



## On-Background Conference Call on North Korea's 60-Day Assessment

### Senior State Department Official

Washington, DC  
April 14, 2007

**MR. CASEY:** Good afternoon, everyone. I apologize for starting a few minutes late here and I appreciate you all taking the opportunity to be with us today. You should all now have, or if you don't, you'll certainly have in a couple of minutes a copy of the statement released in Sean's name concerning the conclusion of the deadline of the first phase of February 13th agreement of the six-party talks.

We have with us this afternoon a Senior State Department Official here to speak with you on background to give you a little more information about what we see happening now and where we may be going in the future on this. Because I know we've just put the statement out, what I'm going to do is ask her to read that statement for you at the top and add whatever opening comments she has and then we'll go to your questions. So if I could turn this over to our Senior State Department official.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** All right, well, good afternoon. As Tom said, the statement has just come out and I understand that most or all of you perhaps have it front of you, but I will read it and I'll read it fairly quickly so we can get to a discussion here. But just so we all know what's been issued. This is a statement by Sean McCormack -- North Korea 60-day assessment.

"On February 13th, the United States, China, Japan, Russia, the ROK, and the DPRK agreed on a set of Initial Actions to achieve the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and fully realize the September 2005 Joint Statement.

As agreed in the Feb. 13 statement, the parties convened five working groups to address denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, economic and energy cooperation, Northeast Asia peace and security, U.S.-DPRK relations, and Japan-DPRK relations. The DPRK invited IAEA Director-General ElBaradei for initial discussions relating to the monitoring and verification of the shutdown and sealing of the nuclear facilities at its Yongbyon complex. In addition, the U.S. carried out its promise to finalize its action with respect to Banco Delta Asia. While a variety of technical issues delayed the unblocking of BDA funds to account holders, as of April 10, all North Korea-related accounts that had been blocked at Banco Delta Asia were un-blocked, thus conclusively resolving the issue.

It remains for the DPRK to realize fully its commitments under the February 13 agreement by inviting back the IAEA immediately to begin shutting and sealing the Yongbyon nuclear facility. This would enable the other parties to follow through with the provision of emergency energy assistance equivalent to 50,000 tons of heavy fuel oil and move the six-party process forward to the next phase of implementing the September 2005 Joint Statement.

We, along with all our other six-party partners, remain firmly committed to prompt completion of the initial action plan and to achieving the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula through the implementation of the Joint Statement. We will continue to consult closely with all parties to consider next steps.

We have taken note of the DPRK's April 13th statement reaffirming that the DPRK 'remains unchanged in its will to implement the February 13th agreement' and will 'move' when the BDA resolution 'is proved to be a reality.' It is time now for the DPRK to make its move so that all of us can move forward."

And that's the end of the statement that we've earlier released. As Tom said, I'm happy now to take your questions and I believe this is on background.

**MR. CASEY:** Absolutely. Thank you. If we can ask the call manager to come in and then bring into us our first couple questions.

**OPERATOR:** Thank you, sir. We'll now begin the question and answer session. If you would like to ask a question, please press star-1. You will need to record your name. And to withdraw your request it is star-2. It will be just one moment for that first question, sir.

**QUESTION:** Arshad Mohammed, Reuters.

**OPERATOR:** Your line is open.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, my question is: Is it necessary for the North Koreans merely to invite back the IAEA for the release of the 50,000 tons of heavy fuel oil or must they invite them back and complete shutting down Yongbyon before they can get the 50,000 tons?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Well, I'm actually looking at the February 13th statement and it's not entirely clear. But I think what we all feel is that we need to get the IAEA in there and get it started on the process of shutting down and sealing it. So I would say to you, I think much more than inviting back is required; we need to get the process started. But in terms of when this initial shipment would actually commence, I don't think we've attached a great deal of specificity to that. My understanding is, you know, the South Koreans have agreed to do this initial shipment and are kind of standing by. But clearly, until we're satisfied that the shutdown, the sealing, is occurring that shipment will continue to stand by.

**OPERATOR:** Our next question will come from --

**QUESTION:** Glenn Kessler, Washington Post. Hello.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Hi.

**QUESTION:** Hi. I mean, I'm looking at what's happened here, transpired over the last 60 days, and do you feel at all you been snookered by the North Koreans? That they've led you down a path here where you have basically given back all their money, back to the account holders, you know, had this bilateral meeting, normalization of relations and all they've done on their end is, you know, they had ElBaradei there which didn't really amount to much. And while they're still maybe waiting for their fuel oil, the impression is that they have led you down a garden path and you've gotten nothing for it.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** No, I wouldn't characterize it that way. I mean, obviously we're concerned. The 60 days has passed and a number of things that were supposed to happen did happen, but a number of things that were supposed to happen haven't happened yet. But, you know, I think we made a good start in some areas. This -- the BDA issue did turn out to be far more complex, far more technical, I think than any side had anticipated and it's going to take us a few more days to get to where we wanted to be today. But, you know, Chris Hill has just concluded some consultations in Beijing. We're going to stay in close contact.

We do see the North Korean statement, which is mentioned in Sean McCormack's statement, as a sign that there seems to be a commitment to go forward and obviously

that's going to be tested here over the next few days. But, no, you know, I don't think there's been the kind of completion on any side. The North Koreans haven't gotten their heavy fuel oil, there's a lot of other things in the next step, as you know the February 13th statement and beyond, that's been agreed to happen. None of that's happened. But clearly the onus is now on Pyongyang to make the move to bring in the IAEA and get started on shutting down Yongbyon. So, no, we'd like to be a little bit ahead of where we are now but, you know, the Chinese, all these consultations, there are consultations here and we're going to see if we can get this thing back on the track we'd like it to be on in the coming days.

**QUESTION:** Just to follow up. Is there some point at which your patience runs out? I know that Chris was talking about, you know, he didn't like the idea of waiting a month. Is there some timeline where your --

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Well, I think it's fair to say that, you know, our patience is not an infinite supply. But we feel that given the kind of unexpected complexities that did arise in connection with some of the banking issues, that it's probably prudent to give this thing a few more days to see if the Pyongyang statement of April 13th is something they're going to follow through on and to work with our partners in the talks to see if we can get the movement we need in the coming days.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) days?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** No, it's a matter of a fairly short period of time.

**QUESTION:** So you're saying days but not more than a week?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** I don't want to place a time scale on it. You know, I'd certainly like to see, and I think Chris mentioned this in Beijing, certainly like to see a phone call going to the IAEA pretty quickly here and to get them going. I mean, they have their own process. And my understanding is they're ready to move pretty promptly. But, you know, I don't want to place a false timeline on it, but we'd like to see the movement start here pretty quickly.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**OPERATOR:** Again, if you would like to ask a question, please press star 1. Just one moment.

**QUESTION:** Elaine (inaudible). Yes, hello?

**MR. CASEY:** Go ahead, Elaine.

**QUESTION:** Hi. Can you tell us any more about what Hill heard from the Chinese in terms of what they want to do now and what they think can be done?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Well, you know, I think what he heard is that the Chinese believe, as I was mentioning earlier, that we need to show a little patience, but promised that they would be in very close touch with us and with the other partners in the coming days. And make clear -- that all of us would make clear to, as we have tried to do in our statement, that we think the time is here for the DPRK to move forward with shutting down Yongbyon. So, you know, I think if we get this going, we'd like to get the parties back together and move forward. You know, we have a plan. We haven't deviated from that in terms of getting these initial actions done quickly, moving -- to hope for gathering of our ministers and then getting into the next part of the actions that were laid out in February 13th of moving to a complete declaration of the DPRK's programs and to its disablement. So all of that remains unchanged, but we're just a little delayed in the timing here and we're going to try to work with the partners in the next few days to get it back on track.

**QUESTION:** In terms of timing?

**QUESTION:** Mike Lavalley, Tokyo Broadcasting System. Hi. Just wondering in parts of Washington, in corners of Washington, you know, there's people starting to question about whether you're giving up too much for getting very little back from the North Koreans. And amongst the Japanese press as well there's a lot of reporting going on suggesting that the United States is caving and giving up a great deal for what they're getting back. Is the pressure increasing in Washington for some returns on this deal from the North Koreans at this time within the Administration? Are you feeling that you need to start getting something back in return to show that this deal is worthy?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Well, I'm not sure exactly what is that we've given up. We've resolved the BDA case as we committed to doing. And, you know, we are awaiting the DPRK to follow through on its initial action. And of course as this deal is laid out, it is on this principle, which the DPRK likes so much to cite, of action for action. So, you know, I'm not sure what we've given up here yet. We're waiting for the Yongbyon shutdown and the IAEA inspectors to be there to seal it and then to get into another phase. And at each phase there's a sense of DPRK performance, followed by things that are laid out in the initial agreement that the other parties will participate in. So I don't see any deviation from what was agreed in February nor from the overall framework that we laid out in 2005.

**QUESTION:** Well, just as a follow up, what people feel like you've given up is a great amount of leverage. A lot of people feel that the BDA action had put a great deal of pressure and was squeezing North Korea to come back to the talks. And now that you've given them back to BDA -- the money there -- and that issue is gone, now that you don't have any more leverage to keep them moving forward in the talks. What leverage do you have at this point to keep them moving forward in the talks once this issue is settled?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Well, I mean, I think the kind of leverage, or if you like the incentives, for the DPRK to participate in this process, you know, are the same ones that have existed all along. And they are the ways in which the DPRK will begin to obtain the much needed energy and economic assistance that its people need and its economy needs and the steps that it needs to take and its partners -- in the six-party talks -- have committed if they take action towards denuclearization to break its international isolation. And this isolation includes its isolation vis-à-vis the international financial institutions. You know, until North Korea really gets on the road of denuclearization, it's going to continue to have trouble conducting its business, its financial business, its economic business as a member of the international community. That's the larger goal of this process is to bring it into a more normal relationship with the rest of the world not just the United States and not just Japan but the rest of the world. But to do that it's got to move on denuclearization so that's the leverage. That's what's always been there. And actually I don't see that unchanged. I think it's been kind of, if you like, brought home by this issue of BDA. That the DPRK's behavior is -- both in terms of its nuclear programs and in other areas, has got to change in order for it to access what it needs to improve its standing in the world and its standing at home. And this six-party process gives it a pathway to do it and we hope it will go down that path.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) NHK. Hello?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Hi.

**QUESTION:** Hi. You mentioned that you're just a little delayed on the timeline here, but could you give us any more idea about what the most likely path to follow, will there be an extension of the deadline or Sean mentioned that there's room for a little bit of maneuver here because it's not a treaty. Would you be willing to consider a different kind of approach to the February 13th agreement?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Well, I mean -- I think we're not interested in somehow negotiating, you know, a new deadline. I think our aim here now is,

as I mentioned, without establishing an exact deadline here, to say within the coming days, and I think it is a matter of days, to get real movement. Now, you know, how long it takes to get Yongbyon shutdown and sealed is something we need to be in consultation with the IAEA about. But we want to see the initial actions of the 60 days completed as quickly as possible and we will be very, very focused and in very close consultation with the other parties to the six-party talks to get that done just as fast as possible. But we do need to see an action from the DPRK in that direction.

Once that is done then I think the February 13th roadmap remains and still makes sense. And we would look forward to moving as quickly as we possibly can towards the next steps in that -- outlined in the February 13th and that includes the full declaration by the DPRK of its nuclear programs and the disablement of those programs.

**QUESTION:** And just to follow up, so when you're saying you're not interested in negotiating a new deadline and yet you're willing to wait a couple of days, so is that not just an extension of the deadline as it stands?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Well, I think what we're saying is some of this took a little bit longer than we thought and we hoped it would. So what we're going to focus on now is just getting it done as quickly as we possibly can.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**QUESTION:** Kirit Radia, ABC News.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Yes, hi.

**QUESTION:** Yeah, hi. You had said -- can you give us a sense of what might happen if this does drag on for a few more weeks? Would you say that there's going to be some sort of new approach to it? I mean, if this does go on and you don't see any change from the North Koreans, what's going to happen?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Well, you know, anytime you start a question with "if" it allows me to say that's hypothetical and I don't want to answer it. And actually I don't want to answer it now. I mean, right now our focus is -- and this is very much the focus of Chris Hill's consultations in both Seoul and Beijing and the discussions that we've been having here in Washington -- is how do we get in the coming days to where we need to be. And that's our focus right now. You know, down the line if we have to look at what the other alternatives are we, you know, then obviously that's something we'll have to do. But, you know, we've tried to make very clear all along that we think that, you know, the pathway outlined in the six-party process and in the February 13th agreement is the only one that really makes sense for the DPRK if its intent is to move towards a more normal relationship with the rest of the world and to give up its nuclear programs and to begin to have a better future.

**QUESTION:** And if I could just follow up, if you have heard (inaudible) on anything that Chris may have heard from his counterparts in China from the North Koreans in the last few days?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Well, you know, I think Chris is -- what Chris has heard is that the Chinese think that with a little bit of patience and coordination among the parties that despite the fact that we've reached our 60-day deadline and that we obviously have a concern that the deadline has not been met that this is still doable. And so I think that there will be some very close consultations over the next few days to really try and get that done.

**QUESTION:** But specifically from the North Koreans if there was anything from the North Koreans passed on.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** I think what I'd really point to, as I said, is what the North Koreans have said publicly on April 13th, which did recommit them and obviously is quoted in Sean's statement to implementing their part of the February 13th agreement. You know, I mean, they're suspicious. And tomorrow, as I understand, is Kim Il Sung's birthday. It's a Sunday. I mean, I'm not trying to say this didn't happen because it's a weekend and because it happened to fall on Kim Il Sung's birthday but, you know, here we are, it's Saturday and I'd like to be able to say to you that, you know, the banking thing is totally resolved. But we've -- I don't think we're going to hear anything out of Pyongyang or -- over the next 24 hours we could, but I'm just guessing that maybe we won't. But, you know, we think within a reasonable period of time that we'll see. We'll see if the intent is there for the DPRK to move forward they're going to have the option to do and we can get this process going.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**MR. CASEY:** I think -- let's just make this next one the last question.

**QUESTION:** Nina Donaghy, Fox News.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Yes, hi.

**QUESTION:** Hi, there. Just a quick question about the process over the coming days. Can you clarify will Chris Hill remain in Beijing and will he be talking via phone with his counterparts or will they meet? Can you just clarify what's going to happen?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Chris Hill, I think is planning to come back to Washington tomorrow.

**QUESTION:** All right, okay.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** But the intent is to stay in very close touch with all of the parties. And I know he's quite prepared to go back out to the region in the event that we're able to get the parties together and give an impetus to move forward. But I think, you know, what we're going to see first we hope is movement on the part of North Korea to get the IAEA back into North Korea and to get it going. But, you know, he has been on the phone with all of his counterparts. He talked to his Japanese counterpart, I think the day before yesterday. He's been in touch with the South Korean counterpart and, you know, they'll all be sending the same message I think to Pyongyang about our readiness to move forward as soon as the DPRK reengages here.

**QUESTION:** So (inaudible) saying DPRK to get in touch with IAEA and get the process moving, that's what you want to see happen?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** That's right.

**QUESTION:** All right.

**MR. CASEY:** Okay. Well thank you very much everyone. I want to thank our briefer for making time today to be able to join us and thank you to the rest of you for being with us this afternoon. Again, apologize for the delay in getting to you initially. I hope this has helped with your understanding of our statement and where we're likely to be going in the next few weeks. Thank you very much.

**QUESTION:** Thank you all.

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