



Briefing En Route to Anchorage, Alaska

Secretary Condoleezza Rice
En Route to Anchorage, Alaska
July 13, 2005

SECRETARY RICE: Okay. I just wanted to come back for a few minutes and talk about the trip as a whole. It turned out, I think, to be a very good time to have decided to come to Asia. We've been -- this is the second time that I've been out here in a fairly short period of time. And I think we've made a lot of progress in between on a number of issues of interest.

We talked about the alliances with Japan and with South Korea. But obviously, the centerpiece was to continue to work on the diplomacy that has led to a resumption of the six-party talks, but having acknowledged that that resumption is an important step, to now really begin to talk about what we need to see when the talks resume. And there is agreement across the region and across the -- with all of the members of the six-party talks that it's now incumbent on North Korea to come back ready to negotiate. I made very clear to all of our partners that the United States was prepared to work as hard as possible, to roll up our sleeves, to work long hours and long days.

But no matter how hard we work, the real issue is: Is North Korea ready to make a strategic choice to give up its nuclear weapons programs? And there is a lot to recommend to North Korea that they do so, given that the June 24th -- June 04 proposal had made clear that we would consider, within the context of six-party talks security assurances, that energy needs would be addressed -- and of course, the South Korean proposal addresses that in a major way; that we were prepared to reiterate the President's pledges about not invading or not attacking North Korea and that there could be a better future for North Korea, particularly for the North Korean people, who I think everybody feels that there's just a humanitarian issue there. And so some of the offers of food aid have been addressed to that.

But it's been a really intensive period of diplomacy over the last six weeks or so but really, even going back a little further than that. That diplomacy continues. Chris Hill is still in the region and he'll be talking with South Korea and with Japan in a trilateral on Thursday. We know that Mr. Tang is in North Korea on behalf of the Chinese. So we have a pretty intensive period leading up to the resumption of the talks sometime during the week of the 25th.

QUESTION: I was struck by your comment, your answer to Nippon TV where you faulted the turgid and slow process of the six-party framework in the first three rounds. Now, it's been no secret that North Korea has been a very difficult -- it's been no secret that North Korea has been a difficult policy issue for this Administration dating back to the first term. You know, it has battled between the soft-liners and the hard-liners. But you may not agree, but I --

SECRETARY RICE: I'm fine. I'm fine.

QUESTION: All right. Well, my question then is, since you did say that this process was not -- the way it happened, that it was not acceptable that they were able to build an arsenal while these kind of pre-canned statements were being passed back and forth. Doesn't the Administration share some of the blame for the way the process has unfolded since 2002?

SECRETARY RICE: There is one problem and that's North Korea's inability to declare that it needs to give up its nuclear weapons. And what it's tried to do instead is to use the six-party talks to come to make statements and then -- have the six-party talks end, and then they go and they threaten some -- threaten further, hoping to get back to the six-party talks.

You know, that pattern has to be broken. And I think the reason it's important to recognize that this is not a bilateral issue between North and -- the North Koreans and the United States is that the North Koreans could have made a decision at any time to give up their nuclear weapons program, which is, after all, the demand that has been made of them by all of their neighbors. It is, by the way, what they signed onto in 1991, that they wouldn't possess or develop or have these programs.

And so there's one issue here and that's how -- whether North Korea is now prepared to make the strategic decision that they could have made a long time ago. And I think you heard from everybody that that is what is expected of them. And Glenn, I've been in all of those meetings and I can tell you that the view that it is for North Korea to -- I mean, all of our meetings -- the view that it is for North Korea to make this choice has been our position ever since Jim Kelly first went to North Korea planning, in fact, to lay out a bold proposal for the possibility of, you know, better relations between the North and even the United States, and found instead an admission of an HEU program. So there's a lot of work to do, but we're finally in a position to resume the talks and now we'll see whether or not that commitment is there on the part of the North.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, over the last six months, you and many others in the Administration continually urged the Chinese to exert their pressure -- more pressure to bring them -- the North Koreans -- back to the talks. And in the end, the Chinese did not take that very far and it was the South Koreans who appeared to have made the difference. Did you miscalculate here?

SECRETARY RICE: How do you know that it's the South Koreans that made the difference? Have you been talking to the North Koreans about what made the difference? I think, Joel, I can make the argument that a number of diplomatic efforts here -- by the Chinese, by the South Koreans, by the United States indeed the Japanese and the Russians -- have been involved, has convinced the North Koreans that all of their neighbors are, indeed, united in the view that there has to be a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula and that it is important that the six-party talks which are the proper vehicle for that, that those talks are resumed. The North Korean was -- announcement about the talks was, I think, February 10th. There has been a pretty intensive effort on the part of everybody to convince the North Koreans that there was but one path ahead. And I think that everybody deserves a good deal of credit for convincing the North Koreans that there were no bilateral off-ramps from the six-party talks, that the only way was the six-party talks.

QUESTION: Secretary Rice, I wanted to ask about your Beijing stop. I know you recused yourself from the UNOCAL discussions, but did the Chinese bring it up, ask for clarifications, perhaps, about CFIUS?

And secondly, did they raise the issue of Israeli arms sales and U.S. objections?

SECRETARY RICE: The latter issue did not come up. And on the CFIUS process, I referred all of that to the -- there is going to be -- there was a JCCT right after me that could clarify that process. I really am recused from the issue and didn't talk about it at all.

They didn't bring it up with me, but I'm sure that they brought it up with others. I made clear at the very beginning that was something that I could not discuss. So I thought it was better probably to take that off the table from the beginning.

QUESTION: Thank you. Madame Secretary, on North Korea, a question about the sequencing. How flexible is the Administration willing to be? In other words, will a simple declaration by the North Koreans that they are going to denuclearize get things started or do they have to more things like allow in inspectors and actually take physical steps to dismantle?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we've always said that it begins with a strategic choice. Of course, that means they have to first declare. But I don't believe, given the record of the North Koreans, that people are going to be satisfied just with a simple declaration.

I think we'll have to see how this unfolds, over what period of time. But obviously, there are going to have to be ways to have them demonstrate that this is, in fact, not just a declaration, but a real commitment. And we'll talk with our colleagues about how the North Koreans might do that and in what time period. But there's no doubt that it has to be more than words at some point for people to be satisfied.

QUESTION: Thank you. Madame Secretary, just to try to clarify, really, in a sense, follow up on a question that was asked a couple of days ago does the Japanese abduction issue belong inside the six-party talks or is it something that should be approached separately?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, the effort that we are making to get rid of the nuclear programs is the core of the six-party talks. But we have never said that the six parties should not be able to raise other issues, nor have we ever said that the end of the nuclear program is going to be the end of the difficulties with North Korea. I think we've made clear that we have human rights concerns, we have -- the Japanese obviously have the abductions concern. And what's unfolding here is that there is a nuclear issue and that issue has to be dealt with and that issue has to be dealt with quickly.

But, of course, there is a broader context of what is going to be -- what are the politics going to look like between North Korea and other states with which it has created conditions of concern, and among those are the Japanese.

So I don't think there's any doubt that this is a long process in which the abduction issue is also going to have to be -- eventually have to be dealt with.

QUESTION: Do your partners in the six-party process agree with the U.S. position that North Korea has indeed been carrying out a uranium enrichment program for all these years?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I do believe that there is agreement that the North Koreans have engaged in activities that are certainly, at the very least, suspicious on that front. And again, we don't have to go to anything except the North Koreans' statement about HEU and their having taken that path.

I'd also note that, of course, they associated with A.Q. Khan and the last time I looked, A.Q. Khan didn't engage in civilian nuclear uses. So I think there's plenty of evidence there. And in any case, the goal is going to be a complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and, of course, that has to include HEU.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, the armchair quarterbacks tomorrow are probably going to say that you've outsourced your Iran policy to the Europeans and you've outsourced your North Korea policy to the South Koreans, all to avoid having to make any concessions to the bad boys. And you hold fast to the notion that, you know, you weren't going to offer any incentives but you've kind of stood by while the South Koreans proposed. And, you know, whether or not that made the difference, we can argue about. But how are you going answer that?

SECRETARY RICE: I would say that what we've achieved is that the Iran policy is a unified policy between the United States and the Europeans. That's pretty good. And the North Korea policy is a unified policy between Japan, South Korea, the United States, Russia and China. So I thought this was called multilateralism, that it's a good thing when the United States finds itself in complete unity with other states that have core interests involved in these very difficult nuclear cases. And since we work very closely with our European allies on the Iranian issue and when it was appropriate for the United States to give some further way for these negotiations to move forward, for instance, with the WTO, we were prepared to do that.

And on the North Korean side, it was really a part of the June '04 proposal that somehow the North Korean energy needs were going to have to be dealt with. Now, the good thing about the South Korean proposal, of course, is that for the first time, we have a comprehensive proposal on energy that is non-nuclear. That is a major step forward and does diminish considerably the proliferation risks that were even associated with earlier efforts to fulfill energy needs. So it is very good to be working in a coalition with the Europeans on Iran and with the other parties to the six parties where North Korea is concerned, and I think that people generally believe that the United States is an awfully important part of that coalition.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, you said that you were pleased by the Japan Foreign Minister's update on the beef export situation, but what specifically was that update? And should the U.S. beef producers have any reason for optimism, given that the Administration has said there will be a quick solution to this?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I was glad to have the update. I still think the issue has to be resolved and has to be resolved quickly. The Japanese have told us that they are in the midst of a process with experts. I think they recognize that it is important that this be done as quickly as possible. I understand that there are regulatory processes, you know, in democratic societies. I fully understand that.

But I had an opportunity again to say to the Japanese Government that this is something that we hope is going to be resolved very soon. And I can't speak to the question about optimism except to say that I think the Japanese know that we've registered this concern yet again.

QUESTION: Will the United States be flexible in the negotiations with the six-party talks in relation to North Korea's request to be flexible (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we've said that this is a negotiation and so the issue is what are we going to hear when we get to the table. I think the first step is to see if North Korea comes prepared, having made a strategic choice, and is then really ready to negotiate. And I think at that point we'll see what else is required. But it is, obviously, a negotiation but there is currently a pretty strong proposal, or a set of elements proposal, on the table.

QUESTION: I have to ask you, there's a lot of buzz in Washington about -- there's a lot of buzz in Washington about the Karl Rove situation. You've worked with him before there. Is this a distracting situation for the White House priorities and how do you react to that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, I would just refer you to the White House. I have not been following this since I've been on the road. I know that this is a matter that is in legal channels and so I don't want to try and comment off the top of my head. But I think I'll just have to refer you to White House channels about what is going on there. But I have absolutely felt no distraction. I mean, we've been here pretty involved in what we're doing.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) this is not a distraction?

SECRETARY RICE: I don't imagine so. I mean, you deal with matters as they come along and this is a matter to which I think everybody is trying to be responsive and to be responsive to Mr. Fitzgerald and to do what is right. But I've really not been following it very closely.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, if the North agrees to give up its nuclear weapons, is the Bush Administration prepared to live with a regime headed by Kim Jong-il?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, let's first get the North Koreans to give up their nuclear weapons. I have a personal belief in one thing at a time. We've made no secret of the fact that we have concerns about other aspects of the regime's behavior, about its human rights record, about the conventional force balance, about proliferation of missile technology. And obviously, there is a larger political context here. But the goal that we've had over the last several months is to make clear that we have all of these concerns. We believe that these can be addressed diplomatically. But the President continues to be concerned, as do we all, with the plight of the North Korean people who, of course, deserve to, like anyone else, to live in better circumstances than they currently do.

QUESTION: Thank you, Madame Secretary. I couldn't help but absorb some of the Asian customs and traditions that I was able to observe, so my question has 27 parts. (Laughter.) All right, just two. Just two.

First, can you tell us --

SECRETARY RICE: At least you don't have to translate. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Can you tell us how often you have communicated with President Bush since the trip began and what reactions he has had to the developments that we've seen?

And secondly, you've repeatedly mentioned this is a negotiation and, as you know from your own experience, a negotiation involves coming prepared with various fallback positions for various contingencies. Can you enlighten us on how you've approached that aspect of this negotiation, what kind of fallback? How do you go about creating your fallback positions and how prepared you are for how many different kinds of contingencies that may arise?

SECRETARY RICE: James, actually, I'm not much of a fan of the fallback strategy in negotiation. I think what you do is that you have certain goals that you're trying to achieve. We know that we have to achieve a denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We know that requires a strategic choice by the North Koreans. We know that we've put some elements in place that should help the North to make that strategic choice. And I think at the time that we see whether they are ready to demonstrate that, then we're going to be prepared to discuss and negotiate seriously about what next steps can be taken.

What we can do in this period leading up to the talks and are going to do is to have pretty intensive discussions with our allies. We have a trilateral with the South Koreans and the Japanese. I'm quite sure that there will be intensive discussions with the Russians. I look forward to hearing from the Chinese after the return of Mr. Tang back from North Korea. So I would think of this period more as trying to make certain that we keep a common front about what it is that we are trying to achieve when we get to the negotiations, rather than starting to think about how we might respond to any specific contingency.

And yes, I've talked to the President a couple of times. But as you well know, I don't discuss what I've talked to the President about, but I have talked to him a couple of times for the trip.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: James, I'm not going to characterize my conversations with the President. We've had very good discussions and it's -- I have kept him informed about what's going on.

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