



Interview on SBS Television

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Seoul, South Korea

July 13, 2005

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, thank you for this opportunity.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

QUESTION: I'm wondering if the U.S. is willing to hold more in-depth bilateral talks during the upcoming round of the six-party talks than at previous rounds? If so, how do you envision that happening?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the six-party talks are, indeed, six-party talks. And we've been very clear that this is not a bilateral issue between the United States and North Korea. The North Korean programs are a problem for all of its neighbors, and that's why the six-party framework is the appropriate framework. We, of course, have contact with all of the members of the six-party talks and we have, on occasion, had bilateral discussions within the framework of six-party talks with the North and I suppose we may again. But I think the focus here is on the fact that it is a six-party negotiation, and we cannot let the North try and turn this into a bilateral negotiation with the United States.

QUESTION: Yes. North Korea insists that it is already a nuclear state and the upcoming talks should be arms reductions talks, with North Korea standing on equal footing with the U.S. I would like to hear your view on this.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we've been very clear that this is about the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. And, after all, North Korea signed an agreement in 1991 that said that it would be a party to a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula. That meant not to possess, not to produce the fuel cycle, reprocessing and enrichment capability, certainly not to possess or produce nuclear weapons. And so the North needs to come back into conformance with the obligations that it took in 1991, that it took again in 1994 with the Clinton Administration. So it's the North that needs to dismantle its nuclear weapons programs and to return to the Nonproliferation Treaty.

QUESTION: Yes. Does the U.S. continue to believe or feel that both North Korea's plutonium-based program and its HEU, highly enriched uranium, program should be addressed through their six-party process?

SECRETARY RICE: Absolutely. We mean -- when we say nuclear weapons programs, we mean nuclear weapons programs, we mean the fuel cycle because the nuclear fuel cycle cannot be entrusted to the North Koreans, given that they have already violated their obligations and given that they've withdrawn from the NPT in order to violate those obligations. So our very strong views is everything -- HEU, plutonium -- it all has to be on the table.

QUESTION: Should be --

SECRETARY RICE: It all has to be taken care of in any agreement that is forthcoming. But the real issue here is: Has North Korea made a strategic choice not to possess nuclear weapons? That really is the issue.

QUESTION: That's the point.

SECRETARY RICE: That's the point. And I believe that we will have early indications of that when we resume the six-party talks and we will see.

QUESTION: Yes. And what steps will the U.S. take to improve its relations with North Korea if North Korea eventually abandons its nuclear program?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the first issue is for the North to make a strategic choice to abandon its nuclear weapons programs and its nuclear programs. We've been very clear in the June 2004 proposal that the North could have, within the context of the six-party talks, security assurances, if that is the issue; that we would be prepared to look at the North's energy needs, if that is the issue; and indeed, the South Korean offer for a major nuclear -- I'm sorry, a major energy program that is non-nuclear is a very positive step.

We have said to the North that there might be further economic and humanitarian --

QUESTION: Aid.

SECRETARY RICE: -- assistance.

QUESTION: Yes.

SECRETARY RICE: So there is a lot for the North to contemplate when it decides to come back to the talks. So I don't think there's any need to elaborate further. We need to get an answer to what we've already said.

QUESTION: Yes. Does the U.S. hold any opposition towards the so-called secret proposal to the DPRK by the ROK Government?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first, let me say that the Republic of Korea Government has kindly briefed us on this. We had discussions when the Unification Minister was in Washington. Our view is that an energy proposal that would address the legitimate energy needs of North Korea, and do so in a way that is non-nuclear, and therefore does not --

QUESTION: Electricity --

SECRETARY RICE: Right, electrical power -- does not have proliferation risks associated with it, is very creative. It is also very useful that the ROK has made clear that this is if North Korea is prepared to abandon its nuclear weapons programs.

QUESTION: The whole nuclear program.

SECRETARY RICE: That's right. The whole nuclear program. And so that, from our point of view, is a very creative idea.

QUESTION: Yes. What will the U.S. focus on at this round of six-party talks?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we are prepared to work hard. We have a saying, "to roll up our sleeves," and to work hard to try and make this round of the six-party talks a success. We will be prepared to negotiate, to stay late, to stay long in the meetings, but it has to begin with a strategic decision by North Korea to abandon these programs. That is really what is key here because all of the members of this arrangement have said to the North Koreans: this has to be a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula. That has implications for what the North is doing. And what we can't have again is that we have talks for talks' sake, that after a few days the talks break up, the North goes back and continues to improve its nuclear capabilities and then waits to come back to the talks at some later date. This is a cycle that we have got to break.

QUESTION: Yes. Did the U.S. withdraw the "outpost of tyranny" remark? I would like to hear it directly from you on this.

SECRETARY RICE: I will tell you what Ambassador Hill said when he was with his North Korean counterpart. He told him exactly what I had said: that we recognize that North Korea is sovereign; we confirmed the President's commitment that he has no intention to invade or attack the North; and that we are prepared to negotiate seriously toward an end to the North Korean program. That is all that Ambassador Hill has said. But our views of the North Korean regime's human rights record is well known, so that isn't an issue.

QUESTION: Which means you will no longer call the North Korea "outpost of tyranny"?

SECRETARY RICE: This has always been an excuse by the North Koreans. Now that they've decided to return to the talks, let's just remember that we have stated that this is a sovereign state, that we have no intention to attack it, but, of course, the President continues to have concerns about the plight of the North Korean people. It's one reason that the United States has been a major donor of food assistance to the North Korean people because they shouldn't have to live in the conditions in which they live.

QUESTION: How'd aid contributions to the DPRK split among six-party countries pledging aid?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the -- others have said that they would be prepared to deliver certain, for instance, fuel oil or whatever. But the important point is that the six parties, five of the six, are united in what has to be achieved here, which is that the North has to give up its weapons programs. And so that is the unifying factor here.

We, ourselves, have always said that humanitarian assistance should not be linked to any political goal, that, in fact, humanitarian assistance is humanitarian. And so we have never demanded anything in return for the food aid that we have given to North Korea.

There are also a number of other elements that are on the table with the proposal that was made in June 2004 and we need to get an answer to them.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, thank you for joining us today.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

QUESTION: I really appreciate it.

SECRETARY RICE: It's great to be with you. Thank you very much.

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