

Ambassador Christopher Hill-April 29, 2008
“Korea: The Art of Negotiation-Bridging the Fifty Year Divide”

Diplomatic negotiations with North Korea over denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula are in a six-party framework (No. Korea, So. Korea, China, the U.S., Japan and Russia). “Diplomacy is not the only option,” Ambassador Hill said, “but it is what the region wants and I believe it is what the American people want. Walking away is not an option.”

Cumbersome, difficult and slow, some progress nonetheless is being made. More productive bilateral discussions are held within the six-party framework and on the margins of those meetings. Given historical, emotional and geographic animosities between these countries, the U.S. plays a crucial role in helping to bridge divides. While this as a regional problem requiring a regional solution, the U.S. is seen by all parties as ‘the implementer.’

The U.S. goal is to make sure that North Korea is not in a position to threaten its neighbors or traffic in nuclear weaponry. The nuclear reactor producing plutonium must be shut down and disabled (for which we will exchange fuel oil). A U.S. team was on site doing that--to ensure that any resumption would be both costly and time-consuming. The next step is for North Korea to turn over the estimated 30-50 kilos of plutonium already produced and to allow verification that none has been held back. There will be no “trust me” Hill stressed. (Update: No Korea has turned over 30 kilos which they say is all they have).

There has been a disturbing pattern of purchases in the past by North Korea (probably to enhance uranium). On trafficking, there is good reason to believe that they were cooperating with Syria in construction of a nuclear reactor there. All that must stop. Verification is critical. If this is achieved, the U.S. and South Korea would be willing to work out a peace treaty with a denuclearized North Korea.

Ambassador Hill said that U.S. relations with Asia are “pretty good” despite differences over Iraq. Strong bilateral and treaty relations continue with South Korea and Japan. The U.S. relationship with China is extremely complex. 1.2 billion people speaks for itself. There are 57 separate U.S. - China groups meeting regularly on the range of issues that concern us. A North East Asia regional group may emerge from the 6-party talks opening an important channel for ongoing communication.

-Ambassador Marilyn McAfee

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