



Special Briefing
Office of the Spokesman
Washington, DC
September 9, 2005

Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Christopher R. Hill On Upcoming Resumption of the Six-Party Talks

(2:40 p.m. EDT)

MR. CASEY: Afternoon, everyone. Welcome back to the State Department. Having a busy day today, I want to make sure, though, that we have an opportunity for you to hear from Ambassador Chris Hill, the Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, before he heads out to Beijing to pick up his duties and responsibilities, again, as head of our delegation to the six-party talks.

Ambassador Hill.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Will this be product placement or -- would I be okay on --. Anyway, well, good to see you all. I'm heading off this weekend, I guess, leaving Sunday morning. I'll go first to Seoul. Actually, I'd hoped to go to Japan and Seoul or Tokyo and Seoul, but Tokyo just having elections, I just thought there might be too much going on in Tokyo, so I'll meet Ken Sasae when I'm in Beijing. But anyway, so I will go to Seoul, arrive Monday afternoon. I think I have a meeting with the Unification Minister, Mr. Chung Dong-young. And of course, I'll see my counterpart, Ambassador Song Min-Soon. I will then Tuesday morning will depart -- or Tuesday around, I believe noontime, will depart for Beijing, arrive there in early afternoon. I'll have a series of bilaterals in the afternoon, I hope with all the parties. I think we're working on scheduling those. And that night, as I understand the schedule, the Chinese will begin the six-party talks with a dinner. And then Wednesday morning, we'll start in earnest.

Where we are at that point or where we are in the six-party talks, we will know when we get there. I know that we have certainly looked very carefully at the document. We're still working on the Chinese fourth draft. We have some suggestions to it. We consider it a very good basis for the agreement on principles, goals and principles. I know some of the other parties have looked at it and have some small suggestions, as do we. But of course, the real question will be, how have the -- how has the DPRK evaluated the document in the ensuing, now some four weeks, I guess, since we broke off the party in Beijing.

So we will see what they think about it. We'll see if they have any new ideas. I know there has been discussion about whether the DPRK is toughening its position or whatever. I really don't know. I will know better when we sit down with them and pick up where we left off. My sense is that some issues will get raised that we thought were resolved. That seems to be a pattern. We'll have to deal with that and -- but I don't want to say whether I'm optimistic or pessimistic. I want to engage, see where we are, and then I'll have a good sense of whether I should be optimistic or pessimistic.

How long it'll take, again, we don't have a fixed timeframe. I think people are thinking in terms of about a week but, again, my view is we'll be there as long as it's useful to be there. It might be longer than a week, might be a lot shorter than a week. So we'll have to see. So those are opening comments.

QUESTION: Does the current draft explicitly call for the verifiable dismantling of the North Korean nuclear weapons programs?

AMBASSADOR HILL: I'm sorry? Does it?

QUESTION: Does it. Yes.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Oh, yes.

QUESTION: And has North Korea indicated it is okay with that?

AMBASSADOR HILL: You know, in a document of this kind, nothing is agreed unless all is agreed. So there has certainly been a lot of discussion about how to word all of that. There has been certainly a lot of discussion about other elements around that. But the basis on which we're there is the dismantling of all these nuclear weapons programs. We felt that that was an issue on which we have made a lot of progress, but I don't want to say we're there yet because we have to have the overall two pages, two and a half pages agreed. So one shouldn't say that they've agreed to that but haven't agreed to something else because we've got to see the whole picture.

And by the way, sometimes in a negotiation, one side doesn't like one part of the agreement; but doesn't want to oppose that for a variety of tactical reasons, so it will oppose another part. But you know that in opposing the other part, what they're really getting at is the first thing. So one has to be real careful about that stuff and describing that stuff.

Yes.

QUESTION: One of the issues that was contentious and that led to the postponement of the talks was the civilian nuclear program.

AMBASSADOR HILL: I don't -- well, you know, that's an issue. I don't deny that for a minute. I'm not sure I would say that that was an issue that led to the postponement of the talks. I would say that was an issue that we did have a disagreement on. I don't know how much of an agreement or disagreement it is until we really see if that is, in fact, the issue out there. But certainly, the reason the talks went into recess was the DPRK delegation asked for some time. They wanted to go back to their capital.

You know, this is not an easy issue. These nuclear weapons programs have been around in the DPRK for some 20, 30 years, depending on when you date these first -- the first reactor, the construction of the reactor in Yongbyon. So, you know, these are important decisions and our best indication was that they wanted to go back and have a discussion about this. And so the question will be: What did they use the intervening weeks for? Have they used those weeks to find solutions and find a way forward, or have they used those weeks to toughen their position and to come back not in a mood to reach an agreement? So we'll have to see.

QUESTION: Just a quick follow-up. Is the U.S. agreeable to North Korea having a civilian nuclear program?

AMBASSADOR HILL: No, I'm not -- we've been very -- our position has been very clear on this. What North Korea needs to do is get out of the nuclear business -- been very clear about that. You know, nuclear -- North Korea, DPRK, has had trouble keeping peaceful programs peaceful. And what this agreement tries to do, and what it actually clearly does, is propose a way forward for the DPRK economy, including and I would say especially in the area of energy. And the energy proposals have to do

with conventional power, which it is felt by the experts could really provide a great improvement to the people in the DPRK. I mean, within some two and a half to three years, they could have new electricity being generated into towns and villages and cities in the DPRK.

So if this is about energy, if this is about electricity, we've got a very good proposal for that. And this would really meet their capacity needs and we don't see any reason to go and develop additional capacity, especially through such very difficult and extremely expensive projects as nuclear energy.

Let's go for some geographic distribution. Yes.

QUESTION: Ambassador Hill, do you think that North Koreans are looking for concessions from the United States? And also, they've had food famine and a huge military that surely outweighs any need for a military that size and nearly in the millions. Are you talking to them in the way of human rights and some of their concessions that they might want from here in the United States or do they think that we, as the United States, are ganging up on them?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, we're not ganging up on them. We're trying to solve a problem, which -- and proposing a solution that I think is in everyone's interest to accept. What the motivation is for finally looking for ways to get out of the nuclear business -- you know, you'd have to ask them. I would hope it would have something to do with the fact that nuclear weapons or nuclear weapons programs in the DPRK have done nothing to solve the DPRK's problems. You line up their top 100 problems, you will not see how nuclear weapons programs can solve any one of them.

I think they've realized the nuclear weapons programs have not, in any way, enhanced their security and I think it's pretty clear that nuclear weapons programs have caused more isolation than ever before. So, if you're looking to improve the DPRK economy and looking to improve the life of its citizens and maybe, in fact, looking to stabilize that country and to avoid these intermittent famines which, unfortunately, are coming more and more because of the environmental degradation and the DPRK, it's necessary to get out of the nuclear business.

Now, if I were a DPRK official, that would be my motivation, but -- you know, as I said, you'll have to ask them.

Yes.

QUESTION: How are your meetings in Beijing going to be coordinated and -- if any way, with any meetings that the Secretary might have with the South Koreans, the Chinese, the Russians in New York at the UN?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, we have telephones. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Were they working?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Yes. E-mails. Lots of ways to communicate. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: I said coordinate not communicate. I said how are you going to coordinate it?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Now, we will be -- you know, when I was in Beijing the last time, I spoke with Secretary Rice once and twice a day and I suspect we'll, you know, maintain that pace. I also bring a sort of microcosm of the interagency process on the delegation so people will also be in touch with their agencies. We'll have the Bureau of East Asian Affairs -- will be backstopping us here. There'll be meetings of the deputies and principals and certainly a meeting like the one that you describe Secretary Rice with her counterparts in New York; we will coordinate very closely on that.

I mean, for me personally, it's kind of unfortunate that the six-party talks are timed during the UNGA week, so -- I'm sorry?

QUESTION: That's what I was getting at when I asked --

AMBASSADOR HILL: Yes. It's unfortunate because frankly speaking, you know, I'm not the Assistant Secretary for North Korea. I mean, there are other issues going on in Asia and I would have liked to take part in some of those meetings in New York, but we'll manage.

QUESTION: Do you think it was deliberate on the part of the North Koreans to want to do this next week? Because of I'm not seeing any --

AMBASSADOR HILL: I don't think so.

QUESTION: Okay.

AMBASSADOR HILL: But you'll have to them.

QUESTION: Some have suggested that there's a way to compromise on the whole -- at least, a rhetorical compromise on the LWR question and that is to -- for the United States to acknowledge a theoretical right of North Korea and other countries to civilian nuclear power and not -- and yet the United States would not commit to actual LWR construction. Is that something that you're even considering? Do you see that as a plausible solution? And can you talk a little bit about whatever Mr. Heckler and his party talked to you about in terms of their trip?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, I mean, first of all, it is important in these negotiations to keep your eye on the ball. What we're trying to do is get the DPRK out of the nuclear business and we're doing that with a package of proposals that address what we believe are the issues that they want to address. And I must say, when I spoke of progress last time, I think one area of progress was the fact that I said to my DPRK counterpart: Are these the issues you need? I mean, is it energy assistance? And is it economic assistance? Is it international recognition? Is it security guarantees? Are these the issues?

These are the issues. So I think we have a pretty good package on the table. And I would say one of the best elements of that package, thanks to our friends in the Republic of Korea, in the ROK, is the conventional energy package. I mean, within -- it's very important to understand, DPRK has a serious problem with electricity, and so the ROK is putting forward a very serious proposal that will be done pretty quickly, two and a half, three years, including the very important issue of transmission. Because while the light-water reactors that were envisioned in the 1990s were, you know, impressive-looking facilities, they weren't particularly well connected to the grid because there's not much of a grid. So what the ROK has in mind is connecting this conventional energy through -- into a grid. Pretty good stuff.

And so we think it is very important to focus on this. And to the extent that people get off of this and start talking about theoretical rights and theoretical problems and hypothetical situations, you know, I think it kind of detracts us from the main issue. I know there's a view out there that somehow this was the issue and if we can only find a solution to this, everything else will be okay. That's not the case. I mean, we -- this is -- the main event here is getting the DPRK out of the nuclear business. And so let's see how we do with that and let's see if we can reach an agreement on that.

Yes.

QUESTION: How about Heckler?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Oh. You know, he and Professor Lewis were here yesterday. I met with them. They also met with Secretary Rice. They had some discussions in Pyongyang and also with Chinese counterparts. I don't think it's really fair for me to tell you what they said. I mean, you should ask them. They're, you know, American citizens are quite reachable. But, you know, they're quite -- they're real experts in the field. They know a lot about this. They have a historical knowledge of it. I mean, they've been working on it for a number of years. And, you know, they shared with us their thoughts, you know, where they think we are. They gave us some suggestions on where we might go. It was very useful. But I really don't want to get into the specifics of what they said.

Yes.

QUESTION: How about Congressman Lantos and Congressman Leach? You talked to them? Were they --

AMBASSADOR HILL: I talked to them. Yes, we had a very good discussion before they went. And then there was a moment when they weren't sure if they were going to actually go, but fortunately they went. I talked to both of them, I think a week ago, when they came out of the DPRK and were in Beijing. They had, you know, lengthy discussions very much in sync with what we're doing. I think what's important is while for many of us North Korea's system looks difficult to understand and a little opaque, you can imagine for a person from the DPRK it's a little difficult to understand how Washington works -- a little difficult for some of us as well. (Laughter.)

And so, it's important to be in touch with them and we were in touch before they went and we were in touch when they came back. I think they are very pleased with the quality of their discussions and I was certainly very pleased with the points they were able to get across. What this all means, you know, how successful this all -- all these contacts are, well, I'll know better next week.

Yes.

QUESTION: There has also been talk about that -- or maybe I should say speculation that the North Koreans would be reluctant to accept the South Korean energy proposal, because the power would have to be wheeled across the DMZ and that would make them vulnerable to cutoff and that -- you know, the only way they would go forward is if the plant were sited within DPRK borders.

Is that something that Washington is open to talking about? Would that be on the table? And do you think that that is, in fact, a North Korean problem or is that something --

AMBASSADOR HILL: I don't know how serious a problem it is. I mean, if you look at anyone's -- if you look at any electricity grid in the world today, I mean, you've got electricity lines -- you know, crossing borders. Probably the DPRK does have a more autarkic view of electricity than most other countries in the world. They have not raised that issue with me. They -- certainly, the subject has come up, but I think the ROK makes a pretty convincing case that if the electricity deal is part of the six-party talks and ultimately resides in the six-party process, this is an international arrangement that the ROK would not want to walk away from -- I mean, obligations reached at in an international arrangement that certainly, the ROK would not want to walk away from.

And I think the ROK especially -- and I think the DPRK knows this -- has a great interest in making any eventual settlement work. So, you know, if you look at all the problems DPRK faces, the idea of some cutoff of power by the ROK really shouldn't be among their top concerns and they have not talked to us about that.

Yes, Glenn.

QUESTION: First of all, I was wondering if -- you described it -- the text you're working off of is a two, two-and-a-half page document. I was wondering if you could --

AMBASSADOR HILL: Seems longer. (Laughter.) It's kind of dense.

QUESTION: And lots of brackets. But I was wondering if you could maybe describe, generally, the general principles that make up -- or the general themes or concepts that make up that document. And then secondly, one thing that strikes me about this briefing, you stress the -- you know, they could have electricity in two to three years. You know, the Administration had been saying for a long time it did not want to reward North Korea for bad behavior. And the way you're sort of describing it, it does sound like a package of rewards that they would get for giving up their nuclear programs, as opposed to, first, you give up your nuclear programs and then you start to -- you know, from there we can see where the relationship goes.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, I think in our June '04 proposal, you will see a set of -- a package on the table, which would be a sort of compensation for their getting out of this nuclear business. I think the elements of this two-and-a-half-page document would not surprise anybody. It has to do with a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula, you know, ridding the Korean Peninsula of any nuclear weapons and of course, we have not had any nuclear weapons there for quite some time and I think everyone knows that.

It involves some economic incentives to do that. It involves a willingness to work to reintegrate -- or integrate DPRK into the international economy. It involves a willingness to pursue a cross recognition among states, which of course, are subject to bilateral factors but nonetheless would have the result of further integrating DPRK into the international system. And it would really be -- it would really offer a road to DPRK's acceptance by other countries and by the international community at large. We would be attempting to help make the DPRK -- give it the possibility of joining international financial institutions, for example.

You know, these are things that take time and, you know, all these organizations and all these issues have their own set of rules. But it really opens a road to the DPRK that is currently closed. And so are we rewarding bad behavior? I think the idea is that we're saying that if they get out of this unacceptable behavior and turn away from this unacceptable behavior and change their behavior, that we are prepared to respond and to help that country. But we cannot help them as long as they are embarked on making nuclear weapons.

QUESTION: These principles still have this concept of -- like a three-month, four-month type of freeze of the programs while claims of North Korea are verified or us that more detailed than it would be on this --

AMBASSADOR HILL: That's more detailed. And I'm glad you mentioned that because we are -- you know, we do envision a next phase, which would involve the actual implementing documents. For example, one of the principles is that any disarmament or any abandoning of nuclear weapons has to be verifiable. In fact, everything has to be verifiable. So that's a principle -- has to be verifiable. But how you verify is something you get into -- it's an implementation and that's not going to be an easy issue.

So this is kind of, in many respects, setting up these principles. It doesn't end the problem. We have to go on to an implementing phase, but the hope is that it will provide, I think, a sort of psychological turn of the corner that people will understand what the arrangements are going to be and that people will get used to these ideas. And that we hope that the implementation or the negotiations to lay out the implementation could be speeded up because, in effect, these strategic decisions will have been made. So it's important but it's not the end of the game.

Andrea.

QUESTION: A couple of quick questions. One, leading up to these talks, there were questions surrounding the commitment of China, which after all has some -- greatest leverage over North Korea. Their commitment to actually, you know, do some arm twisting if North Korea didn't continue down this path. Do you feel any more confident

that the Chinese are on board with that? That's my first question.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, I think the Chinese clearly share our goals in this, completely share our goals. And, you know, the fact that they're all drafts that they've shared that they've put out -- remember, these are drafts not based on everyone's bracketed language. These are drafts that the Chinese have taken -- they've taken everyone's comments and put together a draft, trying to get everyone to agree to the wording in the draft.

So this is more than just, you know, just a secretarial role. I mean, they're really trying to put a draft where they take everyone's major concerns and make sure those concerns are reflected in the draft. So they've done a lot of work and a lot of tough work. They've also, I know, spent a lot of time with the DPRK delegation to get the DPRK to accept these drafts.

You know, we've discussed this before, you know, how much leverage does China have and how much leverage are they willing to use and the latter is clearly less than the former. And certainly there is always the issue of whether China could do more because they've had this special relationship with this small country for some 50, 60 years.

I would say though and I really think the emphasis ought to be on the fact that we've really worked very well with the Chinese throughout this process. They've put a very good team together; very impressive diplomats on this. They sent a team here to Washington a couple of weeks ago, had some really good discussions. We're in pretty constant communication. And, you know, I've got to tell you, the six-party process is a process that, if nothing else, has brought the U.S. and China closer together.

QUESTION: I'd like to ask you -- I know what you're going to say, but I have to ask you anyway.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Then why ask?

QUESTION: Because I have to ask. Last October, Congress passed this, you know, bill that would create the position of Special Envoy for Human Rights to North Korea. The fact that it was announced, that this Mr. Lefkowitz was sort of unveiled to the public during this hiatus since you got back to this round of talks, how much is that -- do you think that's going to complicate matters with North Korea as you move forward, knowing that this is sort of in their face?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, I'm not sure that's true. So what do you think my answer is? (Laughter.) No, look, the statute has been out there. I think there was a timeframe during which the Human Rights Envoy was to have been named, and actually the human rights -- it took longer. Occasionally that happens in Washington. I think it took longer but it wasn't something that we wanted to delay.

You know, I've talked about human rights before and I just think it's a very important element in joining the international community. I think all countries need to take a hard look at their own human rights record every day of the year. I think we ought to do that and I certainly believe the DPRK should be doing that. And I think they should -- they have nothing to fear from the naming of a Human Rights Envoy. We have no interest in weaponizing human rights. Human rights is an absolutely legitimate subject of -- when you are talking about bringing a country into the international community. It's part of the UN Charter. Read the Charter. It's all there.

So from the point of view of negotiating -- dealing with the issue of nuclear weapons and dealing with the issue of trying to create a path for a country into the international community, I've got no problem with this, no problem at all. Which I know is the answer you expected, but it's true.

Yes.

QUESTION: Mr. Lantos and Mr. Leach told us that --

AMBASSADOR HILL: Who's "us"?

QUESTION: Told journalists.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Journalists. Okay.

QUESTION: On their visit to Pyongyang, North Korea told them that they are still proceeding with nuclear program, reprocessing and also construction of nuclear reactor.

So, my question is that, how can we get assurance from North Korea that they will stop their nuclear program, at least while we are negotiating with them? Because negotiations can be -- maybe could be very long and they can take advantage of that and take -- and proceed to accelerate nuclear program, so.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, we're going to go back to Beijing. I don't know whether it's going to be three days, five days, eight days. I don't know. But what I do know is at the end of this, we are not going to allow a situation where DPRK retains fissile material. We're not going to allow a situation where weapons-grade plutonium, for example, is allowed to sit around. So, whatever they're doing, if they're doing it, something they're going to have to give up.

So, if they want to keep producing something that they're going to have to give up, it's fine, but the point is, we are not interested in a negotiation where they freeze production, we're not interested in negotiation where we allow them to have a few bombs or something. We're interested in a negotiation where they get out of this business and get on with the business of making their country more successful, of getting their country into the international community and frankly, providing a better life for their people.

So, I am not going to get into any discussions in Beijing about freezing stuff. I want to get rid of it.

Yes.

QUESTION: Again, on civilian nuclear program --

AMBASSADOR HILL: Yes.

QUESTION: If it is only a theoretical issue, do you see any possibility that eventually, you agree to disagree and set aside these topics during this round or it must be definitely included in the so-called statement of principle?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, I think it has to be addressed and what we're not interested in is really creating ambiguity. Nuclear weapons, nuclear programs are not something that one should leave in an ambiguous state, so -- no pun intended. But anyway, the -- we have to address these things and we will.

MR. CASEY: Chris, I think we have time just for one more question. Pick your victim.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, I've got to pick this guy. You know, he's -- (Laughter.) No, I mean you. He looked hopefully behind him, but --

QUESTION: Thank you very much. It's good to see you again.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Great to see you again.

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

AMBASSADOR HILL: You have your plane ticket yet?

QUESTION: Oh, I have to book this afternoon. Thank you very much.

AMBASSADOR HILL: But you're coming? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: I will. I will.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Because if you're not coming, I'm not going. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Anyhow, anyway, I will, I will. Mr. Secretary, at the end of the last talk, just before the recess had started, you --

AMBASSADOR HILL: (Inaudible), I'm sorry?

QUESTION: Oh, recess -- recess had started -- at the time of the end of the talk --

AMBASSADOR HILL: Oh, before the recess. Yes.

QUESTION: Before the recess, you had indicated that, if necessary, you were willing to meet with your counterpart of North Korean. Have you met with Kim Gye-Gwan or you didn't meet with, but did you make a contact with Kim Gye-Gwan in any way, e-mail or a telephone conversation? If not, could you tell me the reason why?

AMBASSADOR HILL: We had some contact with the DPRK. Ambassador DeTrani was up in New York -- I believe it was twice. I had given a message to DPRK -- to Kim Gye-Gwan, my counterpart, and Kim Gye-Gwan had sent me a message. We were talking about when we might get together in Beijing, so that aspect of it was not all that substantive. I certainly did open the, you know, the possibility that if he had any issues for me, any -- I was quite happy to deal with any issues and questions. So you know, we've certainly kept a communication line open, but I think he -- you know, will have more serious discussions when we get to Beijing.

So, you know, I just wanted to make it clear to them that we have an open channel of communication should they have needed it during the intervening time; and we did use it for some discussion, but we will, you know, we'll look forward to having a lot more discussion in Beijing.

QUESTION: So are you going to meet with Kim Gye-Gwan on Tuesday afternoon?

AMBASSADOR HILL: You know, originally, we were talking about Tuesday night and I think you're right, I think it's going to be Tuesday afternoon. (Laughter.) I have full faith that you will know before I do. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Thank you.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Okay. Thank you very much.

2005/850

Released on September 9, 2005

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.