



Update on the Six-Party Talks

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Remarks at the Center For Strategic And International Studies (CSIS)

Washington, DC

July 1, 2008

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, thank you. Thank you very much, Derek. It's a pleasure to be back here at CSIS. It's a great pleasure to be back in Washington. You know, when you're off outside Washington, you really miss it. (Laughter) You know, you can get press clips. It's just not the same. Yeah, it's just not the same as holding those newspapers here. Anyway, it's great to be back. I've been gone for about 12 days, really missed it.

Let me just say, obviously, we have come to -- I think -- an important juncture in this process. I think the President spoke very clearly on Thursday about where we are and where we are not in this Six-Party process. I know the Secretary also just returned from a trip that was even longer than mine. And I think she spoke very clearly as well about where we are and where we still have to be.

I think the key thing that we have been doing throughout this is to make sure that -- as we go forward -- we do it in a multilateral framework. Now, there are people who say, well it's not really multilateral; after all, you're having bilateral meetings. But in fact, what we have tried to do with the six parties is to create a very strong platform on which we can do a number of things. Because at the end of the day, the issue of North Korea's aspirations for nuclear weapons is an issue rooted in the region, an issue that cannot be solved by the U.S. alone, an issue that really needs the active engagement of its neighbors.

And so, throughout this process, we have tried to make sure that the six parties is a strong institution and capable of handling the tough issues. In fact, what the six parties is doing is trying to deal with some of the causes of conflict in the region, trying to deal with the difficulty of relations among states in the region; in short, trying to not only address some of the historical antecedents that got us where we are, but also try to set up a framework for the future where the countries in the region can address -- can look for areas of cooperation where there was conflict in the past, and look for areas where we can really set up sort of lasting mechanisms for peace and security.

And indeed, I think we are doing that. Anyone who has been involved in multilateral diplomacy knows the proverbial difficulty of herding cats. It is not easy to get everyone going in the same direction at the same time. And in this regard, it is our very strong conviction that China has really stepped up. China has played, I think, a very important role in the chair of the Six Parties.

China is a country in, of course, a rapid development, rapid growth not only economically, but in other ways as well. And so for China to step up in this means that it must not only call on its old relationship with North Korea; it also needs to call on all the aspects of the new relationship with some of the other countries, including our own. The U.S.-China relationship during this administration, I think, has grown tremendously. And the Six-Party process is one of the areas that we have been able to work together with the Chinese. So we have really needed to do this with China because, in some respects, China has a lot of -- certainly has a capacity to reach out to the North Koreans. They probably have the best access to them in Pyongyang. But also, we feel at the end of the day, we need a situation in northeast Asia where all countries can feel that they're moving ahead.

And one of the areas where we have been most concerned, where the U.S. has really -- where we have really worked very hard is on the issue of Japan, and Japan's own special problems with North Korea. Now, Japan, like all of us, has to be very concerned about nuclear weapons in North Korea. Indeed, if you look at a map, you can see why. Japan has to be very concerned about North Korea's development of longer-range missiles. And if you look at a map, you can see why. But also, Japan has a very important issue that many Japanese felt was not dealt with adequately earlier on, and that is the issue of abductions. So this was an issue -- for any of you who haven't heard about this -- in the late '70s and early '80s. North Korea had a program that they have since admitted to where they literally snatched Japanese off of streets, off of sidewalks in Japan. Sometimes Japanese were lured to North Korea. But it was a program by which they brought Japanese to North Korea against their will. And for years and years, people could not quite believe that it had happened. Some people maintain that it had, and indeed, those people turned out to be right.

And so it's not just an issue that the Japanese government has been concerned about; it's an issue that the Japanese people have been concerned about. And as we go forward in trying to deal with the problem of nuclear weapons in North Korea and going forward in an effort to normalize with a denuclearized North Korea, we cannot ignore it; indeed, we need to embrace the issue of how Japan's relationship with North Korea will develop.

There is really no future that North Korea can have if it does not have a good relationship with its neighbors, especially Japan. So we have worked very hard on this issue. Indeed, Japan was able to have some initial meetings to discuss the abduction issue. Indeed, they have been able to work with the North Koreans on some measures that they're hoping will come to fruition. And we have followed this very carefully. We have been very encouraging about it. We've made very clear to the North Koreans that we don't want a situation where we're moving ahead on denuclearization and where we don't see some of the other elements of these northeast Asian relationships moving forward.

And so I think in many respects, the Six-Party process is not only beginning to show some results in the issue of denuclearization; we're also showing results in the issue of bringing the countries closer together. The China-Japan relationship is a better relationship today than it was before the Six-Party process got going. Indeed, I would argue the Japan-South Korean relationship -- throughout its difficult periods -- has actually always been maintained within the six parties. And in that regard, we have been able to recreate one of the things that we had going earlier. And we have it going now, going in the current round, which is before we have Six-Party meetings -- before there are important events that take place in the Six-Party process -- we have a trilateral. That is, we have the South Korean, Japanese, and the U.S. representatives sit together and work on issues of common interest. We did that in Washington a few weeks ago. We did it in Tokyo a couple of weeks ago. And I'm sure we'll do it in Seoul and probably in China whenever we have the next Six-Party meeting.

So we have -- in constructing this Six-Party process -- what the President had in mind was putting together a process, a broad framework, a platform in which you can do a number of different things and meet in a number of different configurations. And that's what we've been able to do.

The events that got us to where we are on denuclearization, it took a while. It was not easy. There are some people who have argued that somehow we've rushed to this process. In fact, we had hoped to have this done in December, and it took us till the end of June. That is hardly rushing. We have had to deal with a regime in North Korea that is not inclined to talk about its internal decision-making, not inclined to talk openly about what is going on there. We have tried to address a number of different issues with them and trying to lay the stage for when we are able to get through denuclearization, what is normalization going to look like, what are the sort of issues we need to deal with.

You know, when you look at the U.S.-North Korea relationship, this is not a relationship that will begin and end with denuclearization. We have to work on some other issues where we have some profound differences with North Korea, and one of those, of course, is human rights.

So we have a long way to go, but I do believe that the Six-Party mechanism has put all six countries in the same boat, has kind of created a situation where we can all move together. There are times when it's going [and] there are going to be a lot of bilateral activities as there were in recent months. And then there are times where we're going to see a lot more multilateral activities, and I think that's what we're going to see in the coming months.

So I think the President spoke very clearly about what we expect to see out of the current situation where we are coming to the end of phase two. We need to work very hard on verification. We need to make sure that the understandings we have on verification -- the various elements of verification which include documents, physical

access to sites, and interviews with personnel -- that these can all be turned into a verification mechanism that will function. I believe, based on our understandings with the different parties, including with North Korea, we should be able to do that.

We have to keep working on issues that have still not been fully disclosed, although not denied by the North Koreans. We need to deal with the uranium enrichment issue, an issue that we have to continue to -- facts of which we have to continue to excavate, as Secretary Rice has said. We need to continue to work on proliferation issues. And indeed, in getting to the end of this final phase, it was agreed among the six parties that we would have a monitoring mechanism to look at these issues and other issues; that is, to address the need to continue to monitor pledges that are made within the six parties; that is, monitor the obligations of all members of the six parties to fulfill their obligations. And so we will be working on that kind of thing.

Again, I want to stress that none of this is possible without a Six-Party framework. We cannot do this bilaterally. We can talk to North Korea bilaterally. But we have to come back to a Six-Party framework. All of this is based on probably the sort of founding document of the whole process, which is September '05. Whenever there is a disagreement, whenever there is some misconception or misunderstanding, we come back to the September '05 statement.

So I think this is something that has, I think, just as in the life of an individual, it happens in the life of a nation where you have to rise to the occasion. And I think some of the countries that have been engaged in this have actually risen to this occasion: to work together, to put aside some bilateral differences, to find ways to talk about the bilateral differences.

Indeed, as we have been able to go forward, we have found that there was this kind of unintended byproduct of the Six Parties where we've actually been able to work very closely together with the other countries, even on issues not directly related to denuclearization. We've been able to find ways to communicate thanks to the Six-Party process -- so much so that we're looking to see how this process can form a mechanism for the future, even beyond the issue of dealing with denuclearization.

For this, we need -- there have been a lot of ideas put forward in the nongovernmental sector. And for that, we're very much open to hearing different ideas about how we can turn the Six-Party process that has been very singularly focused on denuclearization and see if it can address some of the broader issues as we go forward post-denuclearization.

So I hope we can do that. We have some ideas, some principles that we would look to work on. In so doing, of course, the United States considers its bilateral relations in this part of the world really very much bedrock. We consider our bilateral relationship with Japan -- our alliance with Japan -- to be really one of our bedrock items in the region. Similarly our bilateral -- our alliance with South Korea is also of an unchanging nature that we need to -- that we will preserve. So what we do in this multilateral process is not at the expense of our bilateral relationships, but really aims to form a greater sense of community in the region.

So it's been a long and difficult process. Again, when I hear people say that we're rushing to something -- if you're in the middle of it, you wouldn't call it rushing unless you like to watch turtles race or something. It's taken a lot of wear and tear on all of us. We have Sung Kim here in the audience -- I don't know where -- there's Sung, who went off to North Korea just before the cooling tower came down. And we -- he was there and met with the North Koreans and got a sense of the real atmosphere in the spot.

You know, this was the cooling tower we always envisioned as our twelfth disabling action. The trouble was the North Koreans wouldn't agree to it; they only agreed to eleven. And so we went with eleven in October, but we thought the cooling tower was very important to try to get done and get down, so we kept working at it. And finally, the North Koreans agreed to make it be the twelfth element, and that's what -- and we agreed in December and we had hoped to have it done in December.

But as I've often said, the Six-Party process offers no refuge for those in need of instant gratification. Everything takes a little more time than you thought it would. But I think the fact that they were able to take down the cooling tower, I think, demonstrated that we really do have a procedure on this disablement and that Yongbyon -- which was entirely capable of producing more and more plutonium -- there was nothing wrong with Yongbyon when it was shut down. I've heard people say, well it was old and decrepit. Believe me, that from a technical point of view, the answer to the question of how long Yongbyon could have operated is as long as they want it to operate, because there is nothing old or decrepit about its capacity to produce plutonium. So the fact that it was shut down, and the fact that some major disablement steps were taken, I think, is a very good sign.

I thought, to be sure, the cooling tower did have a symbolic value. I mean, I've spoken to audiences about how I thought it was very important that we cut the reverse cooling loop on the reactor. But, you know, many of the audiences would slump over and go to sleep as I would explain the cutting of the reverse cooling loop. But I think now people understand that indeed, we are doing some things. And it's not just the cooling tower. There are a number of things that have been done and that will continue to be done, including discharging the actual reactor.

So, a lot of work ahead of us. But I think, you know, as we contemplate the end of the second phase, we can take some sense of renewed enthusiasm, can't we, Sung? And move forward from here as the President very clearly articulated last Thursday.

So, thank you very much, and we can go to some questions.

Released on July 15, 2008

