



Press Briefing on Board Plane en Route Elmendorf Air Force Base

Secretary Colin L. Powell

On Board Plane

February 25, 2003

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, thank you. Thank you all for being on the trip. Let me kind of summarize a few things and throw it open to questions. I was very pleased with the stop in Japan and my meetings with Prime Minister Koizumi and Minister Kawaguchi and others and I think we have solid support for our policies with respect to both Iraq and North Korea from the Japanese leadership, and I noted, just a few moments ago, reading a report where the Japanese government expressed a favorable response with respect to the resolution that we put down in the United Nations yesterday on the 24th.

We're very pleased and we also hope that the Japanese will use their good offices to talk to the elected members of the Security Council to show their support for our efforts, and I also think that the Japanese will be playing a constructive role if we go forward if we're not able to find a peaceful solution. I suspect the Japanese will play a helpful role in the after of potential conflict with Iraq.

In China, keep in mind that I've been meetings with the Chinese Foreign Minister every week for I think the last 4 straight weeks at the UN, but this was an opportunity to convey to not only him in a more extended discussion, which extended over the lunch period as well, so we had a good two plus hours of discussion on a variety of issues, bilateral issues but of course principally Iraq and North Korea, and I was also able then to convey our points of view to Vice President Hu, General Secretary Hu and soon to be President Hu, as well as to President Jiang Zemin.

On Iraq, I continue to believe that time is running out, reinforced the points that we had made with the Chinese at the various Security Council meetings of the last several weeks and I advised them that a resolution would be tabled yesterday. The nature of that resolution and why we thought that it was important to get on with this and not just continue to believe that this can be solved with more inspectors or more inspections or a longer period for inspection.

They took all that in and we will be watching and seeing their reaction. I noted that they aligned themselves, I think anyway, I haven't gotten a firm report, but they are taking note of the French memorandum that was put down by France, Germany and Russia, but we'll have some intense discussions with not only the Chinese again but other members of the permanent membership as well as other E-10 members, as you now, I've been talking to a number of them over the course of this trip.

On North Korea, I reinforced, as you know, the point that we still believe, and I feel more strongly about it now, having listened to counterarguments and had good debates in every capital I've been in, that a multilateral setting is still the best way to approach this problem. Of course the Japanese are supportive of that approach. The Chinese listened carefully. We explored different multilateral forums in which such a dialogue, discussion, could begin, and the Chinese will be back to us through various channels as they've had a chance to think about some of the ideas we discussed, so I was pleased with that outcome.

In Korea, I was very pleased with conversations I had with the new National Security Advisor, Dr. Ra and then with President Noh, and then just before getting on the plane with Dr. Yun, who I expect to be designated as the Foreign Minister in due course, at least he seems to be the leading candidate and that's why I spent time chatting with him. I reinforced to them our commitment to the security of South Korea and our intention to keep a presence in the region. We of course should constantly review that presence, in close coordination and consultation with the South Korean government, and we should have transparency in these discussions and rules should be no surprises. He was pleased to hear that.

We then also talked about North Korea at some length. I once again conveyed to him our position that we are hoping and believe a peaceful solution can be found through diplomatic means, and political means, but all our options remained on the table. But we have no intention of invading North Korea, and I gave the same arguments for a multilateral forum as a way of proceeding. He listened carefully, we talked back and forth and in his response, he said he saw the value in a multilateral approach. So we'll be staying in close consultation with him in the future. Obviously, they hope that (inaudible) bears fruit soon. Everybody is anxious for conversations to begin soon and so we'll see how that turns out.

I also had a meeting with the Australian Foreign Minister who is in town, Alexander Downer. Of course Australia has been very supportive of our efforts at the UN with respect to Iraq. They too would like to see progress on getting a discussion going with the North Koreans, but as you know, the Australians are one of the advocates of the multilateral forum in the first place, and asked that we convert the five plus four into five plus five, the tenth person being Australia. And so I was pleased with the continued support that we are receiving from Australia, not only in our North Korea efforts but in our Iraq efforts as well.

That's just kind of a quick summary, you've heard all of this in one way or another over the last couple of days, and I thought I'd just summarize it for you. So I've achieved what I wanted over this trip and I'm very very pleased especially having been given the opportunity to represent the United States at the inauguration at a time when people were concerned about the relationship between the United States and South Korea. I think it's still strong. President Noh clearly indicated that in his inauguration address. And I'm pleased he put right top dead center the fact that North Korea has to give up its nuclear ambitions. So he clearly knows what we have to do together as we move forward, and that's to make sure that North Korea understands, opportunities await them if they give up pursuit of nuclear weapons. We'll try to find a peaceful way to accomplish that. I still think it's possible. Okay, questions?

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, North Korea has been very resistant to any kind of multilateral setting. In the 1990s, a number of years were basically wasted with the so-called 4-party talks which turned out to really accomplish almost nothing. Why is it that you think that 10-party talks could possibly achieve what 4-party talks could not, and if the North Koreans continue to reject this approach, how do you answer the criticism that the United States is just stalling, putting this off until after Iraq, finding a way not to deal with North Korea?

SECRETARY POWELL: Whether it's five plus five or some other forum that somebody comes up with, we're not hung up on five plus five. But just because the North Koreans want it one way, doesn't mean we have to do it their way.

We're going to try to do it in a sensible way. We believe the sensible way is to get the other interested parties involved. Merely because North Korea keeps saying no doesn't mean that suddenly the United States has to say yes. We will continue to apply pressure and hope that the force of logic in due course will persuade them that we should find a forum in which to begin discussions. We're constantly accused of being unilateral, now we're being accused of being multilateral, but we believe we have a correct position. This isn't the early nineties and it isn't 4-party talks. I'm not too happy with the results that came out of the Agreed Framework some 8 years later as a result of direct talks between us and the DPRK.

It is an international problem and we are going to continue to do everything we can to get international involvement. We understand the North Koreans' strong feelings otherwise, but we also have strong feelings as to the best way to solve this problem once and for all, with all nations that have an equity in this issue being involved in it. North Korea's nuclear programs run in direct contravention of China's goals for a denuclearized peninsula, directly in opposition of the agreement they signed with the South Koreans 10 years ago. And so I understand they want to do it directly with us but we still feel strongly that it should be a multilateral forum and it's got nothing to do

with what we are doing with Iraq or not doing with Iraq. Nevertheless people will continue to write that story.

QUESTION: You know the North Koreans are paranoid, they think the whole world is against them. To have 9 countries ganging up on North Korea, how can that possibly help their sense of paranoia?

SECRETARY POWELL: We're not ganging up on anyone. We're trying to help a country out of a problem that it created for itself. And we simply will not, because North Korea demands something, yield to that something. We believe there's a better solution. Everybody says, well, they demand this, therefore you have to do it. No. Wrong. We don't have to do it because they demand it. What we ought to do is try to find the right solution. They are the ones who have created this problem. It is not us. I was not looking for an alternative nuclear weapons program when I started to engage with them last year, and had arranged to meet with the Foreign Minister in Brunei or in some point along the way. It is their actions that have caused this problem, and they cannot now be the demander as to the manner in which it's going to be solved.

QUESTION: You mentioned that you'd planned to keep up the pressure on them. Other than rhetorical, what other kinds of pressure are you putting on them?

SECRETARY: We are working with friends in the region. We have no plans now to take any economic action if that's what you had in mind, the nature of your question. We believe diplomatic, political pressure still has a role to play, and there are countries that have considerable influence with the North Koreans, and will continue to apply pressure. We've also made it clear that if they begin reprocessing, it changes the entire political landscape, and we are making sure that that is communicated to them in a number of channels.

We are exploring a variety of ideas and channels. We aren't just sitting back with our hands crossed saying, we won't ever talk to you under any circumstances ever. We are offering up suggestions, others are offering up suggestions. Perhaps we'll find a way through. I don't know how soon it will happen.

Keep in mind, when you go back to the early nineties as Barbara did a moment ago, it wasn't solved in a couple of months. It took a longer period of time. It took years before this matter was supposedly solved with the Agreed Framework and it turned out, it was not solved.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, you've said in the past that you have concerns about the distribution of food aid and making sure that it doesn't go simply to prop up the regime. Since you haven't gotten any assurances that the 40 million won't be used in that way, can you fill us in a little bit on the thinking of why the 40 million was given?

SECRETARY POWELL: Forty thousand. We felt it was important to respond to the World Food Program request and the specific request of the Secretary General. But you'll notice, we're doing it in tranches, and the first tranche is 40,000. We will watch carefully, if you take a look at what I said today, the intent of my statement following how the 60,000 will be distributed, we want to take a look at what additional controls might be put on, what additional access World Food Program might be able to get to make sure the food is going to people who are truly in need.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, you said earlier in the press conference that you thought you were in a position to be able to say that President Noh agreed with your idea on the multilateral....what did you mean by that, that he saw the value of a multilateral....does that mean that they think that it's a good idea but they also think the direct talks still are a good idea? On China, are you going for a yes vote on the Iraq resolution, or are you only hoping that they'll abstain?

SECRETARY POWELL: On the first point, Richard has the exact wording, but after I had discussed the multilateral approach with President Noh (crosstalk) but it was a pretty straight acceptance of what I said, a multilateral approach, we agreed. I agree. Now, would he like to see it happen tomorrow, and us talking? Yes, but he understands and he agrees to the approach we're taking. I'm not making up a formulation or putting words in his mouth. (crosstalk)

QUESTION: And China?

SECRETARY POWELL: I always go for yes votes. What do I think? No, I'm not going to start speculating on who's liable to do what. There's a lot of analysis about, we know four for sure, they've all declared, and there will be some tough discussions ahead.

QUESTION: You said a minute ago that it took years before the matter was supposedly resolved. It seems to me that you don't have the luxury of having years nowadays because they may only be months away from developing plutonium-based bombs. Is there a real sense of urgency that something has to happen quickly on this?

SECRETARY POWELL: There's a sense of urgency but not a sense of panic. They've always been just a few months or a few years away from being able to develop plutonium. That was the problem with the Agreed Framework – the fuel rods never left Yongbyon. And so they have always been able to, whenever they wanted to, cut the seals, start the reactor, start the reprocessing. So far they have chosen, for reasons that I won't speculate on, they've chosen not to start the reactor or the reprocessing facility. I think that's a wise choice if it's a conscious choice, and not just the fact they haven't gotten it to the point yet where they can start it.

So we are not unaware of the seriousness of this or the consequences of reprocessing facilities starting, but we are also not going to be panicked by their misbehavior or by demands that we don't believe appropriate for us to meet. So we'll continue to work it hard, work it diplomatically, continue to try to persuade the North Koreans that we can find a way to discuss their concerns, but it's better to do it in a multilateral setting to begin with because other nations are involved.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, a day or so ago, when you were talking to us, you said that the negotiations, any negotiations with North Korea have to start in a multilateral forum. Are you implying that if you can get North Korea to agree to a multilateral approach, you would start and then very quickly shift to a bilateral negotiation?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think if we were to get a multilateral - let's call it a discussion, I don't know whether the term negotiation is the right word yet - but if we can get a multilateral discussion going where we start to exchange views and exchange issues, within that forum, the United States obviously would be in discussion with North Korea, and we would see where those discussions lead. We know what they want, at least what they say they want from us, we know what the world is expecting from them. They stand in violation of their IAEA obligations and have been reported to the Security Council.

So I think we have to get a discussion going and see where that takes us. I wouldn't preclude anything right now, but I don't want to be too precise about what happens when I don't know what will happen yet. Bit of a dodge, but it's my dodge.

QUESTION: Can I talk a little bit about the carrots? Did you get anywhere for example, with the Japanese, that perhaps the Japanese might be willing to restart food aid, or was anyone else prepared to offer some sort of carrot that maybe the United States would not offer as appeasement?

SECRETARY POWELL: There are lots of carrots out there waiting. The Japanese were on the verge of moving forward aggressively on normalization. Ten billion dollars of assistance over some period of time. The South Koreans of course want to help the North Koreans, and the purpose of us starting dialogue again last year was to get first a handle on these proliferating activities of the North Koreans, but to also, as we've discussed before, find ways to assist them.

So the carrots are out there, but the carrots have to begin, before the carrots start to be delivered, we can't do it in the face of this kind of right in your face violation of their obligations. It's sometimes of concern to me that all the concern seems to be placed for the North Koreans and the fact that all they want to do is have a conversation with the United States. The fact that they have violated all of their agreements for the 8 years, and have been trying to develop nuclear weapons again by another technology, is supposed to be sort of just set aside and we'll talk our way through that.

This is a serious matter. And so the carrot is stopped. We didn't tell the Japanese to hold up normalization. Between the nuclear program and the problem with the

abductee issue, the Japanese said we've got to get some things resolved before we can let this kind of aid or this kind of normalization process continue.

So I think the carrots are there, but the burden is, at the moment seems to be, on North Korea, and not on those of us who have carrots to offer. Minor carrot today, one might have called the food aid that I announced, showing that we were not just out to hurt the North Korean people, but we want to help them. Even though there is some question about how food aid gets delivered, because of their urgent need, we were willing to put forth in the midst of this controversy, and this disagreement, 40,000 tons of food that will help North Korean people.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, a question on Iraq. There are reports that you were not turned down by the Chinese, and as you said the Chinese listened to what you had to say about a second resolution. But how hopeful are you that you will get support from China on this issue? Do you think that they are just simply unalterably opposed and are going to follow the French, or what do you think your chances are of winning them over?

SECRETARY POWELL: I can't speak for the Chinese, but nothing that you heard in Beijing, or that you've picked up in Beijing, should have been a surprise, because China has previously taken an open public position that they would like to see inspections continue for a longer period of time. A week or so ago, China aligned itself with Germany, France and Russia on that.

So I was quite aware of their public position. I wanted to make sure that they understood the new resolution that we were putting down, the determination that President Bush has to resolve this matter peacefully, if possible, and through the use of force if not. To make sure there was no doubt in their mind as they considered the new resolution.

Remember that at the time of my visit, the resolution had not yet been put down. It was getting ready to be put down, and so I conveyed to them what was going to be in the resolution, and that I wanted to stay in close touch with them over the next two weeks, as we waited for Dr. Blix to report, and we'll see what they decide to do. So I didn't come here with any illusions about picking up a Chinese yes vote or abstention or a no vote. Just keep in mind, they were one of the 15-0 on resolution 1441, as were the French as we know.

QUESTION: You said the United States is aware of the seriousness, if North Korea begins reprocessing again. Do you think that the other countries in the region are just as aware of the seriousness of that? And can you talk at all about how the United States might react if it appears North Korea begins reprocessing?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think all of the nations in the region are concerned about it, and I think they've all been in touch with North Korea about the danger of moving forward to reprocessing. I would not wish to comment on options that the US might examine in that instance.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, back in Davos about month ago, in the speech that you gave (inaudible) why did you not say, are you not ready yet to commit to a written official statement of no intention to attack North Korea?

SECRETARY POWELL: (inaudible) We have said, I think a number of times over the past months, that we have no intention of attacking. (Inaudible) no intention of invading. I think I said on one occasion, it's certainly possible to document such a statement. What they want and what they are asking for, if not demanding, is something that is legally binding, and what we've said there is no. We are not prepared to go to the Senate with something like this, but you have certainly heard the President say repeatedly, I have no intention of invading.

Keep in mind now, once again back to the North Koreans and their behavior, they had all of that. They had it from the previous administration repeatedly. They have a letter signed by President Clinton. They have the joint statement that came out in the fall of 2000, before Madeleine Albright, Secretary Albright went to Pyongyang. And they had earlier statements in 1994-'95 circa from Bill Perry and others.

So from the whole period of time, from '94 and a half all the way through 2000, they were getting those assurances, in writing, from the President of the United States, from the United States Government, in joint statements and joint communiqués. They still, in the presence of all of that, all that they are now asking for, they went ahead with nuclear weapons development. That's pretty stunning and it seems to me that it ought to cause us all to pull up short, to say wait a minute. Let's do it a little differently this time. This time, let's make sure that it's something that everybody is involved in, and not just two parties.

Remember during the Agreed Framework, South Korea wasn't much of a party to something that involved their destiny. We want to do it differently this time. I don't think it's a basis to criticize us, for trying to do it, I believe in a more substantive, substantial way, and to criticize us merely because the North Koreans don't want to do it that way, or don't like it that way, and therefore we have to rush to do it the way they want to do it because we are concerned about, as we are concerned, about the reactor and the reprocessing. It's a delicate balance, we're trying to work our way through this difficult period, maintaining a balance so that a solution can be found.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, is there anything you can tell us about North Korean accusations of US spy planes flying over them the past few days?

SECRETARY POWELL: No, I don't know about that one. Richard's checking, he says. (inaudible)

QUESTION: I just wanted to ask you, yesterday at the news conference, you said that China was anxious to be helpful in the case of North Korea, but prefers to work quietly. Without betraying any confidences, can you tell us what they're doing?

SECRETARY POWELL: I tend not to betray confidences on the record. What I was saying is that we've got a number of conversations going, and China tends to like to conduct its diplomacy in many areas quietly. We know that they are communicating and in touch with the North Koreans. They don't always communicate back to us what they are doing, but we know that they are seized with the problem of keeping the Korean peninsula nuclear free. When a country is providing you with \$500 million a year worth of aid and provides 80 percent of your energy and 80 percent of your economic activity, it seems to me, you should at least listen to them when they are speaking to you. That is what I was making a reference to.

QUESTION: Do we know for sure they haven't started the nuclear reactor?

SECRETARY POWELL: All the evidence I have from our sources is that the reactor has not yet started. I can't tell you why, but it just has not yet started. They again reaffirmed today, by their representative at the NAM conference, what they have said repeatedly, that they are only interested in energy production and not nuclear weapons.

QUESTION: The 40,000 tons and 60,000 tons looks like a pretty big cut compared to the 157 [thousand] last year. Can you explain why the cut and can you scotch the notion that it's lower because of the concerns about the nuclear program?

SECRETARY POWELL: The World Food Program request was lower, and the 157,000, I think that's the right number from last year or something like that, that really reflected an oversubscription on the part of the United States. We ended up providing 50-something percent of the overall food that was provided to North Korea. So lower WFP levy on us, and there's no relationship to anything going on with respect to the nuclear program. We had a meeting on this one day, we reviewed what WFP wanted, Kofi Annan's request, the worldwide need for food, and the worldwide shortage, frankly, of food to deal with all the requirements that are out there, and so the 100,000 metric tons was a responsible pledge on our part.

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