



Interview with CNN with Tokyo Bureau Chief Rebecca McKinnon

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U.S. Embassy Japan
Tokyo, Japan
June 10, 2003

Released by U.S. Embassy, Japan

QUESTION: Thank you very much for joining us today, Mr. Armitage.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Thank you for having me.

QUESTION: First of all, I would like to ask you about the ongoing situation in Myanmar. As we speak, we understand the UN envoy has had an opportunity to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi. If she's not released soon, will the U.S. be imposing new sanctions or taking other measures?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I think without question we will and certainly this will be a major topic of discussion at the Phnom Penh-hosted ARF for the next week. We've as anxious as anyone is to see the report of UN envoy Razali Ishmael. We want to assure ourselves that Suu Kyi is unhurt and is well and she ought to rapidly be returned to her political activities.

QUESTION: What specific actions might you take?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, the things that are being discussed in Washington and legislation is being proposed by Senators McConnell and McCain, have travel bans and even some import bans associated with, though they are WTO implications to the latter.

QUESTION: Moving on to Sri Lanka, you're here in Tokyo this week for the aid conference for Sri Lanka. Now given that the Tamil rebels did not participate in the conference, how confident are you that the aid pledges made here are really going to contribute to stability in that country?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, many of the pledges are contingent upon a peace process continuing. I'm quite confident that the government of Ranil, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, will distribute aid equitably, transparently and with due respect for human rights. Again, those are some of the conditions that were placed on the aid, and whether the LTTE, or the rebels as you call them, choose to participate or not is up to them, but the eye of history is going to judge very harshly those who don't seize this opportunity for peace. Not to mention the people of Sri Lanka, whom I believe will judge them harshly.

QUESTION: Moving on to Japan, one big issue here in Japan this week is that the Japanese government is considering sending self-defense forces to Iraq. What are you hoping they might be able to do there to help the United States, and how significant is this?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I think there are two elements to this. First of all, there's the political significance. Whatever Japan chooses to do, is something that will be decided upon only by Japanese, not by Americans or, for that matter, any other nationality. I'm hoping that Japan, as a political matter, will decide to involve herself in the great issues of the day and, if she chooses, as a practical matter, to allow SDF forces to go into Iraq, the so-called "boots on the ground." I think that'd be a great statement of Japan's willingness to take part in arduous activities around the world. I think it's quite in keeping with Japan's sort of coming out and becoming a complete nation.

QUESTION: On that matter, now the Japanese constitution and the way it's interpreted really restricts Japan from what it can do in cooperating with the United States, not only in Iraq, but on many other security matters, including possibly missile defense here in this region and other situations. Are you hoping that Japan might reinterpret its constitution to give itself more leeway on defense matters, or possibly even revise it?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, I don't know what I hope or don't hope for is very important. I think the important thing is that Japan feels confident enough about herself and about her future to have some lawmakers now calling for a complete and open airing of the question of the constitutional restraints, Article 9 constraints. You're quite correct, it's the interpretation of the constitution that is interesting, and some have suggested a cabinet legal officer take another look at. But I think the best thing to do is completely air this question in front of the public and let the people make a decision. It's not appropriate for us to fiddle with anyone's constitution.

QUESTION: Of course the most urgent matter in that regard relates to North Korea and the potential threat of North Korean missiles and discussions about Japanese working with the Americans on missile defense. If Japan can't work on that kind of project with the U.S. in its own defense, what will be the consequence of that?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, I once wrote a report on Japan, and among the things we said was the constitution constraints inhibited the ability of Japan to work with the United States, but I think that things are changing. As we sit here, there's a missile defense conference that was just held in Kyoto. And I think that in the minds of many Japanese, it doesn't strike them as appropriate that the United States, who is involved completely in the defense of Japan, would have to take all the burden of that defense; because of the constitution, the Japanese couldn't serve side by side with us. It's not reasonable. I think that's coming to light.

QUESTION: More on North Korea. North Korea has come out with a new statement this week saying that it needs nuclear weapons as a deterrent against what it perceives as a nuclear threat from the United States. Does this new statement raise the stakes; make a solution more urgent?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I think that the solution is urgent enough without this statement. I think that the interpretation by the North Koreans is a very facile one, I would argue that their unrelenting attempt to garner nuclear weapons and sort of WMD capabilities comes at the expense of starving their nation, and I think that should introduce a sense of urgency into their deliberations. Urgency of another kind, urgency to give up these weapons and join the community of nations in a more benign environment.

QUESTION: Now the talks that went on in Beijing in April between the U.S., North Korea and China didn't get very far. What do you think of the chances of more talks happening in the next few months, and possibly including South Korea and Japan this time?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, we certainly want to expand the talks to include Japan and South Korea, they have very great equities in the successful outcome of these deliberations and they should have a seat at the table. Further, I think it's very appropriate that all of us understand at the same time what the views of the North Koreans are, and the North Koreans ought to hear at the same time what the views of her neighbors are. I'm cautiously optimistic that we'll eventually sit down

in a multi-lateral framework, though I can't predict to you exactly when it'll be. I don't think it'll be in the too distant future. But I can't predict exactly when.

QUESTION: Are you seeing any signs coming from North Korea regarding their willingness to engage?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:No, I haven't seen anything in recent days. I see a series of statements and we had a congressional delegation which visited recently and once I return, I'll be studying the records of those talks and we'll see if there is any signal there. And, we'll look to friends and neighbors in the surrounding area to give us their advice, including of course the Japanese and I'll be discussing these matters with Japanese officials later today.

QUESTION: Are you concerned that South Korea appears less eager to be tough on North Korea than Japan and the United States?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:I think South Korea has a great deal of disappointment that it's evidencing because they engaged in very good faith and so-called engagement or sunshine policy, and received the back of the hand from the North Koreans in return. So, I think there's a little bit of disappointment tingeing the South Korean response, but I found when President Roh came to visit Mr. Bush in Washington that they had quite a good meeting of the minds, as did Prime Minister Koizumi when he came to Crawford. And I suspect that, at the end of the day, we'll all hang together on this matter because the equities and the importance of it are so high.

QUESTION: Now, there are growing calls here in Japan for economic sanctions against North Korea and there's discussion of that in Washington as well. What would precipitate sanctions in your view?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:It is a weapon or is a tool that's out there and this is not something that Washington would engage in alone. It's something that would have to seek the advice of a lot of friends and also the UN, I think, has a role to play in here. But it's very difficult I think to successfully sanction a country which is in effect, self sanctioning because of their own policies and their own lack of freedoms for her peoples. So we have to keep that into consideration, too. Whatever you do should be effective.

QUESTION: Now critics of the Bush Administration accuse the Bush Administration of having an unfocused North Korea policy, stemming largely from what many people feel is a very open division within the Bush administration about how to handle North Korea -- whether to pursue regime change, whether to pursue more engagement oriented policies. When you speak about North Korea policy, are you confident you're speaking for the entire Bush Administration?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:I'm quite confident. We have one leader in Washington. The name of that gentleman is George W. Bush. He has set the policy. He has publicly announced it both in Crawford and again when President Roh was in Washington. He seeks a peaceful, diplomatic solution in a multilateral setting, and that is the policy.

I think American citizens should be quite happy that there is a robust discussion of all issues, whether it's North Korean policy or any other, and that we have a President who can be decisive, and will be decisive, and welcomes strong views among his advisors in order to illuminate all sides of an issue for him.

QUESTION: But isn't that going to become very difficult to get a deal with the North Koreans, given that in 1994, the deal that was made then fell apart because of non-compliance. What kind of shape do you envision a deal would need to take in order to work?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:Well, clearly it has to be completely verifiable. This is what was missing in 1994. And, the burden of the proof of any agreement is going to lie on the backs of North Koreans, not on others of us. And, you're absolutely right. Of course, it will be difficult. It's made more difficult by the history that they've introduced. The history of non-compliance; the history of cheating on these agreements. Even at a time when they had an administration that was as favorably exposed to them as anyone could imagine, with a Secretary of State who had traveled to Pyongyang.

QUESTION: Is there a carrot along with the stick for them?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:The so-called bold approach that Mr. Kelly laid out when he went to Pyongyang is a bit of a carrot, if North Korea were to eschew verifiably that weapons of mass destruction and eliminate their missile proliferation and other items, and clearly the United States would be willing to assist them, so should the international community; their neighbors in South Korea, their fellow countrymen in South Korea, their neighbors in Japan. So there is a bold approach out there and I'm thinking there'd be plenty of assistance for North Korea, but she's got to take the first step. She caused the problem; she's got to re-mediate the problem and then we can move on.

QUESTION: Finally, the U.S. has announced plans to reorganize its troop presence in South Korea and there are also reports about possible reorganization of some of the Marines in Okinawa, in conjunction--

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:I believe those reports have been denied by my colleague, Paul Wolfowitz -- the latter statement.

QUESTION: Right. But this is all in the context of discussion about a restructuring of U.S. forces in Asia in general, changing the focus from larger fixed bases to smaller, more mobile forces, this kind of thing. What kind of message do you think is being sent to Asian allies in terms of U.S. commitment to defend people here?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE:First of all, I don't want to be in a position of correcting your comments, but as I understand it, the United States Defense department is looking at the whole situation of global basing of our forces and we want to be sure that our basing worldwide is such that it gives us the greatest degree of flexibility and the greatest bang for the buck. Here in Asia, there have been some discussions with our friends in the Republic of Korea, and anything that happens here in Asia is going to be one that allows the United States to better effect our security cooperation and our alliance responsibilities, or else we won't change. Further, any of these changes are going to be things that are subject to enormous discussions with host governments and most notable of which is our most important ally in Asia, Japan.

QUESTION: Thank you.

