



On-the-Record Briefing -- 61st UN General Assembly

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(10:35 p.m. EDT)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, we had 85 people at this. We just had a meeting of what – sort of a broader group on the – to discuss Northeast Asian security, what became known in Kuala Lumpur as the 5+5.

QUESTION: Can you give us a list of who got in (inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Right. It was – but it turned out to be the 6-1+2+3-2. (Laughter.) And I'll identify them. The U.S., Australia, Indonesia, New Zealand, Canada, the Philippines as the ASEAN chair, and the Republic of Korea. Does that come to eight?

QUESTION: So China and Russia didn't attend?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: China and Russia didn't attend. They are both Perm 5 members. They've been meeting with the Secretary all week. They didn't attend. They didn't say it was for policy reasons. It could have been for scheduling. But since it was an informal gathering we weren't really insisting that everybody be around the table.

We discussed – it was an information exchange. Ban Ki-moon discussed ROK assessments of the situation in North Korea, including the humanitarian situation. He also discussed the ROK's views of the need to get the six-party process going. Generally there was a discussion of the six-party process and I also updated some of the – I also updated the participants on the Macao situation, the banking issue which the North Koreans have used as a pretext for staying away from the talks for one year.

There was also a good discussion of the need to implement 1695 and Australia and Japan updated us on where they have – what they have done recently in terms of taking measures pursuant to their obligations under 1695.

And we also discussed some of the broader issues of the need to develop stronger security mechanisms in Northeast Asia. And at the conclusion of the meeting, Secretary Rice, as she did in Kuala Lumpur, suggested that she thought this was a useful exchange of views, very informal, most people did not speak with notes, and thought that perhaps we could get together in a similar forum in the next time we're all together, which is in Hanoi during APEC.

All participants, and starting with Secretary Rice, were at pains to make clear that we're not trying to substitute the six-party process, that we're not in any way trying to change that. It's not designed to be a substitute. It's simply an informal forum whose purpose is to discuss the security situation in Northeast Asia and to support the six-party process. And I would say all participants were very strong in their support of the six-party process.

QUESTION: Are you disappointed that China and Russia decided not to attend because it gives the meeting less gravitas? Their attendance, I'm sure, would have been welcome.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, again, the point of the meeting is not to create some new mechanism. It's to have an exchange of views. We had only one hour for the meeting so the idea is to be very inclusive. Anyone who really wants to attend or who has a role in Northeast Asian security should be able to attend, but if people are not able to attend it really doesn't affect, as you put it, the gravitas of the meeting.

QUESTION: Do you see it as a snub at all?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, I did not. Sorry, I can't help you with that one. (Laughter.) I can see where you're heading with that. That would be a very – that would really not – you know, the Secretary has seen China and Russia throughout the week. I mean, breakfast, lunch and dinner. I mean, we kind of know where they are on these issues.

It was a good opportunity to hear Ban Ki-moon, for example, give his take on the food situation in North Korea, a good opportunity to hear from some countries that have an interest but often don't express it as much, for example the Canadian Government. I hope the *New York Times* is not here. No.

QUESTION: Do you think that China is doing enough to (inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Several participants, several participants – I won't name them – several participants commented that they thought China should be doing more.

QUESTION: And you generally --

QUESTION: Was the United States one?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: We did not make that point in the information exchange but several participants did.

QUESTION: Excuse me. Can we go on background?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah. No, I think we can just continue on the record.

QUESTION: I just want to get a better sense of what you're trying to achieve with this 5+5.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Glenn, I think to some degree we are trying to make a point, and the point is that in Northeast Asia we need a stronger dialogue on

security issues. One of the major security issues in Asia today is the North Korean situation and we have a six-party process for that that deals with the negotiation of that issue, but we want to have a broader forum to discuss it. And so the idea in Kuala Lumpur was to put together some countries that have an interest.

Now, if you look around the table you might ask why does Indonesia have an interest in Northeast Asia, and the answer is the Indonesians have been very engaged over the years with a North Korea policy. They've got many visitors there. They have a special envoy for North Korea. So they have had an interest in the region. We thought it would be good to have the ASEAN chair there because ASEAN has done a good job of developing a sort of security process for Southeast Asia. And if you look at Asia, you see a real imbalance between ASEAN and Southeast Asia and no similar structure in Northeast Asia. Not that we're trying to create ASEAN for Northeast Asia, but we feel there ought to be more multilateral discussions in Northeast Asia. That is the purpose. It's not to change the six-party talks. It's not to have an immediate sort of actionable outcome or something. It's simply to have information exchange. And we feel it succeeded.

QUESTION: But it's --

QUESTION: Is it more like an OSCE kind of thing?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, OSCE has been around for 35 years, has a formalized membership, a secretariat, you know, rooms the size of the Houston Astrodome. I really don't think you should compare it to OSCE. It's an information exchange.

QUESTION: Are you building -- I mean, as it's building blocks. I mean, all things start small so I just wanted a sense of where you --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You know, I think this is the second time we've had a discussion. We'd like to continue this discussion. But we -- and we'll have another discussion in Hanoi but I'm not going to make predictions at this point whether this is the protoplasm of a new OSCE. I just at this point can't speculate that far ahead.

QUESTION: Is this to show North Korea -- I have two questions. Is this to show North Korea that there is a broader concern about its nuclear program than just the partners of the six-party talks? And also can --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think that's a fair way of -- I think the effect of it will be to show North Korea that there is a broader concern in the broader region about its nuclear programs. It also, I think, demonstrates clearly to North Korea that the fact that while they may boycott the six-party process they're not going to veto multilateral discussions in Northeast Asia.

QUESTION: Since we have you here -- you just returned from the region where you had discussions on North Korea's nuclear program trying to get the six-party talks going, can you just brief us a little bit about, you know, how it --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Maybe I should just take any more questions about today and then I'd be happy to sort of speak more broadly about where we are.

QUESTION: The concern that China didn't attend the meetings comes from the fact that Secretary Rice and various officials say that China's participation is important?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, China's participation in the six-party process is important. I mean, it's essential --

QUESTION: No, I'm just referring to this meeting.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You know, we value our interaction with China on security issues in Northeast Asia. They have a lot to say. But I can assure you the Secretary has been talking to the Chinese all week about various security issues, not only in Northeast Asia. So there is no lack of communication with the Chinese.

For me it was very useful to hear from some other players that we don't hear as much from on these issues. Canada, for example, was a very -- Minister MacKay made some very good points about what Canada is doing. In fact, Canada even has a bilateral process with the North Koreans. So it was a very good opportunity to exchange views on it.

QUESTION: Just a quick follow-up, sir. Malaysia was originally one of the countries that was supposed to attend (inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, Malaysia was attending as the ASEAN chair and now the ASEAN chair has been passed to the Philippines. But you know, if Malaysia wanted to come on its own, I don't think we'd have a problem. Again, we're not creating some closed-in group. We're trying to open this up to all countries with some conceivable direct interest in Northeast Asia.

Yes.

QUESTION: I have two questions. First, just to clarify, when they said these countries, the main countries -- that China needs to do more, China needs to do more to get North Korea back to the talks? Was that what you meant?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yes, yes.

QUESTION: Okay. Secondly, I'm sorry if I missed --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: This is not an original thought too. I mean, many people are --

QUESTION: Right. I just didn't know if it was something meatier than that.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, no, it was a general comment made by several participants, but someone asked me if we had made that comment and we did not do that.

QUESTION: So anything -- I'm sorry if I missed it at the top because I was late, but can you talk at all about the Thailand situation and give us your sense of that right now?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I can do that, but let's just finish with this Northeast Asia thing.

Nick.

QUESTION: Just quickly, Chris, on Macao. What did you tell them about (inaudible) and what kind of questions did they have to follow up, (inaudible) to connect the dots between what North Korea says and what you say?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think the purpose in discussing Macao was to just bring everyone up to speed on how – on what the events actually were. It was a longstanding investigation and it had gone on for a couple of years. The announcement of the Section 311 Patriot Act, the Treasury announcement that came in September '05 was not meant in any way to coincide with the negotiations in Beijing, but – and it represented the culmination of a couple of years of negotiations. I don't think it's anything you don't know already, Nick.

I explained, you know, the number of bank accounts that are probably involved, some 40 accounts. I explained the total amount of money that's probably involved, some \$24 million. I explained what we have offered to do to address this. We've offered the North Koreans that if, you know, when they come back to the six-party talks, we would – we could create some bilateral working group to deal with some of these financial matters. Or we could continue the dialogue that we had in New York last spring where we had some Treasury experts and their experts.

You know, they have said on many occasion they're not interested in money laundering and that they are – would like to, you know, convince us that they don't have it, that this isn't going on in their country. And so we have welcomed their giving us some details on that, so I explained that to the group.

QUESTION: Yesterday or earlier today, I think the ambassador in South Korea, the U.S. Ambassador said that you'd be willing to travel to the bilateral (inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I was – I saw the comment, yeah.

QUESTION: And?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I don't have any further comment on it. I think he was – may have been misquoted.

Yes, Ann.

QUESTION: Back on Macao, did any of the other participants at today's meeting suggest that U.S. should drop it or back off or anything (inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, no, no, not after my coach and explanation of it. No, that's off the record, no. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: You urged them to --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: What we did was we --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, we talked about the need for all countries to implement 1695, the importance that these Security Council resolutions – that they be followed, so --

Yes, Guy.

QUESTION: Did you say anything about the food situation in North Korea? Did Ban Ki-moon talk about the food crisis (inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Ban Ki-moon laid out the South Korean understanding of the shortfall in grain production, which he estimated was something on the order of 1.5 --

QUESTION: 1.5 million tons.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: 1.5 million tons as a shortfall of grains, yeah.

QUESTION: Is South Korea ending (inaudible), a few months ago is that North – South Korea would extend food aid (inaudible).

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: The South Koreans are holding back on providing – on grain shipments, which Roh Moo-hyun commented last week in Washington are "tantamount to sanctions."

QUESTION: So I just want to make clear that the Secretary urged or encouraged the other participants to follow the Japanese and Australia?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: She didn't urge them to follow Japan and Australia, although she welcomed the Japanese and Australian efforts. But she encouraged all to follow the UN Security Council Resolution 1695.

QUESTION: Did you --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Wait, is – yes and then I'll get back to Glenn.

QUESTION: Did you discuss the possibility of nuclear test (inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yes, we did. That subject came up and a number of participants expressed concern about that and emphasized the need to dissuade the North Koreans by all means possible.

QUESTION: There have been a number of reports that the U.S. is going to bring these rollbacks and Clinton-era things that have been lifted and, you know, in time for the first anniversary of this six-party agreement last year. Did you discuss at all any pending U.S. actions?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: We did not. We did not. I want to emphasize it was a one-hour meeting. It probably started about 10 past. It was a 15-minute meeting. We went around the room and we did not get into those questions. Maybe if we had had more time, we would have.

QUESTION: Is the U.S. planning to roll back to these Clinton-era (inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I mean, we have – we are studying – at this point, I just want to say we are studying what measures we need to take to bring ourselves into compliance with 1695. So at this point, I don't want to discuss specifics of that because everything's under study.

QUESTION: Just a minor technical point. There were seven attendants at this meeting and Malaysia did not --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I thought I had eight.

QUESTION: No, you said seven.

QUESTION: You didn't mention Japan.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Oh, Japan, Japan, I'm sorry.

QUESTION: That's okay, it's all right. I was adding up; it's eight.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yes, it's eight, yeah.

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Before you go on to Thailand, can you just quickly kind of brief --

QUESTION: Hold on.

QUESTION: I'm sorry. Do you plan to invite China and Russia again (inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Of course, yeah. Of course and, you know, we hope they can come.

QUESTION: They were invited. They just didn't come, right?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Oh, they were invited. They just couldn't come, yeah.

QUESTION: And did you invite the North Koreans this time?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: We did.

QUESTION: You did?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah. We always invite them and they always turn us down. Yes. They don't like to talk to people.

QUESTION: Any efforts on back-channeling here in New York?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: Back-channel efforts in New York with the North --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: With the North Koreans?

QUESTION: Yes.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No. You know, when we -- if you're referring to the New York channel, we use that as a means to convey information. To my knowledge, the last time we used it was to invite the North Koreans to this meeting today.

QUESTION: We were told that the photo op was canceled at the last moment.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: We heard that it's going to -- the photo of the meeting, the camera spray --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I don't know.

QUESTION: I heard that some countries showed sensitivity to the film. Do you know which country was it?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No. I'm sorry, you'll have to ask someone else about photo ops. I don't do that. Sorry.

QUESTION: But why was it completely closed --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I don't know. I'm sorry. I just don't do the --

STAFF: The decision came late to make it an informal meeting rather than a formal meeting.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah, yeah. I mean, these -- well, no, no, we have always maintained this is an informal meeting and one of the reasons we do that is we want to -- we don't want to be stuck with the same rigid number of participants nor do we want anybody to be speculating that this is somehow a substitute for the six-party process.

But I will say that it is -- you know, we don't have six-party talks going on and we feel there ought to be some multilateral exchanges of information at least. And so this is an effort to continue the dialogue on North Korea and to make clear that their vetoing of the -- their boycotting of the six-party process does not mean they can veto multilateral discussions on this -- on security in Northeast Asia.

All right, now --

QUESTION: Just before you get to Thailand, if you could just -- I mean, where do things stand in your understanding after coming back from the region.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Oh sure, yeah. Well, yeah, I got back about a week ago. I visited Japan, China and South Korea and of course a couple of days later after I returned President Roh Moo-hyun was in Washington from South Korea. Right now, sadly, I don't think there has been much developments. All five participants are ready to start at any time. The North Koreans are not prepared to start. They are maintaining their position that the action against the – our action against Banco Delta Asia was for them tantamount to a sanction against their country and therefore they are not going to attend the talks. We have – until what they describe as a sanction, that sanction, till it is lifted.

We have made abundantly clear to them and I reinforced this with our partners during this last trip that we are prepared to deal with that issue inside the six-party process, alongside the six-party process, but we're not prepared to ignore it or to make some kind of arrangement by which we drop efforts to protect ourselves in return for getting North Korea to the talks.

So I have not – I am not aware of any North Korean effort to try to rejoin the talks. I'm not aware of any effort to, you know, come up with some creative proposals or to look for any ways to – that they could rejoin the talks. We have looked for ways to do that consistent with our view that we cannot just ignore these illicit activities. As I mentioned earlier, we are prepared to talk about it in the talks, alongside the talks. We're prepared to entertain ideas. But the North Koreans have given none.

And so the concern we all have is that the Macao issue is simply the latest of a series of pretexts for not attending talks. In this case however, they have stayed out for a year, a time during which they should have been preparing to implement the joint statement whose first anniversary took place a couple of days ago. Our concern of course is this has nothing to do with Macao and everything to do with the North Korean unwillingness to implement what they've agreed to.

QUESTION: Do you think that they're close to testing a nuclear weapon?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: This is a subject that came up today, as I mentioned. I'm not in a position to say whether they're close or not. Certainly it's something that all the participants made very clear would be a most unwelcome development.

There was one question about Thailand though, I think. We should say obviously we're monitoring events very, very closely in Thailand. I think the new developments today were that there was a royal decree from the King of Thailand supporting the coup and the deposing of the caretaker Prime Minister Thaksin. We have made very clear in our statements that we consider this military move to be a step backward for Thai democracy, a very sad development for Thai democracy.

We are also reviewing our assistance to Thailand in light of the various legal implications of assistance to a country in which there has been a military coup to depose a civilian elected leadership. So we're reviewing those issues. I don't have any announcement on that today though.

Well, thank you very much.

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