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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DAILY PRESS BRIEFING

FRIDAY, JUNE 22, 2007
(ON THE RECORD UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)

12:18 p.m. EST

MR. MCCORMACK: Hey, guys. Good afternoon. We don't have any -- I don't have any opening statements, so we can get right to your thoughtful, incisive questions. Who'd like to start?

QUESTION: Thanks for the compliment. (Laughter.)

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah. Now, the pressure's on -- see if they're thoughtful and incisive.

QUESTION: I don't know if I have anything thoughtful and incisive, but I hope you might be able to talk in a little more detail about the plans for the Secretary's meeting with Prime Minister Siniora.

MR. MCCORMACK: Oh, Prime Minister Siniora was going to be in Paris coincidentally. They're going to overlap. The Secretary's traveling to Paris -- going to be leaving Saturday night, traveling there primarily to -- for the Sudan conference that Prime -- that Foreign Minister Kouchner is holding. It's also a good opportunity to talk about the direction of U.S.-French bilateral relations with this new government. I think there are a lot of areas that we can work together -- in which we can work together. And the meeting with Prime Minister Siniora is an opportunity for the Secretary to touch base with the Prime Minister and talk about where Lebanon is headed in terms of political reform, economic reform, talk about the fight against violent extremism in Lebanon. I know that the Lebanese armed forces has talked about the fact that they are ending the offensive military operations right now in the Palestinian refugee camp against the al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist group, said that they had succeeded in pretty much shutting down this group. I expect that there is going to be continued fighting in that regard. I'm sure they'll talk about the tribunal, progress towards establishing a tribunal and the general situation in the region.

QUESTION: There's a -- seems to be a consensus among some of the Lebanese media that the Secretary and her French counterparts and Siniora may be trying to figure out who should be the next Lebanese Prime Minister -- President.

MR. MCCORMACK: The next Lebanese President or --

QUESTION: Yeah, well, I mean, his term is --

MR. MCCORMACK: Regardless of which office, that is not for us to choose it's not for the French Government to choose. That is for the Lebanese people and the Lebanese political system to decide upon who will lead Lebanon, certainly not for -- not for us.

QUESTION: No king making?

MR. MCCORMACK: No.

QUESTION: Sean.

MR. MCCORMACK: Samir.

QUESTION: The Syrians were -- there were reports the Syrians were closing borders with Lebanon.

MR. MCCORMACK: I hadn't seen those reports. I couldn't offer you any comment, although they have in the past used this as a way to influence the political situation in Lebanon. I can't tell you if in fact they have closed the borders this time around and if in fact that is the motivation. But usually there is some less than benign motivation on these kinds of actions by the Syrian Government.

Go over here.

QUESTION: Sean, (inaudible) with the new French President and Foreign Minister?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, first of all, it's her first opportunity to meet with President Sarkozy, as President. She had previously met him in the United States -- I don't know, maybe within the past year, let's say -- and he has a number of ideas of how France wants to play in the international and political arena, working on issues of common concern. They're very stepped up in taking a lead on a number of issues related to humanitarian or potential humanitarian crises around the world, including Sudan. We're quite pleased that Foreign Minister Kouchner and President Sarkozy are taking this initiative. We think it's important. Foreign Minister Kouchner is taking a distinct interest at the direction of President Sarkozy and the issue of Kosovo. And certainly, we welcome that strong European leadership on the issue and I'm sure they are going to talk about the whole range of issues before us, whether that is dealing with issues related to Africa or Iran or the transatlantic relationship.

Joel.

QUESTION: Sean, Monday, President Mubarak of Egypt has invited virtually the whole problems of both Gaza and West Bank; he's invited President Abbas, Prime Minister Olmert of Israel, King Abdallah of Jordan. Are you going to also be monitoring what is going to go on at that conference?

MR. MCCORMACK: Of course, yeah. Of course we're going to talk to the participants afterwards. I can't tell you that we're going to have anybody at the meeting. I'm not sure we should be at the meeting. It's -- we don't need to be at every meeting in the Middle East and that's a healthy thing. We encourage the parties in the region, the Palestinians, the Israelis, and larger groups to get together to work on problem-solving and they can also look forward a little bit to the wider strategic horizon and how to move the process forward.

QUESTION: Now have you also asked, would the Egyptians ask others such as the Saudis, the Emirates, and other moderate Arab states to come to that conference to --

MR. MCCORMACK: It's up to them, Joel.

QUESTION: It's up to --

MR. MCCORMACK: It's really -- it's really up to them. They're the hosts.

Nina.

QUESTION: Can we move on to North Korea?

MR. MCCORMACK: Sure.

QUESTION: Can you bear it?

MR. MCCORMACK: (Laughter.) Sure. As long as you don't ask about BDA.

QUESTION: No, no, no. On more technical matters.

MR. MCCORMACK: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: Hill says that the Yongbyon plant is going to be shut promptly. Do you think this is realistic? What's your timeframe? He's saying within weeks.

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, we think it can be done in weeks. I'll leave it to experts in graphite-moderated nuclear reactors to tell you exactly how long you can do that, what the time period for safely shutting down and sealing that kind of reactor is. But I think generally, for the layman, it's a matter of weeks.

And the IAEA, we expect, is going to be, we hope, going in there in the coming days. The North Koreans made it clear that they are making the preparations for their arrival there. They want to have the BDA issue completely signed, sealed, and delivered. Fingers crossed, it will be done in the not-too-distant future and I think they're working out some technical aspects of the transfer between the Russian Central Bank and the actual bank where the money is supposed to land.

And Chris is just sort of -- thumbnail readout was very positive, very positive discussions, got from the North Koreans that they intend to fulfill their February 13th agreements, that they are going to take some concrete steps in the coming days and weeks to demonstrate that they are going to shut down and seal and accede to verification and monitoring procedures. And then we all hope that we can move beyond that to the next phase which involves disablement of the reactor and then a declaration of their entire nuclear program; so all in all, positive visit. Chris's feedback was the intention was stated by the North Koreans to follow through on their obligations and we'll see. We'll see in the coming days and weeks.

QUESTION: What about this idea that we've heard that the U.S. might actually purchase some of their equipment.

MR. MCCORMACK: Again, I've looked into this. I can't discount that there are people brainstorming about various ways to address the HEU issue, but I can't -- you know, I can't confirm that that is some sort of formal offer that has been blessed by senior members of the policymaking apparatus.

QUESTION: I mean, I understand what you say that it hasn't been blessed. But just the idea -- I mean, isn't that kind of paying them off to -- even beyond some kind of agreement where they get benefits of it. I mean, isn't that kind of paying them for something they shouldn't have been doing all along.

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, first of all, let's back up. You know, I can't tell you what sort of brainstorming is going on within the U.S. Government on this issue. But I would

point out, and again I'm not in any way endorsing the idea or saying it's U.S. policy or saying it's a proposal. But the concept is one that has been in practice actually for more than a decade now, if you look back at the Nunn-Lugar program where you've had buy-backs of not only nuclear materials but the technologies and actual machines used to produce those nuclear materials through Central Asia and other places around the world, so there's precedent for such a program. In fact, it's an ongoing program but I can't tell you that it's our policy to try to relay either that program or that concept to the North Korean issue. We're not even at the stage yet where we have a declaration of all -- from North Korea of their entire nuclear program.

Now Chris has talked about the fact that we believe that they purchased some of these centrifuges and centrifuge technologies from the A.Q. Khan network, and so that should be part of any declaration and any sort of resolution to denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula.

QUESTION: How would you describe your level of confidence that these next steps will be met?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, we'll see. We're -- I think we as well as the other five members of -- well, four members of the six-party talks are hopeful that North Korea will follow through. They have -- one metric I guess I could point to is they have consistently throughout this BDA -- throughout the process of resolving the BDA issue, consistently said that they are going to meet their February 13th obligations. They have taken practical steps indicating that they intend to do so, working with the IAEA, laying the groundwork for the IAEA going in there. Now we actually have to see the IAEA inspectors and verification monitors go in there, have the shutdown and sealing of the reactor, and put in place the monitoring and verification. So the stated intention is there, repeated stated intention is there, some practical steps that they've taken to follow through on their stated intentions. Now we need to really get to the point where the rubber meets the road.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Chris Hill didn't end up meeting Kim Jong-il. I wonder if you think that was ever possibly in the cards. Did he try? Does it mean anything?

MR. MCCORMACK: It was -- we -- not we. Chris went there with the stated intention and the intention of meeting with Kim Gye Gwan to engage in consultations. He had a courtesy call with the Foreign Minister. You know, it's up to the North Koreans with whom he might otherwise meet, whether that's Kim Jong-il or other people within their decision-making apparatus. I think the end result was a good set of discussions and consultations, part of the six-party process, so I think Chris was satisfied that the objectives he had going into this trip were met by having the meetings that he had.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Did North Korea feature in the discussions this morning between the Secretary and the Chinese leader?

MR. MCCORMACK: They touched on North Korea. They talked about the state of play and our common hope that the process will move forward and that we can get to those next phases, that we can get eventually to the point of a ministerial meeting. They

also talked about a number of different issues -- U.S.-China bilateral relations, talked about the Senior Dialogue that Deputy Secretary Negroponte chaired for our side, touched on Taiwan, talked a little bit about I ran as well. So really the whole gamut of issues, but really at a strategic level.

QUESTION: How confident are you that they'll make a full disclosure of -- the North Koreans will make a full disclosure to the IAEA of all their nuclear activities?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, that comes in the next -- that comes in the next phase. And I think that would be a disclosure both to the IAEA as well as to the other five members of the six-party talks.

We'll see. We'll see. But when the members of the six-party talks say all their nuclear program, we mean all, all aspects of it. So we will see and hopefully we'll be able to answer that question in the affirmative in the coming months. So that -- but the final answer is going to have to wait until we actually have a declaration.

QUESTION: What about their uranium enrichment activities? Do you think they'll admit to that? They have in the past.

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, as you point out, they have in the past, back in 2002. I think it's -- we have talked to them quite openly about the fact that we know that there were these -- there were these purchases, indications that there are -- that there is a program. The CIA recently put out the fact that with medium-level confidence they believe the program may be ongoing, but they don't know how far it has progressed. But they stated with high confidence that there is a -- that there were these purchases of these machines, and you don't -- you know, you don't buy centrifuges to make ice cream cones, so -- you know, we would expect -- we would expect that the entire full range of their nuclear activities would be part of the declaration.

QUESTION: So you're saying according to the CIA report, you don't know yet what the extent of this program or --

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, there -- if you look back, I think there was some public testimony within the past six months from which they talked about their level of confidence about the -- about the various activities related to the enrich -- the uranium program that they have.

QUESTION: Sean, what's the prerequisites for the ministerial meeting to take place among the six parties?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, it's laid out in -- I don't have it in front of me right now.

QUESTION: Is it after disablement or --

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah, it's -- no, it's after the first phase has been -- first phase has been met. And that involves sealing, shutting down, and verification. The -- and I can't remember exactly the timeline. I think it's within either 30 days or 60 days of that first phase having been completed that there would be a ministerial meeting.

QUESTION: Chris Hill will go on to Tokyo, I believe it's Saturday -- Asian time.

MR. MCCORMACK: Right, mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Are you confident that Japan remains fully on board? Some of these steps are more forward-leaning than Tokyo has seemed to like in the past, given they have their reservations on the abductees and things like that.

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, we -- yeah, we believe that we're all on the same page and we are quite sensitive to the Japanese concerns about abductees. And this is an issue that we are going to continue to raise and I know the Japanese Government is going to continue to raise within the six-party talks.

We're going to emphasize all -- we have emphasized and will continue to emphasize it is important to resolve these issues between North Korea and Japan. Now there is a working group that has been set up between North Korea and Japan specifically to address this as well as any other issues they may have. I know the Japanese delegation, after that first meeting, was somewhat frustrated. They stated so in the press. So we want to, in every way we possibly can, support the Japanese Government in working with North Korea to resolve this issue. It's a painful issue for the Japanese people. It really strikes a nerve with the Japanese people and it's important to resolve it.

Yeah, in the back.

QUESTION: A report's coming out, it looks like the next six-party meeting is going to be sometime at the beginning in July, before the 10th of July. And by that point, according to what Chris heard from the North Koreans, the -- Yongbyon is not going to be shut down by that point. Is there any concern about having a six-party meeting before Yongbyon is completely shut down?

MR. MCCORMACK: You mean at the envoy level?

QUESTION: At the envoy level.

MR. MCCORMACK: You know, I haven't seen the news reports. I can't tell you that there's been an agreed-upon date. I didn't hear one upstairs when the Secretary was talking with Dai Bingguo. It's going to be up to the -- you know, all the members of the six-party talks to agree upon a date. I wouldn't rule out an envoys meeting prior to the first phase commitments having been met.

You can imagine a situation where that process is well underway to its completion and you have an envoys level meeting. In order to really kick-start discussions on that next phase, which is -- which can be a critical phase, disablement of the Yongbyon facilities, that's an important step. You're really getting into uncharted territory there. So we'll see. Chris, working with the Secretary, is going to have some flexibility as to when he thinks it's right to work with the other parties to schedule that meeting.

QUESTION: Originally, they had said that back in February before the whole BDA issue, they wanted the first phase complete before they met again for the six -- for the envoy level. Is this something that you're trying to speed up the process so that the ministerial may happen at the end of July?

MR. MCCORMACK: No, well, the -- whether or not that happens is going to depend on

events on the ground up in Yongbyon. So whether or not you have a envoys level meeting prior to the ministerial-level meeting, I don't think it will play that much into the timing. It -- you can imagine from a practical aspect, it would be useful in setting up a ministerial meeting, but that -- all of those timelines, whether or not you have a ministerial meeting is going to be tied to actual events on the ground, what happens.

Gollust.

QUESTION: Returning to the Secretary's Paris interlude, what hopes do you have coming out of that Darfur contact group meeting? And do you continue to have doubts about the sincerity of the Sudanese President's acceptance of the entire peacekeeping package?

MR. MCCORMACK: Right. Well, I think at this point, they say that they have accepted it. I think we're going to see -- need to see something a little bit more concrete before all doubts are erased that this is, in fact, the kind of -- it's going to be the kind of force that everybody envisions as needed to help bring -- to help stabilize the situation in Darfur, ease the humanitarian situation and improve the security situation. So I think on that one, we're going to reserve, Dave.

As for the upcoming meeting, it's an opportunity to -- for the international system to once again highlight the need for action in Darfur and perhaps you can see some concrete results out of the meeting. At this point, I can't tell you whether or not you will. But certainly in our accepting the invitation we would hope that we can (inaudible) move the process forward through this meeting.

Yes.

QUESTION: You mentioned earlier that the subject of Taiwan had come up in the Secretary --

MR. MCCORMACK: Right.

QUESTION: Could you tell us a little bit more about that?

MR. MCCORMACK: I'm not going to really offer you many details, but I think that from our standpoint the Secretary reiterated our position regarding Taiwan, the "one China" policy, the three communiqués and Taiwan Relations Act.

Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 12:38 p.m.)

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