



Interview on CNN's American Morning

Christopher R. Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Beijing, China

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CNN: Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, the chief U.S. negotiator on the [Six-Party] deal, joins us live from Beijing.

Mr. Hill, good to have you with us.

A lot of people are looking at the broad framework of this deal and say it looks awfully similar to the deal that the Clinton administration cobbled together at the end of its term. Let's listen to the former U.N. ambassador, John Bolton -- what he said yesterday on Wolf Blitzer's program.

(Video Recording)

Mr. Bolton: This is the same thing that the State Department was prepared to do six years ago. If we were going to cut this deal now, it's amazing we didn't cut it back then. I'm hoping that this is not really what's going to happen.)

CNN: Is this the same deal?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, in fact you left out one important detail, which is this is a Six-Party deal. This is not a bilateral deal between the U.S. and North Korea. This involves six parties, with China in the chair. I think the deal here is that North Korea has made certain commitments -- not only to us, but to all of its neighbors.

CNN: So because there are six parties to the talks, you think that this somehow changes substantively whether the North Koreans will, in fact, honor this commitment?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Certainly the fact that there are six parties, I think, is very important. It's one thing to walk away from one party; it's another thing to walk away from all of its neighbors. But I think there's another aspect here, which is we have a September 2005 agreement which lays out a complete denuclearization. So what's important about these initial actions that we're taking -- and I emphasize that these are just initial actions at this point -- is that they begin a process aimed at complete denuclearization.

If our process were to stop just on these initial actions, I think we would be open to some criticism. But we don't plan to just stop with a shutdown of this reactor. We plan to go from here to disabling the reactor, eventually to dismantle it, and finally abandon it. I think that's what's important. We have an overall approach here.

CNN: Ambassador Bolton went on to say some things about the timing of this in particular. Let's listen to what he had to say.

(Video Recording)

Mr. Bolton: It makes the Administration look very weak at a time that Iraq and dealing with Iran it needs to look strong.)

CNN: Does the Administration look weak?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, look, Mr. Bolton is a private citizen and has every right to speak his mind and to criticize this. And I'm sure there will be other criticism. I feel it's been very important that we have worked very closely with these other countries, working very closely with Japan, the Republic of Korea, China and Russia. It's been a tough process, but I think we're beginning to make some progress. The fact that we can work closely with them and to begin to implement a deal which aims at complete denuclearization, I think is in our country's interest.

CNN: The President back in 2001, addressing the whole issue of dealing with North Korea, talked about how difficult it is to verify and to see if they would, in fact, honor their commitments. Let's listen to what he had to say.

(Video Recording)

President Bush: Part of the problem with dealing with North Korea, there's not very much transparency. We're not certain as to whether or not they're keeping all terms of all agreements. When you make an agreement with a country that is secretive, how do you -- how are you aware as to whether or not they're keeping the terms of the agreement?)

CNN: Put that question to you. How will we be aware if they're keeping to the terms?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Look, to be sure, dealing with as opaque a place as North Korea is one of the big challenges. Now what we have in mind, of course, is to bring in the IAEA inspectors. These are international inspectors who would verify this shutdown.

But, ultimately, what we have to be able to do is work with other parties. We cannot keep North Korea from heading in the direction of nuclear weapons on our own. We need China. China is a key player there. North Korea really could not survive a day without a relationship with China. So that we have China on board, that we work with China, I think augers well for the potential of success.

It's not an easy process, no question about it. But I think this is a good first step. And our hope -- in fact, we insist that this step be followed up by other steps.

CNN: Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, thanks for your time.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Thank you.

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