

9/11 and the U.S. Approach to the Korean Peninsula*

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Before I get to my assigned topic which is "9/11 and the U.S. Approach to the Korean Peninsula" I know you will want me to say something about the recent revelations about North Korea's nuclear program, which came out of the visit to Pyongyang earlier this month by our Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs James A. Kelly.

As you know, Mr. Kelly confronted North Korean officials with our knowledge that the DPRK for several years has had a secret program to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons in violation of its commitments under the 1994 Agreed Framework, the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), its International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards agreement, and the Joint North-South Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The North Koreans admitted it was true and said that they considered the Agreed Framework nullified.

This was, of course, a very disturbing situation, and we must consider very carefully what it means for the future. Everyone in the region has a stake in this issue. No peaceful nation wants to see a nuclear-armed North Korea. Like South Korea, the U.S. government seeks a peaceful solution to the situation.

During Mr. Kelly's visit to Pyongyang, we had hoped to engage North Korea – based on consultation with our allies and friends – and to open a bold path toward improved relations. We were prepared to offer practical steps which could improve the lives of the North Korean people, provided the DPRK dramatically altered its weapons of mass destruction programs, development and export of ballistic missiles, its threatening military posture on the Peninsula, its support for terrorism, and its deplorable human rights record.

We've seen some actions taken by the DPRK in recent months which could have the potential to lead to real progress in inter-Korean relations but the recent revelations about the DPRK's nuclear program throw into doubt the sincerity of North Korea's intent to work with us. For the United States this new North Korean nuclear weapons program is an overriding concern that must be resolved swiftly and visibly if we are to move forward with the DPRK.

The topic of my speech today is 9/11 and how it has changed the way we Americans look at the Korean peninsula. So what has changed?

I think Secretary Powell, speaking of North Korea last May at the Asia Society, said it pretty well: "If the complexities of combating terrorism and other 21st century scourges make you pine for the simpler Cold War days, the black-and-white days, North Korea will snap you to your senses. North Korea's dangerously deluded policies drag its people further and further into a hell of deprivation and oppression."

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And he went on to say that North Korea's rulers have strangled its economic development and squandered what few resources the country has left on maintaining a massive offensive military capacity. They grow missiles and weapons of mass destruction – biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons -- instead of growing food for their starving and destitute people.

And here North Korea runs smack into our Post-9/11, much-lower-threshold of tolerance for security threats. President Bush said in his State of the Union Address that, "we will deny terrorists and their state sponsors the materials, technology, and expertise to make and deliver weapons of mass destruction... The United States will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons."

And these concerns about WMD and missiles have taken on an even more central role in our approach to North Korea as a result of 9/11 and especially in the light of the possibility that a terrorist organization could use such weapons against the United States or its allies.

We also have been saying for some time that we want the North to move to a less threatening conventional military posture toward the South. We can't see how that could be achieved by North Korean military armed with nuclear weapons.

We are well aware of the regional dimensions of the North Korean problem. You have the greatest stake, for skillful management of relations with North Korea will determine South Korea's continued prosperity and success. It will also determine our shared U.S.-ROK security posture, stability and peace on the Korean Peninsula, as well as peace and stability in the Northeast Asian region. I'll say it again: We want to resolve out differences with North Korea peacefully. And President Bush at Dora Station in February this year put it very plainly that we do not intend to attack North Korea.

I can say with confidence that Washington believes that problems on the Korean Peninsula can best be handled by Koreans themselves. That is why we have strongly supported President Kim Dae Jung's efforts to forge a positive dialogue with the North. This point is reinforced in that the ROK and the U.S. have shared goals with respect to the North, including the need to maintain peace and security in Korea and move the North toward resuming dialogue. We support Korean aspirations for peaceful unification of their nation. We continue to see inter-Korean dialogue as key to reducing tension, establishing lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula, and the best way to improve the lives of the North Korean people.

Time will tell us what Pyongyang's real intentions are. We would welcome a decision by the DPRK to move quickly into a new era of peaceful negotiation and cooperation but Pyongyang must decide to deal forthrightly with the issues of its weapons of mass destruction -- its nuclear program first and foremost, its missile proliferation, conventional military posture, and human rights.

I have focused mainly on the negative so far with respect to North Korea but in fact, since the West Sea incident of June 28, when the North Korean Navy sank a South Korean naval vessel in an unprovoked attack, we've seen some positive actions by the North Koreans. The scope and the speed of those actions are encouraging, but as I said before, it is difficult to evaluate them in light of what we now know about

the DPRK's erratic and threatening behavior on security issues and what we have long known about its very poor record on human rights.

Since June the North Koreans have sought actively to invigorate their dialogues with both South Korea and Japan, while pursuing dramatic internal economic reform. North Korea seems finally ready to link its western and eastern railways with the South and to provide an overland route to Mount Geumgang. Linking the Western Railway could make the proposed Kaesong Industrial Zone a genuine prospect. Kaesong could quite plausibly attract several billion dollars worth of South Korean investment in a just few years and produce tens of thousands of jobs for North Koreans.

And aside from the resumption of working-level and ministerial talks, the participation of North Korean athletes in the Busan Asian Games, another meeting of separated families, there is now a military hotline linking commanders on both sides of the DMZ, something the North Koreans had been unwilling to discuss for years. These are small but positive, potentially important steps.

Of course, we also witnessed Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's dramatic September visit to Pyongyang and Kim Jong-il's equally dramatic admission that North Korea had indeed kidnapped 12 Japanese citizens during the 1970s and 1980s and that most but not all of them were now dead.

The speed of internal changes has been rapid and unprecedented. Now, I guess we have to say that any change away from North Korea's closed, statist economy is a good thing, but it is far from clear that these particular reforms will succeed.

The sweeping reforms the North announced in July will affect the lives of every citizen of the DPRK. The DPRK suddenly decided to reform or to radically scale back its internal distribution system for goods and for food, and effectively substituted a market distribution mechanism.

At the enterprise level, businesses were told that they must cover their own costs and that state subsidies would be a thing of the past.

The big gamble is that the success of the reforms will depend on North Korea's success in attracting outside funds quickly. I'd say that is far from a foregone conclusion, given North Korea's unpredictable behavior and the revelations that it has secretly been working covertly on nuclear weapons, in particular.

North Korean economic reforms have unfolded extremely rapidly and they have an almost breathless quality about them. That does not mean that they will fail. But we have seen policies like this fail before in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

We don't know whether these economic measures reflect a real change of heart in Pyongyang. They may reflect the desperation of a regime that is running out of time to get its economy going, to produce goods which its people need to live, to attract capital investment and aid from the outside world, to give North Koreans incentives to work harder for a better life for themselves and their children.

We hope that North Korea will decide to sincerely engage with the world. We wish the best for the North Korean people. One of the lessons we have learned from 9/11

is that actions speak louder than words. So we will judge North Korea by what it does, rather than by what it says.

And as we judge, we will consult closely with our South Korean allies on seeking a peaceful yet purposeful path to resolve all these problems.

Thank you.

Questions & Answers

Q North Korea wants to have a dialogue and talk to the US. But the US insists that North Korea should give up nuclear development first. But North Koreans tells it the other way around, that we should talk first and then reduce weapons. If both sides take this sort of attitude, there will be no dialogue. What is your stance on this? Also, does North Korea have a genuine intent to hold a dialogue with the US and the EU?

A The US has, in effect, pursued a dialogue with North Korea since 1993 when we first sat down to the table in New York and Geneva. We were trying to work out the details following North Korea's announcement of its intention to withdraw from the non-proliferation treaty. You may recall in 1993 North Korea refused to allow IAEA inspections of certain aspects of its nuclear program. North Korea effectively told the world we are not going to clarify and we are not going to tell you if we have accumulated fissile material for our nuclear weapons program.

We embarked on a dialogue. I was the deputy to Amb. Bob Gallucci who conducted those dialogues. I spent many days, weeks and months in negotiations with North Korea in a variety of places. We came up with the Agreed Framework. It was a way of pursuing, together, based on dialogue and mutual consideration, an end to North Korea's nuclear program. It was a process that could have led toward improved political and economic relations between the US and North Korea across the board.

Now we see that North Korea has clearly and blatantly violated the Agreed Framework. It was the fundamental basis for our approaching North Korea through dialogue. As I said, we know about not only their previous activities in the nuclear area, but also about their covert nuclear program. We have very little basis for trust in North Korea. Very little basis for confidence that dialogue will lead to a solution.

We want a peaceful solution to this problem. We have been consulting with our allies: Korea, Japan and Europe. We have also consulted with China and Russia. We do hope that concerted diplomatic effort based on cooperation among friends and allies and interested parties can succeed in persuading North Korea they must drop this new program. They must come to terms with all of their obligations to the international community with regard to weapons of mass destruction. We hope on that basis, at some point, dialogue can resume. At this point, we think an over-riding consideration in dealing with that issue is a prerequisite for further progress, as far as the US is concerned.

As for your second question, yes, the North Koreans say they want dialogue. But they have broken the basis on which the US-DPRK dialogue has taken place. I think it is up to them now to take the necessary steps to make future dialogue appropriate and productive.

Q Why do we not hear any US discussion of regime change in the DPRK, just like we do regarding Iraq? Can Kim Jongil and his henchmen be offered a safe exile in Russia, China or some other place?

A Various administration spokesmen over the last several days have made a lot of statements about the differences in the Iraq situation and the North Korean situation. We have said repeatedly we want a peaceful solution of our North Korean issues. We have no intention to attack North Korea. We have not said that about Iraq. Our spokesmen have made very clear we do not have a cookie cutter approach to these nations we are concerned about.

One very important difference with regards to North Korea are the neighbors. In this part of the world we have a number of very close friends and allies who have a deep stake in the resolution of all North Korea issues. South Korea is first and foremost among them. We plan to consult very closely and re-shape a consensus with all of our partners before deciding how to proceed from here.

Q Do you think the Geneva Agreement is dead? What went wrong? What lessons were learned from the breakdown of the Geneva Agreement? If a new agreement is to replace it, what must it include?

A US Secretary of State Powell addressed the question of the Geneva Accords, or the Agreed Framework, rather extensively Sunday morning on various talk shows. He pointed out that the North Koreans indicated to us that they considered the Agreed Framework to be nullified. When you have an agreement involving two parties, and one side says that it is null and void, it is a bit difficult for the other party to differ from that.

The real question is where do we go from here. What kind of approach do we use in the future? One element of our future options has to begin with North Korea taking quick and visible steps to end this covert program of uranium enrichment, and to end its other activities in nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

I think it falls very much in the North Korean court. They can themselves create the conditions that will allow us to move ahead to a productive dialogue in the future.

Q Is there a future for KEDO as part of the Geneva Accord?

A We have not made any decisions yet since, as you know, the US is not the only country in KEDO. The EU, Japan and South Korea are also members of the executive board. There are also more broad members. Only KEDO can decide where to go from here.

Q The US government is saying that US policy towards North Korea is different from US policy towards Iraq. But it seems that the so-called "hard liners" are gaining strength in the US administration. Is the US government's policy stance toward North Korea going to change and become more like US policy toward Iraq?

A In the early period of the Bush Administration there were, indeed, some differences within the US government. Some of the people who came in to the Bush Administration had a record of opposing the Geneva Accords and opposing engagement with North Korea. This opposition of theirs dates back to the Clinton Administration, before they came to office. Others within the Bush Administration wanted to give the Agreed Framework a chance to work.

Our policy, as enunciated by the president, was that we would abide by the Agreed Framework as long as the North Koreans did. Now, we have a situation in which North Korea has admitted to the covert pursuit of a uranium enrichment program that can only be aimed at the production of nuclear weapons. They have said that the Agreed Framework is nullified. There is no longer any basic dispute in Washington over the facts. I think we all agree. North Korea has violated this accord. That means we have to consider new approaches to North Korea. Business as usual is no longer valid.

However, I don't hear any dissent in Washington from the president's view. We want to pursue the North Korean problem peacefully. We have no intention of taking military action against North Korea. There is no dissent from that point.

What I hear from all sides in Washington is deep concern and interest in proceeding prudently, carefully—given the seriousness of the problem—and in very close consultation with our partners in KEDO and with other interested countries, like China and Russia. We will mobilize the diplomatic resources that we have in concert with our partners, friends and allies. We will persuade North Korea that they are wrong if they think the development of nuclear weapons is the way to build a better life for their people or a better place for North Korea in the world community.

Q "Confessional Diplomacy" is a phrase coined by Prof. Yeongoh Yoon, the dean of Kookmin University's graduate school of political science. The North Koreans admitted to kidnapping Japanese. They admitted their nuclear weapons. So this seems to be very "confessional diplomacy". What is your view on the real intention and motivation behind this kind of diplomacy?

What does the US government mean when they say that the North Korean issue will be dealt with "peacefully"? What exactly does it mean, to deal with North Koreans in a peaceful way?

A North Korea has made some surprising admissions lately. I would note that with regard to the abductees, Kim Jongil acknowledged the problem. He admitted the kidnappings. He apologized and took steps to rectify the situation. Perhaps those steps have not been adequate, particularly given that so many of them are dead. There was disappointment in Japan.

But in the case of this uranium enrichment program, the admission was made not in a penitent way, as one might expect from a confessional. It was made in a much more belligerent way. There were no apologies. In fact, we heard a determination to proceed with the program. It's a very different kind of circumstances.

What are they trying to gain? Everything that North Korea needs: regime survivability, security, economic success, food. I think all of this has been driving North Korea's outreach to various countries in recent months. This must lie somewhere behind this admission of this uranium enrichment program.

If they think this kind of program will make the world more forthcoming in trying to help North Korea out of the difficult situation it's in, I think they are severely mistaken. That's why one of the aims of our diplomacy has to be to persuade them that that is true.

What do we mean by peaceful? First, as the president said, we are not planning to invade North Korea. We want to rely on diplomatic instruments. Hopefully, concerted diplomatic instruments will be developed in consultation with our allies and other interested parties. We hope to be able to persuade the North Koreans that a brighter future does lie out there, but first they have to take steps to end these dangerous weapons programs.

Q I would like to know more about the process of the North Koreans' admittance of nuclear weapons development. Did the North Koreans admit it because Secretary Kelly provided them with evidence, and therefore had no other option but to admit? Or, did they just come out and say that they have this program?

A Of course, we do not talk about intelligence matters. I will not get deeply into that. But at the outset, Mr Kelly confronted the North Koreans on the first day of the talks with our knowledge of their program. On the second day, Kang Seokju, first vice minister for foreign affairs, came back to him and without giving Mr Kelly a chance to speak again launched immediately into a prepared presentation in which they admitted they had this program in firm, but calm and measured tones.

Q In your speech, you briefly mentioned that this kind of revelation came out earlier than expected. What was the appropriate timing you expected?

Also, in your opinion, in this kind of matter, which country, the US or Korea, is in the right position to announce this kind of thing?

A Our purpose in not discussing this publicly immediately after the Kelly visit was, I think, obvious from the seriousness of the issue. We wished to deal with it carefully and prudently. We had hoped to have time for careful reflection in Washington, close and careful consultation with our allies around the world, particularly Korea and Japan, before having this known publicly and before engaging in a wider debate.

As so very often happens, it leaked. It leaked in Washington. We felt compelled to announce it. I would point out that immediately after his visit, Mr Kelly came to Seoul and briefed the Korean government very candidly. He went thereafter to Tokyo and did the same thing. We took steps to brief some of the main government players around the world.

I should add also that we had, as the Japanese have acknowledged, briefed the Japanese government before Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to North Korea. He was aware of the program, but not of the North Korean acknowledgement of it. South Korean government leaders were also well aware of it before the latest round of interaction.

We have had no interest in stopping the dialogue that is ongoing between South Korea and North Korea. Also, we fully supported the Koizumi visit, as we continue to support North-South progress. We did not go public because we really wanted time for reflection. Perhaps it is inevitable that it would come out.

As to who should make the announcements, our general principle is that South Korea should be in the driver's seat, in the lead, in dealing with North Korea. We welcome that. In this particular case, it is the result of a meeting between a US official and a DPRK official where it was actually announced. So in a case like that, perhaps it was appropriate that the first announcement came out of Washington.

Q Because of this admission of nuclear weapons development, the so-called "sunshine policy" is really losing grounds for justification. Some people say Kim Daejung's policy helped North Korea's nuclear program. What is the US government's thoughts on this matter? Do you think President Kim's policy really helped the North to develop a nuclear weapon?

A We have supported President Kim's "sunshine policy" from the outset. We think his policy of trying to reduce tensions on the peninsula, to build bridges to North Korea, and to build up a basis for reconciliation has been the right policy for South Korea. We support all efforts in working toward a more peaceful situation on the peninsula. I have no negative comments at all to make about the "sunshine policy".

Q What is the cost-effectiveness of the opening stages of negotiations with North Korea? If it is not successful, could we sanction North Korea?

A As I said, we have made no decisions either in Washington or in consultation with our allies as where we go from here. We have always to some degree separated our views of the North Korean regime from our concern for the welfare of the North Korean people. That is why we have provided very substantial amounts of food aid to North Korea on a humanitarian basis. These have not been linked to political objectives or the political situation.

We have ongoing programs related to KEDO. We make no decisions in Washington as to the degree to which they should continue. We have not come up with a common view with our partners in KEDO. I think I will not comment on that until a further time.

Q There seems to be a small anti-US sentiment, particularly among the younger generation. We are all concerned about it. Are you concerned about this? What can you do about this? How do you assess this anti-US feeling?

A We are, of course, concerned about anti-Americanism. We are concerned about comments like those I received from a Korean father not long ago. He said he had two children, both of whom were actually born in the US, but are now Korean citizens. One is in high school. The other is in college. This father told me that they both hate the US. What can I do, he asked. I was very tempted to say back to him that if you do not know what to do, I cannot help you very much.

We are concerned about sentiment like that, particularly on the part of young people. They will carry their sentiments with them into their adult lives. We are also particularly concerned about some of the recent violent manifestations of anti-US feeling. I worry when student activists leap over a wall and climb to the top of our building, trying to set fire to the flag. I worry that someone is going to get hurt, either the activists or the police.

I worry when something approaching a mob in effect kidnaps a US soldier for about three hours and takes him on campus and parades him in front of a rally. I am worried that someone is going to get hurt. I am worried when they throw Molotov cocktails onto our military bases. I am worried about all of this.

My answer to that father is that you, yourself, have to decide whether it is in Korea's interest to continue to have this close relationship with the US, to continue to have this military alliance with the US. If it is in Korea's interest, you have to persuade

your children that some degree of inconvenience is inevitable. Some degree of friction is inevitable. Perhaps this is just the price of security and prosperity.

I read a poll recently that really surprised me. This survey suggested that, to my surprise, North Korea was way at the bottom as a reason for Koreans to be anti-US. Trade was at the top.

I know all of us have spent a little time with trade negotiations, and as you know a lot of friction gets generated from that. But the fact is: we are Korea's largest market by far. We are still the largest investor by a considerable margin. Korea runs a trade surplus with the US of about US\$ 10 billion per year. Korea exported 660'000 cars to the US last year. Korea imported only 7'000 from the entire world.

It is baffling to me why Koreans feel somehow damaged and oppressed by the US in the trade field. You are doing very, very well, and will continue to do so.

I can understand, I believe, some of the frictions surrounding our military presence. I think most Koreans fundamentally believe in that presence and welcome it. But it is not always pleasant to see 37'000 foreign troops in your midst. I think we have to recognize that our alliance now exists in a very different framework from when it was created in the 1950s.

The world has changed. In 1953 China was an enemy. Russia was an enemy. Now China and Russia are friends and trading partners and cooperators in the world. In 1953 Korea had not even begun to work out its issues with Japan. That process has gone a long way. Now China is a very large economic factor and becoming a larger military power. The Korean Peninsula has changed. Beginning with the president's visit to Pyongyang in June, 2000, there has been a palpable sense of relaxation of tension on the peninsula.

Korea has changed. You have democracy. This is a free and very open democracy. You have a free press. The students can go out and demonstrate without worrying about being flooded with tear gas and having their heads beaten up by the police.

It is a very different atmosphere here. We have to recognize that. Part of the answer to me, as a diplomat, is, I think, we are in an era where we cannot manage this relationship, this alliance, just in quiet meetings between government officials, or even at quiet meetings among leaders.

We have to deal better with the public. We have to do our best to have our people behave as well as possible while here. They are not always going to understand Korean culture. You cannot have 37'000 young US soldiers coming here every year and expect them to immediately fully understand some of the concepts that are so central to Korean society. We are trying to do that. We have to pay more attention to public affairs. I am trying to spend more time on public affairs and get out more often.

We have to approach this relationship with a genuine sense of our common interest, and working back from that a common effort by all of us to make it work