



Interview on the Charlie Rose Show

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

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MR. ROSE: We begin tonight with North Korea. Pyongyang has agreed to disable all of its nuclear facilities by the end of this year. Negotiators from the United States, China, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, and Russia drafted the agreement after four days of talks in Beijing. A U.S.-led team will travel to North Korea next week to start the process. Washington has already provided the country with much-needed energy aid. The U.S. has also said it will look into removing North Korea from its list of state sponsors of terrorism.

Joining me now is Assistant Secretary of State Chris Hill. He has been the lead U.S. negotiator at the Six-Party Talks. He returned from Beijing earlier this week, and I am pleased to have him back at this table. Welcome and congratulations.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, thanks very much, but I'm afraid the congratulations are a little premature. We have got a long way to go here.

MR. ROSE: Well, then tell me where we are.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, we're kind of in the middle -- sort of in the muddle here. We've come through the introductory phase, in which we got the reactor shut down, the facilities there shut down. Now we are going to get them disabled. So even if you wanted to turn them back on -- you know, kick out the inspectors and turn them back on -- it won't be so easy. It will take many months to do something like that, maybe a year. So that's disabling.

And then we'll get a full disclosure -- that is, a complete declaration of all their nuclear programs. The main thing is in this Yongbyon facility, where they've got their reactor. But they've got other stuff. So we need to know from them what it is and match it up with what we know about it. And if we can get that -- and that would include uranium enrichment, the other way they might be making fissile material -- then we'll come down to one issue for the new year, after December 31st, and that is to get them to give up the 50 kilos or so of. --

MR. ROSE: Enriched plutonium.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: -- of weapons-grade plutonium. Exactly.

MR. ROSE: So let's take it through. What did we give up in order to get them to do this?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, you know, it is a lot of horse trading. So the first thing we did was to give energy assistance. And they will be receiving energy assistance per month, totaling about 950,000 tons. And we're sharing that assistance with other countries in the Six-Party Talks -- that is, Russia, China, South Korea. We're hoping Japan will join that. So it's not just the U.S. providing this. It's about 950,000 tons.

And so that's one thing. And then another thing is we've agreed to keep improving our bilateral relationship. Now we are not going to get to normalized, full diplomatic relations until North Korea gives up all of its nuclear ambitions and that last 50 kilos of material that they've already got.

So it's going to take a while, but we've agreed to continue on this process. And in particular, there's one issue that was very important to the North Koreans. They've raised it with us on many occasions, and that is to be removed from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. So we are working with them, and we have a plan to move ahead on that.

MR. ROSE: All right, we'll talk about the plan. But why was that so important to them?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, you know, I think they -- First of all, this is a country that actually was involved in terrorism activity. For example, in 1987 North Korea, a North Korean agent blew up a South Korean airliner. In 1983, North Korean agents planted bombs and blew up half of the South Korean cabinet in a ceremony in Rangoon, in Burma. So there have been, there have definitely been terrorist acts.

MR. ROSE: This is what we call state-sponsored terrorism.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, this is actually state terrorism.

MR. ROSE: State doing terrorism, right.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: So now there have not been other examples of that type of thing. And, indeed, in the 1990s they signed on to some anti-terrorist conventions. And I think the North Koreans have come to understand that being on a list of state sponsors of terrorism is kind of, really puts a real black mark next to your name. And so I think they've seen the value of trying to get off that list.

MR. ROSE: You have phrased this well. You've said, you have a choice North Korea. You can either be a country that buys into being a part of the world economic environment, or, B., you can buy into the world of being a nuclear power of some kind. You can't be both. In the end, that's what it was.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: That's right, that's right. You know, I can't say how they will eventually be disarmed if this process that we're working on doesn't work. But they need to understand that sooner or later, they're going to have to give up these nuclear weapons. I can't say how. I can't say what countries are going to do this. But the world cannot allow countries to go ahead and start creating nuclear weapons.

MR. ROSE: How much mischief are they creating around the world, i.e. Syria?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, you know, we've got to be very concerned about their proliferation activity. For example, we know that they sell missile technology to a lot of countries, and a lot of countries that, frankly speaking, we'd rather not see get missile technology from North Korea.

MR. ROSE: Like Iran?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Like Iran, for example. Syria is another case. So we've got to be very vigilant about the fact that this is a country that has been a known proliferator. And so that's something we take on in these Six-Party Talks. And we think it's really the best way to do that, because everybody at the table -- you know, Russia, South Korea, Japan, China, us -- we don't want to see them do this. So there's a lot of pressure that we're able to bring to bear by having this Six-Party process.

You know, a lot of people criticize multilateral diplomacy. They say it takes too long; it's too difficult. But, frankly, if you can get everyone on the same sheet of music, I mean, it can be quite effective.

MR. ROSE: The Chinese played a significant role?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yes, they do, absolutely.

MR. ROSE: What was that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, they really want to see this solved. They don't want some country on their border producing nuclear weapons. They don't want to see problems in Northeast Asia. You know, if North Korea gets away with this, what other country is going to start doing this in the region? So China has a real interest in getting it solved.

MR. ROSE: But what did they do? They leaned on them? They said --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: They leaned on them.

MR. ROSE: -- to them, don't do these things, it's not going to work out so good for you?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You know, they are clearly leaning on them. They are clearly trying to work with them. We don't ask a lot of questions, how they actually get it done.

MR. ROSE: Is that what you do, you just say --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I'd rather not know.

MR. ROSE: -- comrade, just go do it, whatever you want to do?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Get it done. Get it done. So we're on the same sheet of music with the Chinese.

MR. ROSE: With the Chinese?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: With the Chinese, absolutely. And you know, this is important for our relationship with China too.

MR. ROSE: You see, that's really what it is. I mean, why aren't they helping us in Iraq? What other kinds of ways that China, the United States, and even Russia somehow say, look, this is -- there's one common ground here which is better than all of the options.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, you know, you've got to worry if we're putting together around the table China, Russia, the U.S., Japan -- the world's second largest economy -- South Korea. These are powerful countries, and if we can't get this done, you know, you have to worry about what problems are going to be out there that we're unable to solve. So I think we should be able to get this done.

MR. ROSE: You're optimistic.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: God, I hate using that word in my line. I use it only for the Red Sox. But --

MR. ROSE: Are you optimistic for the Red Sox?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Of course. I mean, they're the best team this year.

MR. ROSE: Can I tell you about your history?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You know, history doesn't matter. We're in a transformational age. The Red Sox are going to win. Don't worry about it.

MR. ROSE: That's what a former first baseman said. All right.

Here, let me just pick it apart here. All right. One, this idea of taking them off state terrorism, that list.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yes.

MR. ROSE: Who else is on the list?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, there are countries like Syria, Iran. I believe Cuba's on the list. There are a few countries on the list.

MR. ROSE: Is it like 10 that are on the list?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Even fewer.

MR. ROSE: Eight, or maybe six. All right. So there seems to be some dispute about this. They believe that you have said you're going to take them off the list by the end of the year. Is that what you said?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, Charlie, it's a little complicated. And you know why? Because we have a situation where Japan really wants to see progress on some of the problems they have with North Korea. And for Japan, it's very important that we keep them on the list. For us, it's very important that we have a good relationship with Japan and try to work this out.

MR. ROSE: You had a bunch of side agreements between North Korea and the United States.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yes, we had some side understandings. You know, some things are better handled in a bilateral channel than in a multilateral.

MR. ROSE: What's an example of that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, for example, in the overall agreement you'll see that we're talking about getting a team out there in two weeks --

MR. ROSE: To start disassembling.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: -- getting a team out there to look at the facilities and begin to figure out how to take them apart. So in the side agreement we have a more specific understanding of which day they will get there and things like that. So it allows us to get to a little more precision on things. But, also, we have to have some understandings with the North Koreans that are really bilateral that -- they don't involve the other parties, and that's where we do things on the side.

And, you know, the Six-Party agreements, they get publicized. But we do have these side agreements, where we try to work them through traditional diplomatic channels.

MR. ROSE: The Chinese released the text. Any reason that happened?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: No, we released the text also.

MR. ROSE: So it was simultaneously or --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You know, what we do is -- They are the host of the process. So in this case, there are some heavy-duty elements to this thing, namely having the U.S. named by the Six Parties to go in there and to begin this disabling and, by the way, to take on the initial cost of doing this.

So I felt I needed to not only phone home, but actually come home and talk to people about this, make sure everyone was comfortable. I had a meeting with Secretary Rice Monday morning, and then Secretary Rice and I met with the President.

MR. ROSE: What did the President say?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, he looked at it very carefully --

MR. ROSE: Said well done, Chris?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: He looked at it very carefully. He went through the elements. Wanted to know --

MR. ROSE: Oh, he did? He was interested in all of the elements?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Absolutely. He wanted to know very precisely what it looks like. And then I was authorized by Secretary Rice to call the Chinese to tell them we agree with the text.

MR. ROSE: I somewhere read this -- and I'm not quite sure where -- that some people originally wanted it to be five years. You -- you can't make it 100 percent irreversible.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, you know, if you took the Yongbyon facility and totally disassembled it, and you brought it down to dirt, and then you planted some grass seed and watered it, and then you decided you wanted to build it again, it would be about five years.

MR. ROSE: OK. So what's going to be happening then?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: What we need is a situation --

MR. ROSE: A screw here and a screw there?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, you know, to pull out things, to make it so that it's difficult to put certain things back in. You know, the nice thing about nuclear reactors is you can't just take the fuel source and plop it in and start operating it. So it will take a while.

But our intention is not to have a situation where the North Koreans want to turn it back on. Our intention is to keep moving. So what we would like to do is to go from this disabling stage to actually dismantling it -- you know, take it apart, ship it out of the country, end of things, end of story.

So we believe that we will have enough time so that even if you got a real rocky road in the negotiation, they won't be tempted to kick the inspectors out and start putting it back together and producing this. So we're buying some time.

MR. ROSE: You think this was the leader, or the military, or just --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, you know, it's hard to say how it works there. That is a country where, to be sure, it's a dictatorship. But dictatorships have politics. So you might have a situation where the leadership doesn't want to ask the military to do something unless it knows what answer it's going to get from the military. So I can imagine that even in a dictatorship with a sort of top-down model, there are a lot of institutions there, and it's not so easy to make these turns. But my sense is -- among the people I talk to who really know North Korea, and among the North Koreans I talk to -- there is a commitment to try to move this process.

MR. ROSE: All right. Suppose the President, when you met with him, said, "Listen Chris, I realize how we're not there yet. And I realize that things can go wrong. But we've made some progress here, and it's different than it was six months ago. You know, we may have taken some steps we didn't think we might want to take. But we've taken those steps, and we've got a lot because of it, and we're on our way to something. How do I translate that lesson to Iran?"

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, you know, in diplomacy and international relations there's no one size fits all. I mean, I can imagine --

MR. ROSE: There are no principles that would work?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I can imagine there are certain things that, assuming we're successful, and, again, we're right in the middle --

MR. ROSE: You've underlined that enough.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: So I can imagine there are some things we're doing that might apply in Iran. But, you know, Iran's circumstances and its region, where it's located, its historical relationships with countries in the region, historical enmities with some countries in the region -- very different from where North Korea is. North Korea is the smallest, least-populated country in the region. It has by far the smallest economy. It's surrounded, really, by giants.

MR. ROSE: But different. It already had nuclear weapons.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Right. That's true. That's true. But it's finding that it has them, it actually exploded one, and -- lo and behold -- things haven't gotten better for it. So I think what North Korea has taken from this lesson is, they've got to reach out and try to make some sort of normalcy with their neighbors and, frankly, with us.

MR. ROSE: So what have we taken from this lesson?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: With respect to North Korea?

MR. ROSE: To negotiating. With respect to dealing with our adversaries. With respect to --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You know, I think it's important to be patient but firm and make very clear that you do have some red lines. You're not going to give in on this. You're not going to be worn down.

MR. ROSE: Yours was, we have got to get in there and see for our own eyes that we can disassemble this thing.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: You've got to get to these people. You've got to get in their face. You've got to say this is what we need. You've got to set deadlines. You say, OK, can we get something done within three weeks? OK, can't do it in three weeks; how about four weeks? Let's do it in four weeks. And really get at them. And I think diplomacy -- it's not so much a question of wearing people down; it's a question of really expressing your resolve.

I have always found in past examples, for example with Milosevic, if we hadn't see him for a few weeks --

MR. ROSE: In Dayton.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: In Dayton, or between Dayton, before Dayton or after Dayton. When we hadn't seen him for a few weeks, he had been surrounded by people who, to put it mildly, were very accommodating to every view he expressed. So he got kind of difficult to deal with when you hadn't seen him for a while. And you had to kind of go through it once again to sort of make him understand that, no, the world doesn't work the way his advisers think it works. So I found it very useful to keep after him and stay with it.

And I think this is very true in this business as well. You've really got-- We've got a good process, and I think just the whole framework of this Six-Party process is moving it forward. So we'll see. You know, it's a tough game. But I think it's the direction we should be going in.

MR. ROSE: But I do want to come back and say what we learned about this and focus on that. It is -- First of all, this was a multilateral effort. You had real help from the Chinese. And yet at the same time, you had the Japanese raising very real points.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: That's right.

MR. ROSE: And they were clearly a power in the region, and they had a voice and a stake.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Right.

MR. ROSE: Help me to understand what we need to do about Iran.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, you know, I've got a lot of problems in life, but Iran is not one of them, fortunately. I have a colleague who --

MR. ROSE: Oh, we have plans for you! We have plans for you!

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: But one of the things in our Six Parties is to look at how each party has a different kind of view of what they're trying to get. For Japan, it's been very much this issue of getting closure on this tragic situation. For China, it's been, my goodness, we want to calm this down.

MR. ROSE: They don't want instability on its border.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: We don't want to go into our Olympic year with this kind of stuff.

MR. ROSE: With refugees streaming across the border.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Exactly. For South Korea -- I mean, one of the great tragedies of the 20th century is that the Korean Peninsula was divided -- families were divided; hideous tragedy --and, by the way, through no fault of the Korean people. This happened because of outside powers. So for the South Koreans, they desperately want some sort of process by which they can have some kind of relationship with, literally, brothers and sisters.

MR. ROSE: Is this a Germany kind of situation?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I would say it's more profound than that -- because, you know, Germany, I mean, anyone who studies the history knows that Germany played a role in its own division. Korea did not. It's a real tragedy that these people in this isolated little peninsula one day had foreign powers in their peninsula. And before they knew it, they were divided. And no one ever thought it would go on this long.

So when Koreans have these opportunities to have these meetings -- and believe me, the Koreans have a lot of different ideas about, or views on this summit meeting that's taking place as we speak -- nonetheless, this is something that Koreans feel very emotionally about. And we need to understand that a little better.

So they have a perspective. China has a perspective. Japan, you know. And so our perspective is very much on the issue of nuclear weapons. We cannot allow North Korea to do this. If North Korea does this, we have a problem in the region. We have potential proliferation problems, and we have other countries who might take this example. So everyone has a different sort of feel for this elephant.

MR. ROSE: There is also this, though. I mean, just tell me if this is a correct assumption. We had insisted on complete, verifiable, irreversible disarmament before, and we had basically said we're not going to do these things until you meet certain conditions. We moderated those demands, right?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I have to agree with the point that we have done a completely different sequencing. That is, earlier there was this idea that they would do everything, and then we would offer a response.

MR. ROSE: We'd talk.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Yes.

MR. ROSE: You guys jump through hoops, and then we'll talk.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think the tactics, though -- While our tactics have changed, we're still looking for complete; we're still looking for irreversible. We don't want them to do this and then redo it the minute we turn our backs.

MR. ROSE: Verifiable.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: We're still looking for something verifiable. And, by the way, we're still insisting that it be dismantled. So all this so-called CVID is still there, but we're trying to approach it differently. We found that it's much better to work with our partners, and we are really in sync with the other partners. I think it took us a while to get in sync, but we're in sync. And that's why I think we're making progress.

MR. ROSE: And hopefully it has repercussions beyond the very significant one of dismantling one nuclear power.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Well, I hope so -- because dealing with nuclear weapons is truly one of the problems of our age. We've got to figure out a way to dissuade countries from doing this.

MR. ROSE: Thank you, Chris Hill.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Thank you.

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