

**DISCUSSIONS WITH AMBASSADOR RI GUN, DIRECTOR GENERAL
BUREAU OF AMERICAN AFFAIRS, DPRK MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (MOFA)
Pyongyang, February 26, 2009**

Place: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Conference Room, 1F, Pyongyang

U.S. participants: John W. Lewis, Robert Carlin, Siegfried Hecker, David Straub, Marjorie Kiewit, and Paul Carroll.

DPRK MOFA officials: Director General of the Bureau of American Affairs Ri Gun; Choe Kang Il, Section Chief; Gwon Jong Gun, Desk Officer; Sim Il Gwang, Researcher, BAA; Kim Song Jin, Interpreter; Kim Hyon Chol, Desk Officer.

Ambassador Ri Gun began the session with the comment that this is an interesting moment. You are the fourth American delegation (Selig Harrison in January, Ambassador Stephen Bosworth in February, and Susan Shirk later in February). I hope we can discuss more interesting things, since we had those discussions already.

He proceeded to read from a prepared statement [and what follows is how it was translated]. The army and the people are carrying out the task of the New Year editorial statement. They are carrying out the economic task. They are united single-hearted unity around Kim Jong Il to carry out this task.

As for the nuclear issue, there are some rumors that the DPRK is not willing to denuclearize. That is not true. Denuclearization is the invariable, consistent stand of the DPRK. There will be no change in this. It was a lifelong wish of Kim Il Sung to do so. We are willing to denuclearize per the Sept. 19, 2005 statement in a verifiable way. This will not be a unilateral action on North Korea's side, but the Sept. 19 Joint Statement calls for denuclearization of the entire Korean peninsula. We are now in the second phase.

The first phase was freezing [Ri Gun corrected the translator and said "shutting down"] the Yongbyon facilities. This phase started with the release of the BDA funds [in June 2007]. When we entered the second phase of disablement, we were obligated to make a declaration and disable the [Yongbyon] facilities. The U.S. agreed to provide economic and political compensation, such as removing us from the terrorist list and from the application of the Trading With the Enemy Act [TWEA]. The compensation was to be 700,000 tons of HFO and 300,000 tons of HFO equivalent.

There is currently a stumbling block because only the U.S., Russia, and China have delivered their share, while the others have not. With the new Obama administration taking office, we have to restart the process from this point. The key is for Japan to provide 200,000 tons and for South Korea to deliver the remainder of its full share. [As an aside, Ri said that the ROK had only delivered "60%" of its share.]

If we are to go into the third phase, we must go on expeditiously to the third phase [only] after completing the second phase. We already informed U.S., China and Russia in December that if the second phase were not completed by March, we would have to reconsider the pace of disablement. The days [for our decision] are nearing. The parties must immediately finish providing the promised HFO and equivalent. We need to complete compensation in parallel with disablement.

As for the verification issue, the September 19 [2005] Joint Statement and the North-South Declaration [on Denuclearization] both state that the Korean Peninsula must be denuclearized in a verifiable way. [Note: Carlin did not hear the reference to the North-South Declaration.] In the September 19 Joint Statement, the North and South committed to complete denuclearization in a verifiable way.) Some say that only the North must denuclearize. Secretary Clinton said denuclearization was to be the “achievement” of the DPRK side. Secretary Hill came in October [2008], and we made a verification agreement. At that time Secretary Rice appreciated it was done in a fair and balanced way. Even President Bush approved this. The agreement was for scientific verification procedures. The content of such procedures can be discussed later, at a favorable time. We’re not opposed or afraid of it. However, the U.S. then insisted on clarification and turned the agreement upside down.

In the October 3 agreement there is no such term as verification. It only states the need for a declaration. We gave the U.S. more than 18,000 pages of operating records [for the 5MWe reactor and the reprocessing center, but not the fuel fabrication facility]. For sincerity, we agreed to allow access to our scientists for interviews and access to the site. We did our part. We are already a nuclear weapon state, so there is no reason for us to oppose verification. However, South Korea should also be verified. The South has said there are no weapons in South Korea, but this must be verified. In 1992, [then President George H.W.] Bush said all nuclear weapons and missiles had been taken out of South Korea. But the day after that a State Department person said NCND [Neither Confirm Nor Deny] applied to U.S. nuclear weapons in South Korea. There are nuclear shells and nuclear mines in South Korea. Then there is the U.S. nuclear umbrella over South Korea. We need to verify the entire Korean Peninsula.

The U.S. side claims not to have introduced nuclear weapons in South Korea but how do we verify this. Nuclear aircraft carriers and fighter planes enter the South with nuclear missiles, and nuclear exercises are constantly conducted in South Korea, plus 36,000 U.S. troops there are equipped with nuclear-capable arms. Under the South Korea-U.S. defense treaty, the U.S. is committed to providing a nuclear umbrella. Everything must be verified.

The trends under the Obama Administration must be considered. President Obama began work by signing sanctions again on DPRK companies. Secretary Clinton [whom Ri Gun regularly referred to as “Secretary Hillary”] called North Korea a “tyranny” and mentioned the succession issue in North Korea. All of these remarks hurt the dignity and sovereignty of the DPRK. The world was startled by such remarks. It was beyond common sense that such a high level state diplomat could make such remarks. There are the Key Resolve and the Foal Eagle exercises [scheduled on March 9-20 in South Korea and around 26,000 U.S. and South Korean troops are expected to take part in the exercise]. For these exercises, the U.S. is planning to use more U.S. forces in the South for a longer period than last year.

When Bosworth came, we made the DPRK position very clear – we have not produced nuclear weapons as leverage but to safeguard our sovereignty and our right to survive. We still feel a nuclear threat from the U.S. and the U.S. hostile policy. We experienced 8 years of Clinton and 8 years of Bush. During those 16 years, the U.S. and the DPRK made so many agreements, commitments not to make nuclear threats and to remove [its] hostile intent. But nothing has

changed. So I say frankly, we don't believe a favorable atmosphere can be provided in the near future for us to discuss a timetable for abandoning nuclear weapons.

In a realistic and pragmatic way, the new U.S. administration should adapt to our nuclear weapons holding. We have to advance little by little to build trust. Only when North Korea and the U.S. fully normalize relations and we feel no threat will we no longer need nuclear weapons. Right now, we have to complete the October 3 agreement. You must give us LWRs in return for dismantlement of [our] nuclear facilities. But we believe it is very difficult for the U.S. to give us LWRs. If the U.S. is not ready to give us LWRs, then we will build LWRs on our own. We have no other choice but to do so. After the U.S. officially announced our removal from the terrorist list and the end of sanctions, the environment was created for both sides to expand economic cooperation. We would like to have deep study on this.

* * *

This ended Ri's reading of the formal statement.

Lewis expressed appreciation for the meeting, noting that he has known Ri Gun for twenty years. He said that our approach was always to try to be positive and optimistic.

Carlin began by saying that it is not right to equate 8 years of Clinton to 8 years of Bush administration. Over past 8 years, diplomacy has suffered a blow. We need to make diplomacy credible. This is a very fragile period. For now, the new people in the Obama administration are not yet in place. Watch for the administration's initial statements and responses. You should give a lot of thought to this. What positive lessons can we resurrect from previous period, especially the high point of 2000, for the future? What tools and approaches can we use so that we do not move in the wrong direction? The U.S. and the DPRK needed to take care that their initial statements and responses did not get us pointed in a direction we did not wish to go. We needed to consider both a long-term strategy and initial steps for the next four years.

Ri Gun responded very abruptly "I get your point." He commented on the "striking contrast" between Clinton and Bush. Clinton made a commitment to abandon weapons and hostile policy. "That was a great thing, we appreciated it," he said. "But under Bush everything went to zero. I take note of your remarks that we want to outline a formula." He continued, "Many people, including Secretary Hillary, say that if the DPRK abandons nuclear weapons, then relations can improve. Let's presume that may be right, but to clarify, you have to have a better understanding of what the "entire Peninsula" means. Nothing can be achieved if we start from the premise that North Korea must abandon its nuclear weapons first." For the DPRK to denuclearize first is the wrong concept.

David Straub also talked about the new Obama administration. It is still getting its people in place, but it will certainly look at the problem very differently from the Bush administration. As a candidate, Obama had stressed the primacy of diplomacy and, at political risk to himself, had explicitly noted his personal willingness to engage leaders of countries with which the U.S. does not have good relations. Even though Obama personally wants to have a positive approach toward the DPRK, policy in Washington toward the DPRK was, as Ri knew, difficult and controversial

under the best of circumstances. Thus, it is important that the DPRK send positive signals to the new U.S. administration now.

Ri Gun responded: "I got the point from Carlin and Straub. The Obama administration is very different from the previous administration. It is conducting a policy review. It is advisable for us to exercise restraint and send positive signals. We especially watched Secretary Hillary's trip. We gave instructions to inform the U.S. through the DPRK Mission in New York that through Secretary Hillary's trip, the outlines of the new U.S. administration's policy toward the DPRK have become very clear. She insisted that we must abandon our nuclear weapons first. This shows that nothing has changed from the Bush administration's position on disarming the DPRK unilaterally. Second, you will follow with normalization, peace treaty, and economic benefits. We told the administration not to use these terms. We also told the New York channel to convey the message that the U.S. should remember that in the past the Bush administration designated the DPRK as part of the axis of evil. This compelled the DPRK to test fire missiles and even test a nuclear weapon. The U.S. should remember this fact. For now, we'll act in accord with principles set by ourselves. Obama should learn the Six-Party principle: the denuclearization of the entire Korean peninsula in a verifiable way. This is the baseline. Based on this, the new [U.S.] administration should have a dialogue with us.

Lewis said that he had an invitation for Vice Minister Kim Kye Gwan from former Secretary William Perry. Ri Gun said that Vice Minister Kim is not feeling well and is in the hospital. John Lewis spoke about the role of Dr. William Perry in the presidential campaign and as an advisor to President Obama and noted his advocacy of a "world free of nuclear weapons." He relayed the invitation for Vice Minister Kim Kye Gwan to visit Stanford on May 10 to 15 to meet with Secretary Perry and the Stanford group. Lewis said that had cleared this with the New York channel (Minister Kim Myong Gil) and with the Korea Society and Donald Zagoria's National Committee. Lewis said that realizing the meeting depended, however, on avoiding negative developments, which could make the meeting harder or even impossible. Ri Gun asked if Stephen Bosworth would come to such a meeting. Ri also asked what Lewis meant when he said such a visit would depend on a favorable environment. Lewis said that negative developments could cause a delay of the meeting. Ri said he would convey the invitation to Kim Kye Gwan later in the day, when he would visit him in the hospital. Details could be discussed in the New York channel.

Siegfried Hecker asked why the trip to Yongbyon and the discussions with nuclear officials in Pyongyang were denied. Ri Gun said: "I proposed to our guys what you requested. As I mentioned earlier, what we have to do is complete the October 3 agreement. To do that, the Japanese and South Korean share should be delivered expeditiously. If not done by the end of February, we'll suspend disablement. This is not the right time for you to go to the site." Hecker said that before he gave an independent and objective assessment of the nuclear program.

Ri Gun said they know you well. There is no personal objection to your visit. Even if you go to Yongbyon and see the scientists, there is nothing new for you to see or hear. They are busy preparing to suspend disablement activities because of the delay [in delivering all] of the HFO. At this juncture, they don't want to show you their preparations. In the past you have made public your findings from Yongbyon. This time, tell the news media that you were not allowed to come because

they are preparing to suspend disablement. This is very unfortunate. The environment is different from the past when you visited.

Hecker said, "This is a long way to come to make a press statement. Is former Yongbyon director general, Ri Hong Sop available in Pyongyang? Ri replied that the director general is in Yongbyon helping to prepare for the suspension. Ri said that once disablement is suspended, there will be other, follow-up activities. Once disablement is suspended, we have to take other measures. (He did not specify those measures but seemed to be hinting at reprocessing.)

(Later that day, our MOFA guide, Sim Il Gwang, told Hecker that they had not told the other delegations of the impending suspension of disablement. They decided to wait for Hecker to deliver that message to the outside world. However, Ri Gun at dinner that evening claimed that they told the Bosworth and Shirk delegations about the impending deadline).

Hecker said that the suspension needs to be understood technically and understood politically by the Obama administration. There will be the question of what happens to the spent fuel rods and also the question will arise for how long it will take to reestablish the Yongbyon production capabilities. The spent fuel rods can't stay in the pool forever. Ri Gun smiled and said "we know." Hecker said for all these reasons it is important for him to visit or talk to the nuclear officials.

Ri said, you are a doctor, you are very curious. You can do these things in good times, but the current situation is very much strained. We are now on the verge of taking other measures. If you go to Yongbyon, the scientists will not be able to talk to you. They loathe this situation. If South Korea and Japan come through with the HFO, then things will be OK, but for now it is better for you not go to Yongbyon. Moreover, IAEA officials are on site and can monitor developments there.

Hecker told Ri Gun that he disagreed and said: "It is more important to have this kind of visit and the discussions in difficult times than in good times. It is unfortunate that I will not be able to help out this time." Ri concluded by saying that it is unfortunate and he did not hope that Hecker would be witness to the abrogation of the agreement. Hecker offered to go to Yongbyon just to talk to former director general Ri Hong Sop at the Guest House, but Ri Gun dismissed the idea with a smile.

Carlin said the situation feels like March 1993, very dangerous and complicated. He said that the DPRK would act as it would but it was important that the DPRK consider all the consequences. Ri Gun replied sarcastically that the "those words are familiar to me," that U.S. side always said that the DPRK had to live with "the consequences." But it was the other side that hadn't fulfilled its obligations. So who was responsible for the consequences?

Ri said, "All of you are close colleagues. We have to stop the disablement, and as Dr. Hecker said we will have to follow on and take other measures."

After Lewis asked what he should say to Dr. Perry, Ri referred back to the Lewis invitation for May and said, "We will study further how these meetings can be productive. But the gathering itself will be useful." We need to finish phase 2 by all meeting their obligations and enter phase 3, he said.