



Briefing on Six-Party Talks

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(2:05 p.m. EST)

MR. CASEY: Well, good afternoon. Yeah, disappointed to see such a small crowd on hand; seriously, welcome everybody. Glad to have you here. I take it there's a great deal of anticipation to have our guest briefer, Assistant Secretary Chris Hill, talk to you a little bit about his upcoming trip to Beijing and the next round of the six-party talks. So Chris, let me just turn it over to you and let you go to it.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be back here. I'm serious about that really. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Compared to what?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, as I think most of you know we will be beginning the six-party talks probably Sunday night with the first real meetings to take place Monday. This has moved around from Saturday, Monday to Sunday, but in any event, it's around the weekend.

On my way there I plan to stop in Japan and to consult with my counterpart there and possibly have some other meetings. I would like also to stop in Seoul on the way, but this will be determined by whether we have good enough flight schedules. Once in Beijing I would also expect to have meetings with the various delegations out in bilateral form some informal discussions, and I would hope to be meeting with the Russian delegation. Ambassador Alekseyev is expected to be there. As many of you know, he's been ill in recent weeks but apparently he's made a full recovery. And in addition to meeting, of course, with the Chinese over the weekend, I would expect to meet with the DPRK delegation.

As I've said on many occasions, restarting the six-party talks, indeed the purpose of the six-party talks is not to talk; the purpose of these -- this round of the six-party talks will be to implement the September 2005 statement. It has been sometime since September 2005 and so I expect we'll all read it again and we'll all pledge to implement it fully and then we'll get to work. It's our view, in fact, it's our very strong view that in this first round, which starts over the weekend, we will want to show some significant progress. And in that regard, we have had an extremely active calendar of diplomacy in the weeks leading to this aimed at trying to make sure that we have a consensus from all the parties on the need for specific progress in the implementation of the September statement.

The United States had some very specific ideas that we have worked over with our allies and partners. We had significant meetings with the Japanese and the ROK in Hanoi and then we brought them together in a trilateral meeting as well. We also have had discussions with the Russians both in -- first of all when Secretary Rice went to Moscow in, I believe it was the latter part of October, mid-October maybe, and then when Secretaries Burns and Bob Joseph were in Beijing they were able to see Ambassador Alekseyev. And when I was in Hanoi, I met with Ambassador Vanyukov as well, who is the understudy to Ambassador Alekseyev. So we have worked with the Russians on some of our ideas. And I know the Russians have some of their own ideas. Our ambassador in Moscow, Ambassador Burns, has also been fully apprised of what we're doing and he's been in touch with the Russians.

So I think we have been pretty well lashed up with all of our partners. With respect to the DPRK, you recall in -- they announced their intention to rejoin the six-party process on October 31. At the time, I talked about the need for progress as we meet in the first round. I discussed, in very general terms, some of our ideas. And more recently, I think just two weeks ago, I was in Beijing and I spoke to the DPRK delegation -- I think it was over November 27th and 28th, if I'm not mistaken. So I think all six delegations are aware of the various elements that we're talking about. I don't want to get into those specifics here. I know some of them have appeared in the press, but I would rather not get into the specifics of what we're looking for, except to say that we are indeed looking for measurable progress in this first round.

How long this first round lasts it's not been determined. I do expect to spend this next week in Beijing and it is my intention to get back here for Christmas and so we'll see if we can get something done in that timeframe.

QUESTION: Chris, do you know, have they given you -- have the North Koreans given you any reason to believe that they are prepared to take actual steps that would yield the significant progress that you are talking about and that you expect from this meeting?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: During the meetings on the 27th and 28th of November, we did have some discussion about some specific ideas and there were indications that the DPRK, the North Koreans, would be prepared to deal in specifics at the coming round. We have also been in very close contact with the Chinese and I would say our cooperation with China over the past few weeks has been unprecedented in the entire six-party process. And the Chinese have also been in direct contact with the North Koreans on several occasions and they also have reason to believe that we will see some specific ideas for moving ahead.

These negotiations are, as I've said many times in the past, they are very difficult negotiations. We have -- you know, these nuclear programs didn't just start a couple of years ago. They've been around for some 30 years so these are -- this is a major undertaking. And so I'm not here to predict success or to express optimism, but you know, I'll have a much better picture of that probably a week from now.

Yes, Glenn.

QUESTION: Have you gotten any indication from the North Koreans that they feel that now that they have detonated a nuclear weapon that they are -- have a greater standing at the talks, that they are a nuclear power and that in some ways that their expectations for giving up their nuclear programs, what they would receive for that, has increased commensurate with this new (inaudible)?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I think we have made it very clear to the North Koreans that we do not accept them as a nuclear power. And I think also importantly, the Chinese have made that clear. In fact, I think everybody has made that clear that North Koreans -- North Korea's decision to detonate a nuclear device has been, I think, roundly and soundly criticized the world around.

So I don't think they should be looking for anything additional as a result of this behavior which, after all, has been behavior that is, I think frankly speaking, been a step back for the talks and has done some damage to the talks.

Again, I want to emphasize what we are doing is implementing the September statement. So to suggest that they should get something else would be to suggest that we're going to change the September statement. We're not going to do that. And I think we have very strong support from all our partners in the process.

Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you, Chris. Recently, one of North Korean defectors said that for North Korea the human right issues are more desperate than nuclear issues. Will the North Korea human right issues be speaking out at this meeting?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I think human rights issues have always been raised in the context of our contacts, our meetings with the North Koreans. To be sure, it's not an issue they like to talk about, but it's also an issue that I think they have to be sensitive to because if, at the end of the day, the purpose here is to bring them into the international community, they're going to have to really adhere to some of the international community's standards. And so I want to emphasize it's not a bilateral issue; it's a question of what the DPRK is expected to do as a member of the international community in good standing and I would start with the UN charter in that regard.

But as we go to these six-party talks, the purpose of the six-party talks is to achieve denuclearization and notwithstanding the comments about that somehow the human rights situation is more desperate than the nuclear situation or whatever your point was, as we go to these talks, our purpose is to achieve denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Yes.

QUESTION: You said you don't want to predict success. How you will measure success? Will a new --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I'll know it when I see it. No -- I mean, we need concrete progress. We need a sign that we have moved off of the pages of the September agreement and onto the ground of the Korean Peninsula. And we have always felt that as we move from that September agreement to the next phase, the next phase would, in fact, be implementation. And we didn't get to that point and we didn't get there up until this weekend, this coming weekend.

And I think part of the reason we didn't get there is the fact that the DPRK understood as well that we were moving off of simply talking about pages in an agreement to talking about something that's happening on the ground. So I think this is a new phase in the six-party process, a very important phase, and a phase that if we can do this successfully, I think we can look ahead to the full realization of this agreement.

Let me get someone in the way back maybe. Yes, back there and then I'll come down to you. Yes, go ahead.

QUESTION: North Korea has repeatedly asked the U.S. to lift financial sanctions. I'm curious how you are going to advance the issue -- are you still concerned about it or if there is room for negotiation?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Are we still what?

QUESTION: Worrying about the sanction measures.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, are you referring to the financial issues? Well, as you know, the issues surrounding the Banco Delta Asia Macau matter -- is that what you mean?

QUESTION: Yes.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Okay. We have told them and we told them most recently on October 31 -- yeah, October 31, that we are prepared to discuss this issue and to form a bilateral mechanism or working group to deal with that. We're prepared to discuss it, address it. Whether we can resolve it will depend on the results of this process; namely, it will depend on what the DPRK tells us. It will also, to some extent, depend on some legal issues because to some extent, that's where the issue is in Macau. So we're prepared to deal with this issue and next week when we do meet in Beijing, there will be a separate bilateral mechanism to have a preliminary discussion on this matter. I want to emphasize that mechanism for addressing this is not going to be -- I'm not going to be chairing that. We will have someone from the Treasury Department working on that because it's a separate mechanism, but we are prepared to deal with that. And we've had considerable discussion with the DPRK on this matter, so much so that when I last saw the DPRK delegation, they said to us, we understand your position.

So, okay, this gentleman --

QUESTION: A follow-on first to that. Will Stuart Levey be going to head that --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think you'll check with Treasury. You can check with Treasury. I don't believe Stuart is actually going. I think someone from Stuart's shop will be going.

QUESTION: All right. And also as a -- in a different way, how do you categorize this round? What number round -- how many times do you --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I used to have it in my head, but what -- I think we're --

QUESTION: This is six, isn't it?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think we're going to call it round six. Yeah. Glenn, thank you. (Laughter.) The Glenn Kessler round. (Laughter.) Six. So this would be 6.1.

QUESTION: You said that (inaudible) given indications the North Koreans will have some specific ideas. You got that indication and you also got it via the Chinese. Can you elaborate on that at all? And if you can't, could you at least characterize whether you consider that a concession of any kind? You say you can't be optimistic and yet you're speaking of what sounds like they're a little bit more forthcoming than they have been.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, obviously, the fact that we're having the six-party process that we're getting down is a prerequisite to progress. But I stress that the purpose is not to talk, the purpose is to come to an agreement and have some effect on the ground. And so I don't want to be optimistic that we're going to achieve that, but that's certainly the objective. I don't want to get into the specific elements. You know, it is a negotiation except to say that I think we have a very considered view of what those elements should be and we have conveyed those in very clear terms to all the other parties and we've had already some very good discussions. So rather than predict how we're going to do, you can ask me next week.

QUESTION: Okay.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: How's the Matsuzaka afternoon going today? Do we know?

QUESTION: Not very well.

QUESTION: Are you going to --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: It's going well today?

QUESTION: I heard they're flying to Boston.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Matsuzaka is coming to Boston?

QUESTION: Apparently.

QUESTION: He says there's a lot of --

QUESTION: No, no, no, no.

QUESTION: No, I thought it fell through with the Red Sox.

QUESTION: No, no. He's holding out for a six-party agreement. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Really?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I'm really sorry about doing this, but it's very important. He's going to Boston?

QUESTION: Apparently.

QUESTION: He's only got a wire report.

QUESTION: Which is important.

QUESTION: Every time you go to these parties, you --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Parties -- it's not a party. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: It's going to be a big party for you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You've been going to parties; I've been going to six-party talks. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Sorry. The question you've always said would be important is whether North Korea has made the strategic choice to give up its nuclear program. In your kind of preparatory discussions which have included the North Koreans, do you sense that strategic choice has been made which might make your more optimistic about reaching a deal?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You know, I wish I could answer that question. And at this point, I cannot tell you whether that choice has been made or not. What I know is they know what we need in this round. They know it has to be real. All the other parties know the basis of coming together is not to talk and not to party but rather to achieve something real on the ground and that is the basis on which they have come to the meeting next week. So I can answer that better next week.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Could you describe a bit more about the role of the Chinese in this? You talked about how the relationship between the U.S. and China has been unprecedented. We are all very curious as to how much pressure China has exerted on North Korea and in what ways and the role of Hu Jintao in this.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I would say that first of all, our presidents, the President of China, Hu Jintao, and our President have had considerable discussions over the years on this issue. And more recently, this issue, I think, has become probably the number-one issue in our -- you know, along with the economic issues in the U.S.-China relationship. So our presidents had a very good discussion about this issue when President Hu Jintao came to Washington last April. They talked about it again when they saw each other during the G-8 summit meeting in Scotland. They talked about it again when they met together in Hanoi. There has been very close cooperation.

In addition, we have been really, I would say, in daily contact with the Chinese Foreign Ministry about this issue, so we have, I think, a pretty clear understanding on -- our two countries have a clear understanding of what we're trying to achieve. I would say our goals are pretty close to identical. I mean, I don't want to characterize how they approach it, but we have a very, very strong view that we need to achieve complete denuclearization here. We have worked together on ideas for how -- you know, what elements of the September statement we can bring forward and get done in this next round and there again, I think there has been considerable overlap with the Chinese.

Now I think parallel to this, but very importantly, has been the fact that the Chinese have worked with us on these UN Security Council Resolutions 1695 and 1718. And I want to emphasize these resolutions stay in place until we achieve denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. So these resolutions will be there and I think it's very important that China supported this and I think that was really a sign of our -- of the relationship we have with China. Now how China approaches the DPRK, I know China has very active diplomacy with the DPRK, they meet them in a number of different places including in Pyongyang and in Beijing.

And for -- as to what they actually do to achieve DPRK support on these things, you really need to check with the Chinese. I like to think that the Chinese can be as persuasive with the DPRK as they are from time to time with us, so I have no doubt that they have made a very clear and forceful case to the DPRK that the need for progress is -- that there is a great need for progress and there's a need for getting it done, getting some progress done now.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Can you give us some examples of what concrete progress would be, like --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No. I really -- I don't want -- you know, it's all in the September statement, so you can pull it up on the web and look through it, but I don't want to talk about which elements of that we're going to try to pull forward and get done next week. I just -- because if I tell you we're going to do X and next week, you don't find X, you say, "A-ha, they couldn't get X done." So I just don't want to get into that.

QUESTION: It would be a better story.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I know it would be a much better story, "U.S. Fails Once Again." (Laughter.)

Wait -- yes, I'm trying to get some geographic distribution. We're going to the back, we're going to the left.

QUESTION: Okay. Are you a single candidate for the North Korean policy coordinator by now?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You know, I keep seeing this stuff in various blogs and I tell you, this -- I've got to be very honest with you. It just doesn't -- hasn't come up with me. Maybe you can ask. Is there anything new on that subject?

(Laughter.)

MR. CASEY: Not that I'm aware of.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Do you know what he's talking about?

MR. CASEY: Vaguely, but --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah, I'm sorry. I don't think there's anything new on that subject, but I can tell you I am going out there -- I can absolutely assure you, I am going out there as the United States negotiator. I will have a multi -- interagency team. I've asked Victor Cha as the -- who is coming from the National Security Council staff, I've asked him to come as my deputy in this process. I have -- we have had already considerable interagency discussions. We just had one this morning. I feel not only very strong support on the interagency, but also I have very strong support from my boss in this matter, Secretary Rice. And I know Secretary Rice and I both feel we have very strong support from our President. So that's all I need. That should be enough. And now we have to see whether the DPRK can have the same type of support.

Yes.

QUESTION: After the nuclear test blast, there were said to be indications of possible preparations for an additional nuclear test. Can it now be said, as you're entering the talks, that those preparations, or indications thereof, to be more accurate, have ceased? Has their tempo changed? Can you say --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You know, again, you're asking me about test preparations that our analysis of which is done by the intelligence community evaluating various national technical means, and I just can't get into any discussion of that.

What I can tell you obviously is that any testing of any, you know, launching of missiles or anything like that would, of course, do some very severe damage to this diplomatic process.

Yes.

QUESTION: Chris, on the Matsuzaka issue, not confirmed but it does appear that a deal has been struck; Matsuzaka stepped in and made the deal happen.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: He stepped in.

QUESTION: It appears.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: And was John Henry there as well?

QUESTION: Larry Luchino and Epstein and Boras and Matsuzaka.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: This is a terrific Christmas present. Thank you very much. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Not confirmed.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I don't mind going to Beijing for Christmas now. This is great. Okay.

QUESTION: Don't even say that. Anyway, the real question. On the BDA issue, I'd like to delve a little bit more into that because for the North Koreans it seems like unless there's progress made on that it's a nonstarter on everything else. You said we're prepared to deal with this issue on the BDA. Does that mean -- in the past it's always been it's a separate issue, we're willing to explain why we're doing this and everything.

First, are there any indications that the North Koreans have done anything to relieve your concerns about what they were doing with BDA? And second, does it mean that you're willing to negotiate on that issue now to end any --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, first of all, this is a -- we've set up this bilateral mechanism. It'll be chaired on our side by the Treasury Department. I think our Treasury Department will be in a position to explain what we've done and why we've done it. But I think it also depends on what the DPRK people who come for this particular discussion are going to be able to tell our Treasury Department people.

So it is -- you know, it's obviously an issue that's important to the DPRK. But you know, it's also been important to us. And so we would look for a very substantive discussion on this. We come in a mood to learn more from them and to explain to them what we have been trying to do. But so we want to resolve this issue. We do want to resolve this issue. But I can't say before even the first discussion has taken place how or whether we can resolve it. They need to have discussions on this.

But I want to assure you that we want to resolve this and I'm pleased that we will be having the first meeting at about the same time that the six-party talks get going. The DPRK wanted this and we felt that was a fair request. We're doing it in the same city so we'll have -- you know, we won't have to wait 12 hours to get information. But it is -- you know, it's something we want to address. And as I said, it's important to them but it's important to us as well.

MR. CASEY: I think maybe we've got time for one or two more.

QUESTION: You said the UN sanctions would remain in place throughout this whole process. Have you been able to measure what impact those sanctions have had so far? Is there any way you can characterize that for us?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You know, I really can't. I mean, I know there are some people who say that the DPRK has returned to the talks because of the UN sanctions, but there are other people who say they have returned to the talks because they've exploded a nuclear device and they feel very strong as a result of that. You

know, I'll get a sense of where we are when we sit down and we put what it is we want to get done on the table. But you know, the UN sanctions -- it's not every day that the UN sanctions a country. I mean, this is a -- it's a serious step. It's a serious business. It was done unanimously. Russia voted in favor, China voted in favor, the other 13 members of the Security Council voted in favor.

And the way to get out from under this for the DPRK is to get on with denuclearization. Denuclearization -- frankly, with denuclearization a lot of things are going to be possible and easier. Without denuclearization I'm not sure what we can get accomplished.

MR. CASEY: This will be the last question. Chris, your call. (Laughter.)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you. Do you think if North Korea better shut down their nuclear reactor as a token of good faith?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I don't want to get into specific things that we'll be proposing as a -- to move ahead on. But we've got to get changes on the ground.

All right -- one -- look, I don't -- I can't believe I'm doing this but one more question.

QUESTION: Your meeting with North Korea delegation two weeks ago. Did the North Korea delegation ask you to treat them as a nuclear power in the new round of talks?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You know, I don't recall what they asked, except I do recall that I told them that we do not consider them a nuclear power.

QUESTION: Did the --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: And we will not consider them. And I pointed out that no one else does either. So I don't know whether they actually asked, but I wanted to make it very clear that we are not interested in adding to the nuclear club.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, have a good trip.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Okay.

QUESTION: You're starting the talks Sunday night and you said that was the technical thing (inaudible). When are you arriving in Beijing?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think I'm arriving -- I mean, we're working on the dates because it depends on -- I want to go to Japan and if I can work out the schedule, I'd like to go to Korea. So I think I'd be arriving some time on Sunday. But my understanding is some of the delegations are already getting there Saturday, which is when we really wanted to start talking, so probably Sunday I'll begin the talks.

QUESTION: Okay, that's the weekend to be safe?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah, that's the safest.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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