

The South's Proposal For Massive Energy Aid, "A Creative Idea," U.S. Secretary of State Rice

On July 12, South Korea and the United States agreed to try to make progress in the upcoming Six-Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear programs. In their meeting, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Ban Ki-moon and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice worked on a substantive game-plan on nuclear negotiations with North Korea and to cement the Seoul-Washington alliance at a gathering organized just three days after Pyongyang ended its year-long boycott of the Six-Party Talks.

At the meeting, Ban and Rice underscored the strong alliance between the two countries and was a step toward resolving the North Korean nuclear standoff. They also talked about arranging summit talks between Roh and President George W. Bush during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Busan in November.

Secretary Rice threw her support behind South Korea's proposal for massive energy aid to North Korea if it would dismantle its nuclear weapons program, calling it "a creative idea" to tackle the North's needs without proliferation risks. She also called on North Korea to scrap its entire nuclear weapons program, encompassing plutonium and high-enrichment uranium (HEU).

In a joint news conference with Minister Ban on July 13, Rice said that the U.S. has been aware of North Korea's energy needs. But the question has been how the necessity will be met, particularly in the face of "significant proliferation concerns" about nuclear energy in North Korea. "That is what is so very useful about the South Korean proposal. It gives an opportunity for the North Koreans to address questions of their energy needs – something that had been anticipated in the June 2004 proposal that is still in fact on the table," Rice said.

"The key here is similar," Rice said. "It is to prepare to dismantle its nuclear programs. We are about to find that out. But let me just remind everybody that what is on the table is essentially what was on the table in the June of 2004. That is where the talks will begin." "The agreement of the North Koreans to come back to the talks is a very good step but only a first step," she said. "We look forward to a strategic decision by the North Koreans to abandon their nuclear weapons."

Rice reconfirmed that North Korea should give up all of its nuclear programs, including the HEU program. "Nuclear weapons program means nuclear weapons program," she said forcefully during the news conference. "That means plutonium and HEU. Reprocessing

and enrichment, the fuel cycle so to speak, is a part of a nuclear weapons program, particularly for the state that declared in discussions with the U.S. that it had an HEU program."

At their news conference, Ban and Rice both expressed optimism over ending the nuclear standoff. "We are also very optimistic that our joint efforts to improve the security situation on the Korean Peninsula could indeed bear fruit. Although of course, there are still much work to be done," Rice said.

If North Korea is not ready to abandon its nuclear programs, the talks will not likely make any meaningful progress as the U.S. is determined not to make any further concessions. White House spokesman Scott McClellan fielded a question from reporters on July 11, by saying that it is a "wrong impression" to think the U.S. would offer some new incentives to North Korea for scrapping its nuclear programs.

Before coming to Seoul, U.S. Secretary of State Rice said in Tokyo that the envisioned "talks cannot be successful" without North Korea's intention to give up the nuclear programs. "The two allies will further discuss how to coordinate our proposal on the provision of energy to North Korea and the U.S. measures to solve the nuclear issue during the threeway talks," said an South Korean official.

Rice arrived in Seoul on July 12 on the last leg of her current Asian tour, invigorated with a new purpose and a new mission: to coordinate steps with South Korea to re-energize the rusty Six-Party Talks now that the North has ended its year-long boycott.

Her trip to China, Thailand, Japan and South Korea was planned ahead of North Korea's pledge to return to the talks, and her revised aim consequently was to discuss how to approach the negotiations to end the North Korean nuclear standoff, according to government officials.

During her stay in Beijing, Rice indicated that the United States is willing to offer North Korea a security guarantee, energy aid and other humanitarian assistance. The Washington Post, citing U.S. officials accompanying Rice on her Asian trip, said the United States is willing to change the terms and conditions of its proposals to resolve the impasse over North Korea's nuclear programs if the government in Pyongyang constructively outlines its concerns when the Six-Party Talks resume. ★

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