

Readout on North Korea Six-Party Talks U.S.-DPRK Working Group Meetings in New York

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MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Welcome to the New York Foreign Press Center. We're delighted today to have Ambassador Christopher Hill here to give us a readout on this week's U.S.-DPRK working group meetings in New York. Ambassador Hill, please. Welcome.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, thank you very much. We just completed some eight-plus hours of discussions with our DPRK or North Korean counterparts. We will look forward to having additional discussions when we all re-form back in Beijing for the remainder of the working group meetings and then for the Six-Party head of delegation meetings.

The U.S.-North Korea working group is the first of five working groups. The North Korea and Japan working group will get underway just a few hours from now in Hanoi, and then there will be a working group on denuclearization, on energy, and economic assistance and on Northeast Asian security. And those three working groups will take place in Beijing probably toward the latter part of next week, followed by Six-Party head of delegation meetings.

I would say these were very good discussions that we had here in New York. I think they were very comprehensive. We discussed, first and foremost, implementation of this during the 60-day period, which will culminate in a shutdown and sealing, for the purpose of its abandonment, the Yongbyon five-megawatt reactor and the reintroduction of international personnel, IAEA personnel, to monitor and verify those procedures.

I would say there was a sense of optimism on both sides that we will get through this 60-day period and we will achieve all of our objectives that are set out in the February 13th joint statement. And so we spent a considerable amount of time looking to the next phase, which will be a more difficult phase because we will be dealing with the disabling of the facilities so that they cannot be brought back to use.

We will also be dealing with the North Koreans providing a final declaration of their entire nuclear program, so we want to make sure that we are prepared for that next phase and clearly, there are a number of issues that we need to address so that at the end of the 60-day period, we can immediately go into this next phase and not lose any momentum.

So I was pleased with the discussions we had in that regard. I know that many of you would like to hear the details of that, but frankly, I would prefer to brief my Secretary of State first and then we'll see what we can do about making some of this more public. But suffice it to say, I think these were very good, very businesslike, very comprehensive discussions.

So with those opening comments, why don't I go to questions. Yes.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) Was there any consensus on the location and date of next round meeting? And if I may add one more, you used to complain that the most agonizing --

AMBASSADOR HILL: I never complain. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Part of negotiating with North Korean counterpart is that you were not sure whether they made a strategic decision to dismantle nuclear weapons. After these two days sitting in successful negotiations, do you -- are you sure that they made some kind of strategic decision?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, first of all, with respect to the question of the next meeting, we will meet in Beijing and we will have bilateral meetings in Beijing in the framework of the Six-Party Talks. We will, I think, continue in this framework of Six Parties to have these embedded bilateral meetings, but I think all we did this time was to set the next one, which will be in Beijing just in advance of the actual Six-Party meeting.

With respect to the issue of strategic choice, I think we are on a step-by-step basis with the DPRK. I believe that they have clearly set out at that point that they are prepared to live up to all their obligations in the 60-day period, and it was useful for me to hear their plans for how they will proceed to the next stage. So I think we also have a will to move to the next stage.

But this process that we're on, not unlike a video game, gets more and more difficult as you go into more and more levels. So again, we'll get through this first phase. It's looking good for that. We've got an approach for the second phase, which I think is encouraging, then we have to see how we do.

Yes.

QUESTION: What did you reach concerning the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries?

AMBASSADOR HILL: We had a good discussion about that, a lengthy discussion about that. We talked about some of the political aspects of it and the legal aspects of it. I wanted to understand a little better from their perspective what happened in the 1990s when there was discussion of liaison offices and that did not take place. So we are committed to working toward that goal, and I reaffirmed to them that we are committed to doing that. But I also reaffirmed to them the need for them to fulfill their part



of the bargain, which is complete denuclearization. And I think it's important for everyone to understand how the September 2005 agreement is the basis on which we judge our progress. Are we getting closer to those goals or are we not? And I think the February joint statement gets us closer to that, and as we move forward with this next stage, I think we will get closer to that goal and to the September statement which is the complete denuclearization.

Let me try over here.

QUESTION: Tsukasa Arita from Kyodo News in Washington. What kind of discussion did you have with North Koreans on abduction issues in this working group and delisting North Korea from the state sponsor of terrorism? Is it necessary to resolve this issue?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, I don't want to get into specific issues of how things are linked. What I will say is that we had an in-depth discussion on the terrorism list; again, similar to the discussion we had the establishment of relations. We discussed some of the political aspects. We discussed some legal aspects and, frankly, we discussed some of the historical aspects of how it was the DPRK got on the list in the first place.

So it was for me, one of the lengthiest conversations I've had on that matter. But if you go through the negotiating history, you'll see that my DPRK counterpart has also had discussions on that some years ago.

With regard to the abduction issue, this too was a subject of a lengthy discussion, which again included some historical look at the matter. I made very clear that it is very important -- in my opinion it, is very important for the DPRK to reach out and develop a relationship with Japan and this is very important for the DPRK's future. I made a very strong pitch for what I feel is for a successful working group meeting that will take place in Hanoi, literally a few hours from now, my view that this is really an opportunity for the DPRK to start getting things right with Japan.

Again, without getting into too many specifics, because these were private discussions, I was pleased to see that there was an understanding of this central point, which is that the DPRK ought to reach out and have a good relationship with Japan.

Yes.

QUESTION: Are you seeing Kim Gye Gwan or do you have any plans? SBS Seoul Broadcasting System. Do you have plan to visit Kim Gye Gwan? Were you invited by Mr. Kim Gye Gwan to visit Pyongyang?

AMBASSADOR HILL: We did not have any specific plans on that matter. I think he raised it in a general sense, but we did not discuss a specific plan to go to the DPRK. In terms of logistics, we focused very much on meeting in Beijing at the end of next week on the Six-Party Talks.

And then we talked about another aspect of the September statement and essentially the February joint statement, which was to have all of our ministers meeting in Beijing to be assessing the first 60 days -- which I hope that when they meet it will be a positive assessment of the first 60 days -- to be assessing where we go in the next phase and to be discussing some of the other elements that are in the February statement; that is, the issue of a peace mechanism on the Korean Peninsula and a Northeast Asian security mechanism.

QUESTION: Takuya Nishimura with Hokkaido Shimbun newspaper in Washington, D.C. I would like to ask you about how you raised the issue of the highly-enriched uranium and what was the answer of them, but you may not want to get into detail on that.

AMBASSADOR HILL: That's right. (Laughter.) You're listening.

QUESTION: And my question is after the conversation this time, are you confident that North Korea will answer on the page of the declaration of their entire nuclear program?

AMBASSADOR HILL: We had, as we have had in the past, a lengthy discussion of the HEU matter and we also discussed the need to resolve this matter to mutual satisfaction prior to the final declaration. So there was an understanding not just on my part but also on the DPRK delegation's part -- in fact, they raised it -- the need that we address this HEU matter before the declaration. So we are going to do just that and we're going to work out how we can get some experts to meet with some of their people and begin an expert level discussion that will get to the bottom of this matter, because I have stressed on many occasions we cannot have a denuclearization process that leaves out HEU. We cannot have a denuclearization of North Korea if HEU is still out there. So we have to have complete clarity on this issue, and I made that point very forcefully today. So I think we will be able to have a further discussions and maybe some technical discussions that will help guide us as we get to the declaration.

Yes.

QUESTION: Warren Hoge, New York Times. I think you said this morning that there is a 30-day from February 13th deadline for something to happen in the talks that the United States is having with North Korea on the subject of the two lists. And I wanted to -- is that right?

AMBASSADOR HILL: No.

QUESTION: I wanted to ask you what has to happen by a certain date. What was that deadline for?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, the 30 days is a deadline that all the working groups need to have met. And so our working group -- we have fulfilled the deadline with a few days to spare. The Japan working group will have also met the deadline. And then we run into a bit of a problem with the next three, because we want to have them in Beijing and that's in the middle of the week and that's next week and that's rubbing up against the 30-day deadline. But I think we'll be pretty close to 30 days. This is just for the five working groups all to have met.

The other issue that has to be resolved, from our point of view, from our part, is the issue of Banco Delta Asia and the U.S. role in Banco Delta Asia. There too, we're committed to resolving that within 30 days and based on meetings I've had with the Treasury Department in recent days, I think we will achieve that deadline. So I think we are moving ahead on the 30-day deadlines and that certainly augurs well for getting the 60-day deadline, which is the shutdown of the reactor.

Yes.

QUESTION: Beni Avni of the New York Sun. Of course, we've been here before and the question is --

AMBASSADOR HILL: I'm sorry, you've been in this room before or you've been on this issue before? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Yeah, we've been in it before, in a situation where North Korea has declared its readiness to have nuclear power. And the question is what difference do we have now as far as proliferation? Could you (inaudible)?

AMBASSADOR HILL: You know, I know there was concern in some quarters that this first 60-day period looked a lot like the Agreed Framework. And I think what is

important and what is different about this process is first of all, the very tight deadlines. 60 days is not very much time. Secondly, this is not a bilateral agreement. This is an agreement with six parties.

So in addition to the U.S., we have, notably, China as a guarantor of this agreement. So I think that puts it not only quantitatively different in that there are six members rather than two, but also qualitatively different. By doing this on a very step-by-step basis, I think Secretary Rice's concept here is to try to make progress at each step and then go on to the next step, so that if we have a problem -- if there's a problem of noncompliance -- we will know it pretty quickly.

And of course, with any measures that they are taking with respect to denuclearization, we'll have to have verification procedures, and we will build those alongside. That's why we have the IAEA coming. And I was pleased to see that the DPRK have already invited the head of the IAEA, Dr. ElBaradei, who will be coming I think some time next week. I don't know if he's made an official announcement, but it's coming very soon.

So I know there are skeptics out there. I know people have seen this issue over the years, perhaps yourself. But I will say that we have a very tight deadlines, short time spans here and we have six parties who for now all want to get this done. So we'll see how we do.

I'm going to go here and then I'll get back there.

QUESTION: Kahraman Haliscelik from Kanalturk TV of Turkey. Mr. Ambassador, I read a few editorials today about your approach, the U.S. approach, toward Iran and North Korea. And those editorial had said that actually you have been more tolerant toward North Korea. Do you -- being through all these discussions, Six-Party Talks, do you see Six-Party Talks being a model to actually solve the Iranian nuclear problem?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, you know, fortunately Dr. Rice has not asked me to work on that. (Laughter.) But I can't say it's a model for anything yet, because we're just in this first 60 days. I mean, we got a good agreement on our list of principles; that was in September and I think it was a very important agreement. But, you know, the DPRK is still producing plutonium so I think it's a little premature to be cracking out the champagne or doing any victory laps here. So let's see how we do.

I must say in these diplomatic efforts there are always lessons to be learned in different circumstances, frankly. As I've dealt with this issue I think back to some of the adventures I was involved in the Balkans. But I would caution against a sort of notion that one size fits all. I think these issues often have their own historical antecedence and they have to be seen in their own context. And rarely is it useful to draw too many analogies in different parts of the world.

The only lesson I think there is, is that nuclear weapons have not been a very good experience for North Korea. I think North Korea has been left more isolated than ever before and more impoverished than ever before. If you look back at the history of North Korea's economy and you can see that these nuclear weapons have done nothing for North Korea, absolutely nothing. And I do hope that people in Iran take note of that fact. When you say North Korea's being treated better, I'm not sure that's the view in North Korea. I think they have very, very serious problems and all of their problems I would say are traced to the mentality that has them building weapons of mass destruction.

Yes.

QUESTION: Regarding the BDA issue, did North Koreans agree with the way the Treasury will close this issue? In which we will see some portion of but not all of North Korean money will be lifted from the sanctions.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, you're one step ahead of me on what the Treasury is doing then. I mean, they have not announced how they're dealing with this. I know there are basically a couple of components to it. It's the question of doing business with this bank. It's also the question of the accounts. So I'm not really in a position to comment on the Treasury, on how they resolve it, except to say that they will resolve it in 30 days and this will no longer be our problem; it will be the Macao Monetary Authority's problem.

So I did not get into a discussion today with the DPRK or with the North Koreans on this. I think they understand essentially what the problem -- or how we're trying to address the problem. Besides, I've had a lot of issues on denuclearization I was taking care of.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Bill Varner, Bloomberg News. A couple of things. One, could you give us sort of a little thing about maybe some atmospheric, how you and Vice Minister Kim got along or related? You know, just something about how the back-and-forth was in terms of the dialogue. Also, what went into the decision for you guys not continuing after lunch today, or was that always or never a plan?

AMBASSADOR HILL: We tired each other out, I guess. (Laughter.) I think the atmospheric were very positive. I think we have a strong sense and I think the DPRK has a strong sense that this February approach is the right approach. And I'll feel better about that after 60 days and even better after the next phase, but certainly for now we feel we're on the right track. And if you're a negotiator involved with these sort of things, you know, pushing this rock up the hill that seems to always come back down on the base of the hill, that's a positive frame of mind to have that we're actually making progress. So I would say the discussion reflected that sense that we can get through this.

I was also encouraged by my counterpart's willingness to look ahead rather than just at the 60 days, but to look ahead to how we're going to get through this more difficult phase of disabling the reactor. Because I've stressed to many people we're not in this just to shut the thing down; we're in this to disable it, dismantle it, grind it up and really denuclearize the Korean Peninsula. So I do feel there was a sense that we can go on this step-by-step process.

The atmospheric -- I must say, we are getting to know each other because we've had so many meetings in Beijing, so when some issues come up we don't need to sort of reiterate the points because we've all heard them many times. And so in that way we were able to cover more ground than we used to.

Did I ask you the -- did you have a question earlier? Is this your first question?

QUESTION: Yes.

AMBASSADOR HILL: All right. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: (Inaudible) daily from Korea. Regarding the delisting of state sponsor of terrorism issue, do you think North Korea better do something to get off on the list -- get off the list?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Do they what?

QUESTION: Do you think if North Korea should do something in advance to get off the list?

AMBASSADOR HILL: We had a discussion about that and I don't want to get into it publicly, but we talked about how this might all work. But really, it's not something I want to talk about publicly.

QUESTION: Richard Roth, CNN. You said that North Korea knows that nuclear productivity or whatever was not good for North Korea, but there's got to be certain people in the leadership there that thought there was something to this.

AMBASSADOR HILL: You think so? Insightful.

QUESTION: Could you explain why you think -- and maybe you've done this in numerous press opportunities, but could you tell us why you think they decided to now look ahead, talk straight and change their position?

AMBASSADOR HILL: Boy, the easy answer to that is, "Go ask them." I will say that -- I've said this before, but I really do believe that it has been extremely important that the U.S. and China are working together. We not only have the same goals in this matter, which is the goals of denuclearizing North Korea, but we also have a similar strategy and even the tactics. I mean, in the last session in Beijing, I was able to work with my Chinese counterpart in terms of, you know, specific elements of the text in a way that I was very gratified. I feel we've really done well with the Chinese.

So I like to think after North Korea made what I think was a real mistake in firing off missiles in July and then testing a nuclear device, they saw that the international reaction was pretty strong and pretty united, and I'm sure they noticed that China was one of the countries that voted unanimously in the Security Council on the resolutions both in July and in October.

There is no question that there are people in North Korea who take the view that somehow, nuclear weapons are in the country's interest, that somehow, it'll give them prestige or security or whatever. But to me, what keeps me going in this process is that I'm convinced that in the long run, people understand that it's quite the opposite and that they need to get rid of these weapons if they're going to have a future.

I've told them many times that as long as they have these nuclear weapons, there's just no future for them and we're not going to deal with North Korea as a nuclear weapon state, we're not going to deal with some sort of strategic ambiguity. We're going to insist that they get out of this business and do so in a verifiable way. So you know, I think sometimes, when you are firm on a point, people finally understand that you really are serious about it and they start acting accordingly.

And as for how we meet them or where we meet them, you know, whether it's Berlin, whether it's Beijing, whether it's New York, I think those are just tactics and I think there's much too much focus on that and not enough focus on the real underlying issues.

MODERATOR: I know the Ambassador has another appointment, so maybe we have time for a question or two more.

AMBASSADOR HILL: Go ahead.

QUESTION: Yes, (inaudible.)

AMBASSADOR HILL: Boy, you're really anxious to ask this question. I hope it's a good one. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Yes, you've spoken about what North Korea's change is. What about the U.S.? I think the people in the U.S. are very -- would like to know what support you'll have to keep this on track so that there's nothing that comes up like the Banco Delta again that kind of throws them --

AMBASSADOR HILL: Well, you know, look, the issue of Banco Delta Asia -- I mean, you know, there were problems going on in that institution. There were some serious problems. And I think anyone, not just DPRK, but any country that engages in some of those practices is going to find that they're going to have some problems continuing to engage in that practice, especially if they're making weapons of mass destruction. You can often get away with illicit activities. Some countries get away with that, but usually, when you are engaged in those, plus engaged in weapons of mass destruction, sooner or later, someone's going to have a pretty tough look at your finances.

This is sort of a Washington-style question you've asked, but I'll answer it in New York. I've had tremendous support within the U.S. Government on this. Secretary Rice is completely on top of all of these details. In fact, I'll be briefing her in a few minutes on this. When I was in Beijing, we talked several times a day and I think she called me on the last day at 4:15 or 4:30 in the morning, Washington time.

So I think -- I feel I've got a lot of support and I think as long as I can show some results, I'll get more support. You know, diplomatic negotiation is sort of like managing a baseball team: as long as you win, everyone's happy. So you know, we'll see how we do.

QUESTION: Paul Eckert of Reuters Washington.

BDA and the mechanism for resolving it has come up repeatedly here, but at the core of it is counterfeiting. Do you understand -- what do you know about the state of North Korean counterfeiting of U.S. dollars? Is it still continuing? If Kim Gye Gwan asked you to change a C-note, would you do it?

(Laughter.)

AMBASSADOR HILL: I've never seen one in my life, but that's because I have a couple of teenage daughters. But I have made abundantly clear to them that this counterfeiting business has got to stop; whether they will take that advice -- I hope they do, because I think it's something that no country, no country in the world can look the other way on.

I was in a congressional hearing the other day and one of the congressmen waved a \$100 bill at me. You know, it's very clear that there is a very, very strong view in this country that, we don't ask a lot of the world, but we do ask that people not counterfeit our currency. So I don't think there's much flexibility on that matter. I think if countries -- if anyone's engaged in counterfeiting -- they need to get out of that and get out of it in a hurry. So I certainly have made those views clear, and we will continue to be vigilant about our currency. It's basically for our economy. That's our life's blood so we have to make sure our currency is protected. We'll do that.

One more question. This is always a mistake, but -- all right, go ahead.

QUESTION: Edith Lederer from the Associated Press.

AMBASSADOR HILL: I called on you this morning.

QUESTION: You didn't call on me. Nicholas Kristoff called on me. (Laughter.)

AMBASSADOR HILL: Technicality. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: But I wanted to know -- you're talking about this very tight timetable but you haven't really given us any sense of a timeframe. We talk about the eventual

denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Are we talking about months? Are we talking about years?

And going back to the second part of my question, you talked a little bit about the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and North Korea, and in your answer you mentioned something about the possibility of liaison offices that didn't happen in the '90s. Could this be some kind of an interim step that might happen before the establishment of full diplomatic relations?

AMBASSADOR HILL: First of all, I don't think it will because this was a model that China had and that China felt was a very successful model in terms of U.S.-China relations. I don't think that view is shared by the DPRK, so I think they would like to move to diplomatic relations. But I must say this is very much linked to the question of denuclearization and that's a very fair question. You know, how long is this going to go on? We will want to keep as fast a pace as possible. We certainly believe that the faster we go, the steadier we'll be, the fewer opportunities for these lengthy pauses of the kind that we recently had where we didn't meet for almost 18 months.

But I can't predict to you exactly when the last piece of fissile material would be taken out of North Korea. We're going to shut down this reactor, we'll disable it, we'll then want to dismantle it. We will want to achieve clarity on the HEU and do similar operations on highly enriched uranium equipment. We will need to have a good reading, good fix on the weapons and on the actual fissile material. This will take some time and I think if we can get it in a way that we're moving every month, I think we'll be okay. But if we end up in a situation where nothing happens for six months, then I think we'll have a problem.

So I think just do this step by step. We want to get through this next step, these 60 days, and we'll take the next thing, which I think is measured in months not years, and then go on from there.

MODERATOR: I'd like to thank Ambassador Hill and ask everyone to please remain seated for a couple moments while the Ambassador --

AMBASSADOR HILL: While I escape. (Laughter.) Thank you. Thank you very much. Good to see you all.



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