



Briefing on Upcoming Trip to the Region and the Six-Party Talks in Beijing

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MR. CASEY: Morning, everybody. I'm always amazed how empty this room is when Chris is here. Pleased to have with us Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Chris Hill. As you know, he will once again be leading our delegation to the next round of six-party talks that will be taking place in Beijing next week. I wanted to give him an opportunity to come talk to you a little bit about those discussions and about how we view things with North Korea. I suspect he'll also be open to any considerations of hopes and possibilities for the Boston Red Sox next season as well but that is in his free time, so Chris I'll turn it over to you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Thank you very much and what an opportunity it is to talk to you about the six-party talks.

I will be leaving tomorrow and going first to Seoul over the weekend. There's an event commemorating the Korea Society 50th anniversary that I'll be attending Saturday night and I'll be having some meetings with senior Korean officials on Sunday and then I'll be having some additional meetings to discuss the -- really the bilateral U.S.-Korean relationship in addition to, of course, coordinating our position on the six-party talks. Needless to say, we remain in very close contact with the Koreans -- with the South Korean Government. I'm often on the phone with Chun Yung-woo, my counterpart, so I don't think we'll have any real surprises on the six-party talks, but it's an opportunity as well to meet with people about the bilateral relationship.

I'll be leaving Seoul Monday afternoon and heading to Tokyo where I'll spend two nights in Tokyo and also coordinating on the six-party talks. I'll be meeting my counterpart, Kenichiro Sasae, and I think they'll be some additional meetings. And from Tokyo, on Wednesday I'll go to Beijing. My hope is Wednesday afternoon to do some bilateral consultations with some partners in the six-party process, including the Russian delegation. As you know, there is a new head of delegation and it's an opportunity to get together with him in advance of the actual six-party meeting.

The six-party meeting will begin then on Thursday, February 8th, in the afternoon. I know there's a considerable speculation as to what will be accomplished during this. We have had -- the U.S. has had extensive bilateral consultations with all of the six-party partners including, as you know or as you recall, the North Korean delegation, DPRK delegation, whom we met with in Berlin a couple of weeks ago. So we do believe we have a basis for making progress at this round. I would caution you, though, because I also believed we had a basis for moving forward in the December round. And while I thought there were some positive elements to that, it did not fully meet our expectations.

So we don't know how long the six-party talks will go. Typically they've tended to go about three or four days and we believe that sounds about right and we'll have to see what we're able to accomplish. As you recall, the purpose of the six-party talks is not so much to talk but rather to implement the September '05 agreement. And what we would hope to do in this opening round is to implement a first tranche of measures which are -- which would be the beginning of the implementation of the -- the full implementation of the September agreement leading to the full denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We will not achieve full denuclearization in February, but we hope to make a substantial start on this. As for whether we'll be successful, time will tell. While we have had extensive consultations, I don't want to confuse those with negotiations. The negotiations will take part in the -- take place in the six-party talks and so we'll have to see.

So I will look forward to meeting your colleagues in Beijing and try to give them regular updates on the progress.

QUESTION: What makes you feel that you have some basis for making progress in these talks?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, again, I really avoid trying to talk about specific elements of what we would want to see in an early tranche of implementation. But we have had considerable discussions about some of those elements. And based on those discussions, I believe there's a -- that there is a -- that we can expect some progress on this, but I'm very mindful of the fact that I expected progress in December and it didn't happen in terms of the actual implementation on the ground. So we'll have to see. And so I'm really kind of -- I'm really not willing at this point to say that we're definitely going to achieve something.

QUESTION: Have they indicated an interest to allow international inspectors back into North Korea?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Again, I don't want to discuss the specific elements of it. I know there's been a lot of speculation about what the elements are, including international inspectors, but I just don't want to put myself in the position of saying, yes, they have and then that's not achieved or something.

QUESTION: When you spoke about a first tranche of measures, could you please elaborate what are these measures and whether North Korea has agreed to separate the financial restrictions with the nuclear talks itself?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, we have always taken the view with respect to the financial issues about Macau. This is about the Banco Delta Asia in Macau. We've always taken the view that those issues are ones that we would like to discuss with the DPRK and resolve with the DPRK. But resolving them will depend on an interactive process with the DPRK. Now, I understand that our Treasury officials under Dan Glaser had some good discussions in Beijing. I had an opportunity to talk to Dan before he left Beijing and I look forward maybe to having another opportunity. But it sounds like things on the financial -- in those financial talks that there was a very good exchange of views. But in answer to your question, I'm not prepared to discuss the specific elements except to make the general comment that I think we have a basis for calling the six-party meeting and for making some progress.

Let me call on some people. Barbara.

QUESTION: What makes you feel that if you do have some success on this first tranche of measures that there's any guarantee that it will not just stop there and that it actually will lead to the full denuclearization? I mean, a lot of people have suggested that you're going to get a freeze and inspectors back. And how does this make this any different from the situation that existed four years ago?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, first of all, there are no guarantees in this business. You do the best you can and you try to set up a framework that makes sense for everybody. And it seems to me that the framework we're setting up for the implementation of the September '05 agreement which calls for the complete denuclearization and not for stopping at a first tranche is a framework that makes sense. And I think it makes sense for what North Korea's needs are and it makes sense for the rest of our needs. So while we don't have guarantees, I think we do have a reason to believe we can make some progress in this tranche and then move from there. Of course, if -- were it to just stop with this tranche and were we not to make further progress, I think we could certainly open ourselves up for criticism. But you know, we're not in this just to make the first step. We're in this to make the last step as well. So we'll see how we go.

I would like however to contrast this with some previous efforts and, by the way, I'm not one of these people to criticize previous efforts. But I will say that we have a six-party process. It is not just the U.S. And we have really been at great pains to make clear that while we talk to the North Koreans, we have as many bilateral discussions as necessary or as desired, we're not interested in substituting for the six-party process and there's a reason for that. It's not just stubbornness on our part. It's a belief that if we are to achieve our objectives, we will do it because we have many countries, that is, six countries together, working for the same objective. And I think it's a little more difficult for any one country to defy the other five -- five participants than it is to have one country defy the whims of another country. So I think the overall architecture of this, of six different countries, involving some of the most important countries in the world -- I mean, Japan is the second largest economy in the world, the United States is the first largest, China is an enormous player, Russia is an enormous energy player, for example. I mean, these are big players and so by getting everyone together, I think we do have a reason to believe we can get beyond the initial tranche.

Yes.

QUESTION: Can you assure us that between the time where you announced the resumption of the six-party talks in December and today, that the United States, as a negotiating tactic, hasn't reduced what it is seeking or the six-party powers have not -- the five parties have not reduced the -- what they're looking for in this first tranche?

In other words, just to make progress -- in other words, you submitted some things you wanted them to do the first time around, or in this most recent round in December. You didn't get an immediate response. I'm not asking you to tell us what the measures are. I'm just asking for your assurance that you haven't reduced -- said, "Okay, you didn't bite on that, you know, what -- how about if you would just do a little less for us, but do something?" Do you get what I'm trying to ask you?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Not really. Do you want to --

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: Let me take one more stab at it. You put forward some measures --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You're looking worried. I mean, just -- it's okay, just -- I didn't quite get it, that's all.

QUESTION: You put forward some measures --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- that you wanted, as a first confidence-building step, the North Koreans to implement on the ground --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- in the last round of talks.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah.

QUESTION: Obviously, that round of talks ended without an agreement for -- by North Korea to implement those measures.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah, we didn't even discuss them, frankly, because the North Koreans took the view that they could not negotiate on denuclearization until they were -- until we resolved the financial measures on Macau. And so that made it impossible, really, to have a negotiation on elements that we wanted to see in the first tranche.

QUESTION: But you communicated what those elements are, correct?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Correct.

QUESTION: And you have not altered or made any modifications to those elements in the time since --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Altered or modification, well, I mean, we -- you know, our aim is to implement complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula or DPRK. Our aim is complete, not partial, not allowing them some weapons and -- our aim is to the complete denuclearization.

So how we go about achieving that, what we try in this round versus a March round, versus an April round, I think is a matter where we try to work out something and to -- you know, we have a lot of leverage, an awful lot of leverage. We also have some very serious partners in this process. So I'll be able to answer your question, as I understand it, a little better after this where I can tell you what we've achieved and what we felt we had to put aside for a next tranche or bring forward to the first tranche. At this point --

QUESTION: I'm just asking if you have scaled back what you were asking for in December.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, we're -- we have -- no, I don't think that's a fair characterization.

QUESTION: I'm just asking you if -- I didn't characterize it as such.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Okay, we've got a lot of questions here, all right. We'll go here and then we'll go to the second row.

QUESTION: I'd like to ask you something I asked you before the last talks and you said that you didn't have enough discussions with the North Koreans to know whether -- you've always said that it would take a strategic choice on the part of the North Koreans to give up their nuclear program for this to work, that you can continue talking but until they made that strategic choice that the long-term progress was never going to happen. You've had a lot of discussions bilaterally with the North Koreans in recent weeks. Do you have a sense yet whether the North Koreans are indeed committed? Even though they signed up to the agreement, they still haven't taken steps to implement it, so do you believe that they're committed to ending their nuclear program once and for all?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Look, I have to give you kind of the same answer I've given you in the past. There's a real -- there's a very strong logic to their giving up these programs. If they think that nuclear weapons are going to protect them, they should consider what the threats are to their existence and whether nuclear weapons, as opposed to a stronger economy, as opposed to good relations with neighbors, they should consider what the best method is to protect them from conceivable risks.

And I've always maintained, I continue to maintain, that nuclear weapons are totally inappropriate and essentially would be a very unsuccessful means for them to protect themselves. I think they need good relations with neighbors and I think they need to get moving with their economy.

Do I think that every DPRK leader understands that? Probably not. And so while some I think understand the need to move on and have made that strategic choice that we all have alluded to, I'm not sure that this is something that every DPRK senior official has come to.

So the hope is that you start a -- you get moving on an agreement which, you know, I've been critical of the December meeting, but I mean, one benefit of it has been that the North Koreans did re -- did once again restate their support for complete denuclearization. So we -- I think it's important for us to put that to the test.

And I think it's also very important that in putting it to the test we are also putting to the test our ability to work with China, because this is an area where I think the U.S. and China share very much a common objective and the Chinese have been in the chair of this process and very much want us to be strong, full participants in the diplomatic process aimed at this. And I think we've been able to do that and I think our ability to work with China has been enhanced as a result of this.

China has made it abundantly clear over the course of the months and especially after the missile launch and the nuclear device test that China absolutely supports these objectives and has a sense of urgency about getting this accomplished. So I think it is in our country's interest to pursue this and to work closely with China and with our other partners in the process.

Yes.

QUESTION: I have two questions. Are you planning to hold bilateral talks with the North Koreans on the sidelines?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I'm sure we will.

QUESTION: Okay. And are you considering making concessions in this round over the financial sanctions? There are some reports about declaring some of the assets at the Macau bank as legitimate. Are you going to make any financial concessions ahead of these talks?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, again, with respect to the Macau business, we've had two days of intense discussions with that. The Treasury Department, I think, has reported on those. You know, we've made very clear to the North Koreans both in these discussions on Banco Delta Asia but also in our six-party discussions that North Korea really has to get out of the business of being involved with illicit activities and they need to move on to an economy that's based on some modicum of transparency and an economy that ultimately can be one that starts to grow and attract capital, et cetera.

So I think we have made very clear that we're not prepared to live with financial irregularities, live with the sort of illicit activities that caused us to be concerned about this in the first place. So I think if -- whether the North Koreans understand that, you have to ask them, but they've certainly heard it. They've heard it a lot from us. And I like to think we have a certain understanding on that.

Let me go to you and then back to Glenn.

QUESTION: I just wanted to ask about the UN sanctions and what impact you think those have had on the North Koreans wanting to bargain and at least appearing more willing to bargain? Have they really felt a squeeze from these sanctions?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think that's a question better posed to them. I can't tell you what -- you know, what has motivated them except to say that the Security Council resolutions were very strong resolutions and I think sent a very powerful signal with the fact that they were unanimous and involved some of -- a couple of North Korea's biggest neighbors, Russia and China, and I'm sure that fact has certainly sunk in, in Pyongyang. But as for whether it's motivated them or -- I think you have -- you would have to direct that to them.

Glenn.

QUESTION: I just have a couple of things. One is, if you get this first tranche started, how confident are you that the Chinese and the South Koreans or the other partners at these parties -- at these six-party talks aren't then going to relieve some of that pressure, that they -- that North Koreans will have demonstrated that they're committed to this process, they've done something that everyone would be happy to see, and then suddenly, the pressure gets lifted and that they're not really held to the gun as they are now?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well --

QUESTION: And then I also have a second thing, but you could -- the other thing I wanted to clarify -- okay. The other thing I wanted to clarify is has the U.S. Government made any judgment that any of that \$23 million that has been frozen at the bank in Macau is actually legitimate money, not tainted by counterfeiting or other criminal activities?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, again, you have to direct that to Treasury. I mean, Treasury --

QUESTION: I thought you might -- be in on some of those assessments, correct?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: That's very shrewd thinking of you there, Glenn, but I'm also not a spokesman for the Treasury Department. But you know, clearly, they've had an in-depth discussion of these -- of the Macau -- the banking there. And they've had an in-depth discussion of the actual accounts, going through the various accounts. So I think they have a good sense of where -- you know, what the issues are there. I think you can direct your questions to Dan Glaser and to others. Now what was your first point?

QUESTION: Whether the South Koreans and the Chinese were going to -- you know --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah. Look --

QUESTION: Let the spigots flow again once they --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I think we have -- I mean, I'm not sure how else I can say it, but we're not in this for a first tranche and we have made it clear to the North Koreans that they should not be in this for a first tranche, because -- you know, we have a situation where a country has produced plutonium. Depending on who you believe, it's plutonium for several weapons and clearly, denuclearization is not achieved unless it -- unless North Korea can get back into the nonproliferation treaty as a non-nuclear state. And they're not going to be able to do that until they give up these nuclear weapons and nuclear programs.

So, I think they understand that there is -- that they have to move beyond the first tranche. But, you know, you should not be surprised that we're trying to do this by tranche and -- you know, it's -- this is a big undertaking we're talking about and to try to do this all in one session of implementation, I think, is a little tough and I don't think this is the first negotiation in the world where you try to take certain parts of it, try to get that down, and then have an agreement on the next parts and sort of move ahead. So you know, we'll have to see.

I must say, though, with respect to China and South Korea, we've had some very -- a very good understanding, especially in -- during the year 2006 when -- you know,

when the North Koreans fired these missiles and exploded this nuclear device. So I think it's been a -- I like to think we have a very good understanding and certainly, if you watched carefully what the South Koreans are saying, I think you'll be hard-pressed to find much daylight.

Yes.

MR. CASEY: Chris, I think maybe we've got time for a couple more. Can we go to some of the people in the back and to --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yeah, I feel bad because I haven't gone very well on geographic distribution, but why don't we --

QUESTION: If it is, as you said, the North Koreans wouldn't negotiate a denuclearization until the bank of Macau -- Banco Delta Asia issue is resolved, why are you starting the talks before that issue is resolved?

And the other thing I wanted to ask you was John Negroponte the other day on the Hill talked about -- said the U.S. wants a freeze. If you could just address that.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, that was -- the North Koreans came in December with that position and we had some discussions with them but we did not have any negotiations. I'm not sure it really helps me to tell you that the North Koreans have changed their position. I don't think that's very helpful if I say things like that because then they'll want to say that they haven't. So let me just go back to my formulation that we have a reason to believe that we can make some progress.

QUESTION: Even before that issue is resolved?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: We have reason to believe that next week we can make some progress. But whether we do or not, we will know when we sit down and try to negotiate this.

QUESTION: And the issue of John Negroponte saying we want a freeze?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: We want denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and we want to get going with that process. We have not -- you know, we had this great agreement on paper and now we have to take the agreement and see if we can start to implement it. And I think what he's referring to is the beginning of implementing the complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: It is reported that the North Korea has proposed peace treaty talks with United States.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: That they have what?

QUESTION: Peace treaty.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Proposed?

QUESTION: Yes. Has the United States Government officially received any such proposal from North Korea?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, the notion of creating a peace mechanism is, of course, embedded in the September '05 statement and I think it's on page three of the September -- I think it's the fourth section of the September statement. So of course we are interested in moving to that. We are interested in implementing that. But you know, first we need to get moving on some of these other elements.

We've had some discussions with the North Koreans about this and in anticipation of the next tranche of issues, so we have had some discussions with them.

MR. CASEY: This will be the last question, guys.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I can take one or two more. I feel bad about -- here, I'll go to Nick over here.

QUESTION: Chris, there was a sort of a bizarre comment yesterday on one of the wire services that North Korea had --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: (Inaudible.)

QUESTION: No, I thought it was a North Korean official, but I may be wrong. That North Korea might be compelled to have another nuclear test if the six-party talks aren't successful. During your talks in Berlin, were there any threats of such sort made at all or was there any belligerent attitude? Was there any attempt on the North Koreans' part to in a way force you and the others into some sort of an agreement next week?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: We had discussions in Berlin that were not characterized by belligerence or threats, but rather a useful exchange of information. So again, I don't like to go into what's discussed, but those sorts of comments which do come out from time to time in the media were not part of our discussion.

Yes, sir, and then the lady behind you.

QUESTION: On what condition can you go to the Pyongyang?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: Do you need any -- on what condition do you think you can go to Pyongyang?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think under the conditions that it's in our country's interest to do that.

Yes.

QUESTION: Has the U.S. position on the abductee issue that the Japanese Government has been posing, has it changed in any way? And will there be any progress in this round given the fact that North Koreans are not willing to talk about --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, again, I don't want to predict what kind of progress we can make in this round. I mean, I made the sort of general proposition that

we are going there and the expectation that we can make some progress in a general sense.

I must say with respect to the abduction issue, this is an issue that we've raised many times and with the North Koreans and it's also an issue that we are in very close contact with our Japanese colleagues. I have never, ever had a discussion with Ken Sasae where he has not raised the abduction issue. It always comes up in my meetings with him. So we will see what kind of progress we can make in terms of creating mechanisms for dealing with a number of very difficult issues that I think continue to make Northeast Asia or that contribute to tensions in Northeast Asia.

And now I'm going to go to the last question.

QUESTION: A follow-up on the peace treaty question. In the September agreement, it was a general understanding that it would come after denuclearization was complete and verifiable. But it seems like the timetable has changed on that. Have you decided to move up that timetable on the peace treaty with North Korea and do you have concern or a belief that they will not fulfill their obligations with denuclearization, without that in place first?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I've made clear to the North Koreans is with denuclearization really everything becomes possible. Without denuclearization, well, frankly, -- frankly, everything becomes very, very difficult and I think that goes for the peace mechanism as well. Denuclearization is the key I think to resolving a number of issues and really to being able to address issues. And so it's not a coincidence that denuclearization appears first in the September statement and peace mechanism appears last. I mean, there is a logical sequence of events there. And I think denuclearization is something we really need to get on with. And I hope that in this next session, we will make some progress on that with the understanding that it will only be an initial step and that we have many more steps before we rest.

Hey, thank you very much.

QUESTION: Thank you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Okay.

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