



North Korean Six-Party Talks and Implementation Activities

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Introduction

Thank you, Chairman Levin, Senator McCain, and distinguished Members for inviting me to update you on the status of our efforts to achieve the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula through the Six-Party process. I also want to talk today about our broader vision – as outlined in the September 2005 Joint Statement – of a region where the benefits of human rights protections and economic development go along with progress on denuclearization. I am pleased to be joined today by my colleague Will Tobey from the Department of Energy (DOE), a key partner in the implementation of our Six-Party agreements.

We have made important progress recently in the Six-Party Talks, but much work remains for the full implementation of the September 2005 Six-Party Joint Statement and the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Before turning to the specific status of implementation of Six-Party agreements, I want to reflect on the importance of the Six-Party framework that we have built.

The Six-Party Framework

In October 2002, President Bush and Chinese President Jiang Zemin discussed creating a Six-Party framework to deal with the North Korean nuclear issue. Over the past six years, we have seen the strategic importance of this framework not only for dealing with the important North Korean nuclear issue, but for Northeast Asia more generally. Multilateral diplomacy takes time and effort, and merging the interests of six countries is not an easy feat. And yet, it is because of our common interests in the region and our concerted efforts that we have achieved important accomplishments to date.

Throughout this process, the Chinese government, which chairs the Six-Party Talks, has played a key role. Our close cooperation with China in the Six-Party Talks has implications beyond the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia, and has an important, salutary impact on China's emergence as a responsible stakeholder in the region.

The Six-Party framework works because each nation represented at the table has a shared interest in a peaceful, stable and denuclearized Korean Peninsula, and because North Korea is accountable to all of its neighbors for its actions. And each of these nations complements one another in our efforts to hold North Korea to its commitments.

The Six-Party process is based on the principle of "action-for-action," which was embodied in the September 2005 Six-Party Joint Statement. The Joint Statement lays out the goals of the Six-Party Talks, most importantly the DPRK's commitment to abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, and return to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to IAEA safeguards. The Parties undertook to promote economic cooperation in the fields of energy, trade and investment, bilaterally and/or multilaterally, and the other Parties described their willingness to provide energy assistance to the DPRK. And the Joint Statement outlines a vision for transforming relations in Northeast Asia, including through normalization of bilateral relations with the DPRK, exploration of ways and means for promoting security cooperation in Northeast Asia, and negotiation among directly related parties of a Peace Regime on the Korean Peninsula.

This is a broad vision. Full implementation of the September 2005 Joint Statement would not only offer the North Korean people a better future, but also provide a foundation for regional peace and stability, based on recognized norms of international relations, including human rights. Of course, this ambitious agenda cannot be realized all at once. Rather, the Parties agreed to take a phased approach to reaching these goals. Each of these phases has been challenging, but we have made important progress throughout each phase. With each step forward, we have reduced the number of tasks before us.

The action-for-action approach has allowed us to build trust, as each side knows that the process will only move forward when each party fulfills its commitments. Under this framework, the DPRK receives something from the other Parties only as it moves forward on its commitments. This process of building trust is of great importance, for the tasks will only become more difficult as we progress.

Current Status of Six-Party Actions

So what is the status of the implementation of these agreements? The Initial Phase was concluded in July 2007. We are currently completing Second Phase actions and moving into the Third Phase of implementing the September 2005 Joint Statement. In the first two phases, we have made important progress. Under the February 13, 2007 agreement on "Initial Actions for the Implementation of the Joint Statement," the DPRK shut down and sealed core nuclear facilities and invited back the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to conduct monitoring and verification activities. IAEA personnel have remained in place, monitoring the shut-down and sealing of the Yongbyon nuclear facility, since July 2007. Under the October 3, 2007 agreement on "Second Phase Actions for the Implementation of the Joint Statement," the DPRK has taken significant steps to disable three core Yongbyon nuclear facilities, and on June 26, it provided a declaration of its nuclear programs to the Chinese chair. On June 27, in an important symbol of its commitment to the disablement process, North Korea collapsed the cooling tower at Yongbyon before the international media.

Since November 2007, a rotating team of U.S. experts has been on the ground overseeing disablement of the three core nuclear facilities at Yongbyon, and North Korea is no longer able to produce weapons-grade plutonium at Yongbyon. As of today, the DPRK has completed eight out of 11 agreed disablement tasks, and has discharged more than half of the 8,000 spent fuel rods from the 5-MW(e) reactor. Upon completion of all 11 steps, the DPRK would have to expend significant effort, and time -- upwards of 12 months -- to reconstitute all of the disabled facilities. Our experts continue to report good cooperation with DPRK experts at the site.

The declaration package that the DPRK provided to the Chinese on June 26 addresses its plutonium program, and acknowledged our concerns about the DPRK's uranium enrichment and nuclear proliferation activities, specifically with regard to Syria. The DPRK's declaration is not an end point in our efforts to understand North Korea's nuclear programs, but rather is the basis for a rigorous process of verifying all of the DPRK's nuclear programs. Review of the copies of 19,000 pages of documents, consisting of copies of operating records from its 5-MW(e) reactor at Yongbyon and the reprocessing facility, that the DPRK provided to the United States in May, is already producing results. The Six Parties have agreed to general principles for verification that are guiding ongoing discussions of a verification mechanism. These principles include access to facilities, documents, and interviews with personnel, and other measures as agreed by the Six Parties. The verification process would include participation by experts from the Six Parties and the IAEA.

In response to the DPRK's actions to fulfill its Second Phase commitments, the United States has also moved forward on fulfilling our Second Phase commitments. On June 26, President Bush announced that he was terminating the exercise of authorities under the Trading with the Enemy Act with respect to the DPRK, and notified

Congress of his intent to rescind designation of the DPRK as a State Sponsor of Terrorism (SST) following the 45-day Congressional notification period. The President made clear that we would use this 45-day period to assess the DPRK's cooperation, including on reaching agreement on a verification protocol, and respond accordingly.

North Korea is also receiving energy assistance in return for its denuclearization actions in the First and Second Phases – equivalent to one million tons of Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO). To date, the DPRK has received approximately 420,000 tons of HFO and equivalent assistance, including 134,000 tons of HFO provided by the United States. HFO-equivalent materials and equipment provided have been consistent with U.S. laws controlling exports to the DPRK. On July 12, the Six Parties announced agreement to work in parallel to complete all remaining disablement work at Yongbyon and to contract for or deliver remaining energy assistance by the end of October.

Even as we have seen progress on these fronts, the United States remains concerned about outstanding questions relating to North Korea's uranium enrichment efforts and proliferation. We will continue to engage the DPRK in detailed and candid discussions on these issues until North Korea resolves these concerns in a verifiable manner. The Six Parties have agreed to establish a monitoring mechanism to track all Parties obligations – including nonproliferation and provision of energy assistance. We will use this mechanism to hold the DPRK to its commitment "not to transfer nuclear materials, technology, or know-how." The North Koreans are also cognizant of the fact that United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718 remains in effect.

At the same time, the United States will continue to press the DPRK to address questions about the Japanese abductees. We will continue to urge the DPRK at every opportunity to address Japan's concerns. Japan is an important friend and ally of the United States, and we will continue to consult closely with the Japanese government as we move forward.

Offering the DPRK A Better Future

Even as we make progress toward finalizing Second Phase actions and begin moving into the Third, and final, denuclearization Phase, significant work remains, including abandonment of North Korea's nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, dismantlement of all North Korea's nuclear facilities, removal of all fissile material, and verification of North Korea's denuclearization.

In exchange, the United States is prepared to transform our relations with the DPRK into a more normal relationship. The United States and DPRK have committed to improving bilateral relations and working toward full diplomatic relations. One way we will seek to do this is by increasing bilateral exchanges between the United States and DPRK aimed at enhancing mutual trust.

The issue of human rights will be a key element of the normalization process. We will continue to press the DPRK for the kind of meaningful progress that will be necessary for the DPRK to join the international community. The DPRK's human rights record is abysmal, and every day that the people of North Korea continue to suffer represents an unacceptable continuation of oppression. I have seen satellite images of the DPRK's extensive prison camp system – a scar on the Korean Peninsula – in which it is reported that North Koreans suffer torture, forced abortions, and in some cases execution. The dangers faced by North Korean refugees, who flee their country in search of a better life, often only to face suffering or repatriation, are similarly unacceptable. The United States' dedication to improving the lives of the North Korean people will never wane, and we continue to seek all available opportunities to improve this heartbreaking situation. We have repeatedly made clear to the DPRK that human rights is a U.S. priority. We have emphasized how much we value the advancement of human rights in all societies, and our need to have this and other outstanding issues of concern discussed in the normalization process.

We note that the ROK's National Assembly is considering legislation addressing North Korean human rights. Our Special Envoy on Human Rights in North Korea, Jay Lefkowitz, plans to travel to Seoul soon. We will look for every opportunity to work with our partners in the region on our shared goal of a better future for the people of North Korea. Our goal through this process has been and will remain improving the lives of the people of North Korea.

On a separate track, to respond to severe food shortages in the DPRK, the United States began providing food assistance to the DPRK in June after establishing a strong framework to ensure that the food will reach those most in need. The United States also assisted U.S. NGOs in providing aid to fight the outbreak of infectious diseases following floods in North Korea last summer, and is working with U.S. NGOs to carry out a plan to improve the supply of electricity at provincial hospitals in North Korea.

The Administration shares the desire of families and veterans to resume remains recovery operations in North Korea, and we are prepared to do so at the appropriate time. The Department of Defense temporarily suspended remains recovery operations in May 2005 due to concern for our personnel during a period of heightened tensions between the U.S. and North Korea. As soon as we believe it is appropriate to reengage with North Korea on these recovery efforts, we will ensure that Congress is informed.

Full implementation of the September 2005 Joint Statement may also provide a way forward for the transformation of overall security relations in Northeast Asia. We remain committed to replacing the 1953 Armistice with a permanent peace arrangement on the Korean Peninsula. The United States believes that discussions of a Korean Peninsula peace regime could begin early in the Third Phase. We can achieve a permanent peace arrangement on the Korean Peninsula once the DPRK has verifiably denuclearized. We also hope to move forward on the development of a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism, which could help further solidify the cooperative relationships built through the Six-Party process and provide a means for the parties to work together to address issues including greater economic opportunity and greater human rights protections for their citizens.

Our denuclearization efforts in the Third Phase will require substantial funding, and we welcome Congress' provision of the additional authorities necessary to undertake these important tasks. While the State Department's Nonproliferation and Disarmament Fund (NDF) may continue to shoulder some costs in the Third Phase, we are hopeful that DOE will be able to provide funding, if the President exercises the recently enacted authority to waive needed elements of the Glenn Amendment sanctions imposed on the DPRK. My DOE colleague will speak to those estimates. We look forward to working with the Congress to ensure that the Administration has the necessary funding to undertake these important tasks.

The Road Ahead

While we have made important progress toward the full implementation of the September 2005 Joint Statement, much work remains on the road to verifiable denuclearization of the DPRK and all the goals laid out in that document. We must continue to move forward in the Six-Party process to realize the DPRK's abandonment of all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs in accordance with the September 2005 Joint Statement, as well as its return to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to IAEA safeguards. We will continue to work closely with our Six-Party partners as we move forward on the tough tasks that lie ahead.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am happy to answer your questions.

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