President Roh, there were some very significant issues to discuss, principally dealing with our security relationship in a broader sense, as well as the situation with North Korea. We believe that the SOFA has served a useful purpose many years. We're always willing to listen to ideas that come from the other side, from the South Korean government and the South Korean military, but we did not get into a detailed discussion about the SOFA. But I am sure that as his administration gets up to speed and contact begins at different levels between their Cabinet officials and our Cabinet officials in Washington and here at the Embassy, we'll be listening to all of the ideas that they bring forth. We believe that the SOFA has served a useful purpose but we're always open to listening to our friends.

**QUESTION:** Nicholas Kravov, The Washington Times. Mr. Secretary, President Roh has said that the alliance with the United States should mature because of the generational change within this country and other changes that have occurred. Is the United States ready to engage indeed in a more equal relationship with South Korea?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Well we believe it's a very equal relationship now. President Roh said in his speech that he wants to examine reciprocity and equitability, and that is certainly appropriate. He is a great believer in discussion and dialogue. I could see that already in the first meeting today, and so as he has ideas with respect to how the relationship can be on a more equitable basis, on a more reciprocal basis, and we certainly want to hear that and listen to it. I reaffirmed to him the security commitment of the United States to South Korea, a commitment that has been intact for 50 years, and will remain intact, as long as that is needed, and we expect it will be for some time into the future. But I also said that there is no reason why we shouldn't constantly review, with our South Korean friends, in the closest coordination and full cooperation and transparency, how we could be better guests here in South Korea and what kind of footprint we should have in the country. But our commitment to the defense of South Korea, and our commitment to maintaining a strong presence in this part of the world, is unchanged and unshakeable, and I believe he was reassured by that.

**QUESTION:** PBS Frontline: You've talked about the desire to help the people of North Korea, but the President, on numerous occasions, has made clear that he detests the leader of North Korea, Kim Jong-il. There is confusion about U.S. policy. Is it the policy of the United States to have regime change in North Korea?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** We have never expressed that as a policy objective. The President has on many occasions, as I think have many leaders in the world, expressed disdain for the leadership in Pyongyang, a leadership that takes what limited resources it has and invests them into an army that hangs over the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in great strength long after any such need should exist, and a leadership that expends its limited resources in the development of nuclear weapons – resources that should be going to the people.

And we know the people are starving in North Korea, we know the economy is not functioning; we know that the whole society is in great distress. Yet the leadership acts in a way that is simply inconsistent with basic human values and basic economic sense. And so I don't think there is anything at all that is inconsistent with the President expressing his great concern for the North Korean people as he does on a regular basis and also disdain for a leadership that would not take obvious steps to improve the lot of the North Korean people.

The United States was ready to play a more helpful role last year. A lot of things were starting to come into play. The Japanese on normalization, the South Koreans on opening lanes through the DMZ, the United States ready to engage from a position of strength and expecting and hoping that North Korea had abandoned some of its proliferation activities and the selling of missiles. And I reached out, I reached out to the foreign minister of North Korea last July. But we had to deal with fundamental issues that you can't get around – proliferation and nuclear weapons – and that's where it came to a stop.

We remain ready to help the people of North Korea out of their distress. But it has to begin with an honest dialogue that does not sweep things under the carpet or hide the reality that they have been trying to develop nuclear weapons, despite their promises not to, their obligations they entered into: the North-South Agreement of 1992, The Agreed Framework, other statements and commitments that have been made in the late 90s, only to be abandoned by the North Koreans.

So the problem and the fault rest with the North Koreans, and as a result the people of North Korea are starving. And so we have never stepped back from expressing our disdain for the North Korean regime, but we have not announced a policy of regime change.

**QUESTION:** Reuters. Mr. Secretary, Arshad Mohammed of Reuters. What can you tell us about the missile test that North Korea conducted yesterday, and how do you assess the fact that it chose to conduct the test the day before the South Korean Presidential Inauguration?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** It seems to be a fairly innocuous kind of test, a short range, surface-to-surface naval missile that goes out maybe 60 or so miles. From what I have been able to determine, it's a fairly old system. Why they chose to do it today, I will let you speculate as well as anyone else can. We have known for several days that they had made a declaration, a notice to mariners, that such a test might be forthcoming, so I didn't find it particularly surprising or shocking or disturbing that one occurred today. Thank you.

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