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Resumption of Six-Party Talks Must Precede Korean Peace Treaty

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration is willing to discuss a peace treaty to formally end the 1950–53 Korean conflict, but says North Korea first must return to multilateral talks to discuss its nuclear activities and take “affirmative steps” toward dismantling its nuclear program. When that happens, the agenda of the discussions can be expanded, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs P.J. Crowley told reporters.

Speaking at the State Department January 11, Crowley said the issue in front of North Korea is its agreement to resume the six-party process, which also includes South Korea, China, Japan, Russia and the United States, “and then we can begin to march down the list of issues that we have, beginning with the nuclear issue.”

“It’s our view [that] the ball is in North Korea’s court,” he said. “We’d like to see them say ‘yes.’ We’d like to see a six-party meeting take place.”

The assistant secretary referred to the September 2005 statement agreed to by all six countries.

“It talks about denuclearization, the establishment of a peace regime, normalization of relations among all of the parties concerned, and economic and energy cooperation,” he said.

If North Korea “comes back to the six-party process, if it makes affirmative steps toward denuclearization, then a wide range of other opportunities open up,” Crowley said.

Any talks over a prospective peace treaty to replace the 1953 armistice, Crowley said, would also need to involve South Korea and China. Crowley also rejected North Korea’s call for international sanctions to be lifted before it agrees to return to the talks.

“We’ve made clear going back several months we’re not going to pay North Korea for coming back to the six-party process,” he said.

A senior State Department official who asked not to be identified told reporters the North Korean call for a peace treaty and the end of economic sanctions is “very consistent” with what North Korean officials told U.S. Special Representative for North Korea Policy Stephen Bosworth during his visit to the country in December 2009.

The official said Bosworth had replied at the time that international sanctions would remain until North Korea returned to the six-party process and took “affirmative steps toward denuclearization.” The ambassador had also said the United States is “perfectly willing to address a peace treaty as part of that process, but other things have to happen first.”

“What North Korea is trying to do is use a back door to get bilateral negotiations started with the United States. It’s not going to work,” the official said. “We’re not going to have bilateral talks with North Korea before they come back to the six-party process.”

Reversing the order and discussing a peace treaty first “ends up rewarding them just for coming to the talks,” the official said.

Ambassador Robert King, the U.S. special envoy for North Korea human rights issues, is currently in South Korea and will also travel to Japan to coordinate policy on North Korea’s human rights situation.

Crowley described North Korea’s human rights record January 11 as “dreadful,” and said that the United States wants to see Pyongyang improve its performance on the issue.

King is “making it clear to North Korea that we place great attention on this human rights agenda,” Crowley said.

Human rights “is not an either/or situation” with regard to the efforts to seek the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the positive integration of North Korea into the East Asian region, he said.

“Obviously human rights is ... a significant part of any discussion that we’re going to have with North Korea in the future,” Crowley said.

U.S. Special Envoy Gration Expresses Optimism on Sudan

Implementation of peace agreement on track for elections

By Jim Fisher-Thompson
Staff Writer

Washington — Despite being “very concerned about rising violence in southern Sudan,” U.S. Special Envoy Scott Gration says he is optimistic about the future for the nation that saw Africa’s longest civil war end five years ago with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

Emphasizing that the U.S. goal in Sudan has always been

"to save lives," Gration told journalists at a January 11 Foreign Press Center briefing in Washington that "peace remains incomplete" in Sudan as long as violence and lawlessness still abound in the south and in the Darfur region and 2.7 million displaced people remain homeless.

Gration, who soon will make his 12th official visit to Sudan since President Obama named him special envoy 10 months ago, said, "Roughly 2,500 have been killed in a year [2009] in southern Sudan." He said all parties need to work together "to figure out the source of the guns, ammunition and equipment" and reduce them.

Nevertheless, he told journalists in South Africa and at the New York Foreign Press Center via an interactive video feed, "I am optimistic because I've seen progress" in Sudan, especially in the implementation of the CPA, which ended the 17-year-long civil war between north and south.

Since 2005, when the CPA was signed, the Khartoum government's National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement (SPLM), the main rebel movement in the south, "have made significant progress toward peace," Gration said.

Among the accomplishments he cited were: northern troops pulling out of the south; a cease-fire that has "largely held"; the Government of National Unity, including southerners, formed in Khartoum; a regional government for southern Sudan created in Juba; and the parties reaching agreement on the border of the disputed area of Abeyi." On the economic front, "Oil wealth has been shared and historical grazing rights honored," Gration added.

Gration touched on the "thawing of relations" between Chad and Sudan as an example of progress necessary for effective border monitoring needed to ensure stability and security in Darfur.

The envoy also mentioned former South African President Thabo Mbeki, with whom he said he had been in contact the past 6-8 months and who heads a "high-level panel" working to ensure "accountability and justice," both important components to the national elections set for April.

The European Union (EU) has also played a very important role in Sudan, Gration said, and "we encourage them to supply 300 election monitors." He said the United States was also working with the United Kingdom and Norway "for support to ensure the CPA is fully implemented."

Gains have been made on implementation of the CPA, with the April elections as well as the 2011 self-

determination referendum for south Sudan, the envoy said. "I believe the referendum will take place. I believe that right now I see political will, cooperation and continued commitment on both sides to have this take place."

Though the CPA was facilitated, in part, by the United States, Gration said it was important to keep in mind that peace must be resolved by the Sudanese people themselves. "We have not forced any agreement. We have not forced the parties to make any commitments. What we've tried to do is outline the issues, to facilitate and help in any way we can ... to create an environment" for all the parties in Sudan to formulate their own political solutions.

The week before his press briefing, Gration joined Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton at a State Department ceremony commemorating the fifth anniversary of the signing of the CPA.

Clinton drove home the point that the conflict in Darfur and the CPA "must be seen in tandem" and resolved before the CPA expires in July 2011, when a referendum will be held in the south on the question of autonomy.

"The parties of Sudan cannot afford to delay, and there can be no backtracking on agreements already reached. The risks are too serious. Renewed conflict between north and south would prolong human suffering and threaten stability and peace throughout the greater region," Clinton said.

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