

Remarks on North Korea and an Exchange With Reporters

June 16, 1994

The President. Good afternoon.

In recent weeks, we have been consulting with our allies and friends on the imposition of sanctions against North Korea because of its refusal to permit full inspections of its nuclear program. Today there are reports that the North Koreans, in discussions with President Carter, may have offered new steps to resolve the international community's concerns, saying that International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors and monitoring equipment would be left in place and that North Korea desires to replace its present nuclear program with a new light water reactor technology that is more resistant to nuclear proliferation.

If North Korea means by this, also, that it is willing to freeze its nuclear program while talks take place, this could be a promising development. As we review these reports today and in the days ahead, I want to take a moment to explain the extent of our interests and the steps we are taking to protect them.

Our Nation clearly has vital interests on the Korean Peninsula. Four decades after the conflict there that claimed hundreds of thousands of South Korean and American lives, South Korea continues to face a threat of a million troops, most of them massed near its border.

America's commitment to South Korea, our treaty ally, our trading partner, our fellow democracy, is unshakable. We have some 37,000 American troops in Korea to maintain that commitment, and their safety is of vital importance to us.

We also have an interest in preserving the stability of the Asian-Pacific region. And we have a compelling interest in preserving the integrity of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and to prevent the spread of global nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.

Therefore, in response to North Korea's nuclear activities, we have consistently pursued two goals: a nonnuclear Korean Peninsula and a strong international nonproliferation regime. We've made serious and extensive efforts to resolve the North Korean issue

through negotiations and have given North Korea many opportunities to return to compliance with its own nonproliferation commitments, made first 9 years ago when North Korea signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and in 1991, when North Korea agreed with South Korea to pursue a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula.

We've made clear that these negotiations could continue, but only if North Korea cooperated with the International Atomic Energy Agency and did not deepen its violation of international nuclear safeguards. If today's developments mean that North Korea is genuinely and verifiably prepared to freeze its nuclear program while talks go on—and we hope that is the case—then we would be willing to resume high-level talks. In the meantime, we will pursue our consultations on sanctions at the United Nations.

In recent weeks I've consulted—or days, in recent days I've consulted with President Kim of South Korea, Prime Minister Hata of Japan, President Yeltsin of Russia, and others. I will continue to consult closely with them on this matter, with other international leaders and, of course, with Members of Congress of both parties.

Through all appropriate means, I will keep working to ensure the security of South Korea, the safety of our troops, the stability of the Asian-Pacific, and the protection of our Nation, our friends, and our allies from the spread of nuclear weapons.

There is a great deal at stake. We are pursuing our interests with resolve and steadiness. We are hopeful that this development today will be positive, and we are awaiting further evidence.

North Korea

Q. Is it possible, or probable, that you could know with full confidence that North Korea has frozen its program? Is time a factor? Are you worried about the clock ticking if they really are bent on a nuclear program?

The President. Well, the answer to the second question is, yes, time is a factor. The answer to the first question is, yes, we believe we would be able to know, based on the representations that were apparently made today whether they have, in fact, frozen their program while talks continue.

Q. How long might that take, sir?

Q. Mr. President, are you concerned that they might be playing for time and trying to weaken your hand with the Chinese and perhaps the Russians and others who might be worried about sanctions?

The President. Well, we'll just have to see. These discussions occurred today; there will be more discussions tomorrow, tomorrow Korean time, which is there now. And we will just have to see. But it depends on what the Koreans actually meant by what they said today, and we will have to see.

So Ambassador Albright continued today pursuing our consultations on sanctions with the nonpermanent members of the Security Council of the United Nations, and we are proceeding and we're just going to watch developments.

Q. But there were some concerns about appearing weak in their eyes.

The President. No. It depends on what they mean. That's why we're being very clear today to say that we want to know what they meant by their representation and whether it represents a change of position. If it is a different position on which we can honorably resume negotiations, knowing, in fact, that there will be no development of the nuclear program while we are having discussions with them, then it is not an inappropriate delay. Then it is a genuine effort to resolve disputes which could lead to a safer world at a much lower cost. It simply depends on what their intentions and actions are.

Q. Mr. President, why have you put so much distance between the White House and President Carter's visit? Your aides have always stressed that, "No, this is private. No, the President has not talked to President Carter." Why don't you talk to him? I mean, why don't you try to find out what's really going on, and why would you not debrief him when he comes back?

The President. Oh, I intend to debrief him when he comes back. I absolutely do. And I talked to him before he went, personally.

Q. You did?

The President. Absolutely. So——

Q. Well, there seems to be some sense that he's not representing us, and——

The President. No. Well, I think it's been important in this whole development for the way it's unfolded, that he was invited there as a citizen, as a representative of the Carter Center, to have a dialog, not as a representative of the Government but as someone who could see Kim Il-song and could have a detailed conversation with him. And I think that the way this has unfolded proves that, at least that some—we have gotten some information there that might not have otherwise been the case. So I don't have any problem with it.

But I think it is important that the United States, and its interests, can only be stated by people who are ultimately charged with doing that. And I think President Carter fully agreed with the characterization of his role in his mission. That is the way he wanted it as well as the way we wanted it, and we think that that gives us some possibility that something will come out of this. Whether it will or not, we still don't know.

Q. Mr. President, two things, sir. Will this inevitably take the steam out of your effort to build support for possible sanctions, and second, the Senate today passed by a quite overwhelming vote a sense of the Senate resolution calling on you to bolster force, your forces in South Korea. Your reaction to both of those matters.

The President. First, we will do whatever is necessary to protect our own forces there and to fulfill our commitments to the South Koreans.

I met recently with all the commanders-in-chief, including General Luck, our commander in South Korea. I met today, again, with the Secretary of Defense and General Shalikashvili to discuss this and other issues. And we will take appropriate steps as we should, as we must. So there is nothing to be concerned about.

Now, on the other issue, what happens here depends upon whether this is, in fact, a new development. That is really what is at stake. Will it take the steam out of sanctions? Not if there is nothing new here. If there is a genuine prospect for not only leaving the IAEA monitors and equipment in place and moving away from the present nuclear technology, which is very susceptible to proliferation, to a light water technology, which is less susceptible, in an environment

in which—and I stress—in an environment in which there is a freeze on any nuclear activities, then the international community will be able to pursue its objectives of adherence by North Korea to the NPT, thwarting the proliferation of nuclear weapons, achieving the agreement North Korea made for a nonnuclear Korean Peninsula in an appropriate way.

It depends on the facts. It all depends on the facts, and that is what we will attempt to determine over the next several hours.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:45 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House.

Remarks at an Illinois Victory '94 Fundraising Dinner in Chicago, Illinois

June 16, 1994

Thank you. I thought when I got here, you'd be saying, "Bill, make it short, we're about to starve." [*Laughter*]

I want to thank you for waiting. I want to thank you for your enthusiasm, for your dedication, for your support. You know, I had to stay in Washington a little longer to do my job, the one you elected me to. And I was hoping you'd still be here when I got here tonight. And I was glad to see you. I want to thank Mayor Daley for his leadership of this city and for his strong support. I thank Chairman Wilhelm for that rousing introduction and his hard work. You know, he's just like a flower at night; when he comes to Chicago, he just blooms and starts talking. I may have to send four or five of you on the road with him everywhere, so you pump him up like that. [*Laughter*] I thank Senator Simon and Senator Moseley-Braun and Congresswoman Collins and Congressman Bobby Rush. They are in a very real sense my partners for change. And I want to say a little more about that in a moment. I want to thank my former colleague and good friend Governor Evan Bayh who has done a better job as chairman of the Democratic Governors than anybody in history. And I can say that because I used to have the job, and he's done a better job than anybody in history doing it. I want to say a special word of thanks,

too, to one of my Cabinet members who is here tonight, to the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Mr. Henry Cisneros. I want to thank him for the work he's done with the Mayor and Vince Lane and everybody else to try to bring safety and sanity to public housing in Chicago and throughout the United States. We're going out to Robert Taylor Homes tomorrow to stick up for the right of people to be safe in their homes and to raise their children in safety.

I am delighted to be here with this entire Democratic ticket and your State chair, Gary LaPaille, and especially with Dawn Clark Netsch. Boy, she's something, isn't she? [*Applause*] I think the Straight Shooter is going to replace the Comeback Kid as the great marquee of 1994. [*Laughter*]

I want to try to tell you a little bit about why I think this race for Governor here is important, partly in terms of what we're going through in Washington. You heard David talk a little bit about how the odds are stacked against change; they always have been, you know. Back in the Middle Ages, the great political philosopher Machiavelli said, there is nothing so difficult in all of human affairs than to change the established order of things, because the people who stand to lose know what they're going to lose, and the people who have a hope that things will be better are always afraid that it really won't work out that way. That has always been true.

It is worse in America today because people have been disappointed for so long, because they have been through difficulties, and because we have a political environment in which things are often communicated to us in the most negative possible way. Those of us who are the forces of change and who believe in the prospect of a better tomorrow, therefore, have a heavy responsibility to keep our hearts up, our heads up, and to keep on fighting for what we believe in.

When I first came to Illinois, running for President, I knew two things. One is, I knew that even if I won in the South on Super Tuesday, I had to win in Illinois the next week or I couldn't be nominated for President. The other thing I knew is what Dawn Clark Netsch said, which was even more important, was that I needed to have a reason