

Hearing on North Korea
Opening Statement
January 21, 2004
Senator Richard G. Lugar

Today the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is meeting to receive testimony on the observations of Dr. Siegfried Hecker, Senior Fellow at Los Alamos National Laboratory, following his January 8th tour of the Yongbyon nuclear facility in North Korea. This facility has been closed to outsiders since December 2002. Yesterday, Dr. Hecker briefed this Committee on his observations in closed session. He has briefed members of some executive branch agencies already, and he is scheduled to brief additional administration officials at the State Department later today.

The crisis surrounding North Korea's nuclear program has been the subject of six-way talks between the United States, Russia, Japan, China, South Korea and North Korea. The Administration and our allies understand the importance of these talks for regional stability and global security. The United States has consulted closely with other countries in the region in an effort to make these talks productive. China has emerged as the pivotal country because of its links to the North Korean regime. The continued cooperation of China as an intermediary in the six-way talks is essential, and the Administration is working hard to solidify Chinese support for mutual objectives. In December, the Committee requested Administration testimony on the six-way talks and was assured that either Secretary Powell or Assistant Secretary James Kelly would oblige the request when Congress returned to session. Therefore, at an early date, our Committee intends to hold another hearing at which we will examine the progress of the six-way talks and the Administration's policies toward North Korea.

Even as we attempt to achieve our objectives through the six-way talks, the United States must continue to refine its analysis and options related to North Korea. As this analysis occurs, we should keep in mind several factors. First, the central, overriding interest of the North Korean regime is its own survival. Second, given their lack of friends and their dysfunctional economy, North Korean leaders increasingly perceive that their backs are to the wall. Third, recent events, including the ousters of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban, and even the voluntary opening of Libya's nuclear program, have pressurized the geopolitical environment for North Korea. Fourth, although there is still ambiguity surrounding the precise configuration of North Korea's nuclear program, the North Korean regime sees this program as the primary means through which it can protect and perpetuate itself. These realities combine to create a dangerous situation that requires focused attention by the United States and our allies.

North Korea's nuclear program is at odds with American national security. Our goal must be to stop and ultimately dismantle the North Korean nuclear weapons program – as well as its biological and chemical weapons programs -- while preventing the transfer of weapons or dangerous materials and technology to other groups or nations. To achieve this objective, we should not rule out any options, including – as a last resort – the use of force.

Last year, President Bush announced his willingness to pursue a non-aggression pact

with North Korea in the context of the elimination of North Korea's nuclear program. On January 9th, in an interview with a Japanese television station, Secretary Powell underscored the Administration's efforts to achieve a peaceful solution in North Korea. He stated, "President Bush has made it clear that he wants to find a political, diplomatic solution to this challenge, and I think we can. If we were interested in the military option, we wouldn't have gotten the six party talks organized. The United States does not seek war. We are not looking for enemies. We are seeking to solve problems – problems of the kind presented by North Korea's nuclear weapons programs."

As one of the authors of the Nunn-Lugar program, which has succeeded in safeguarding and destroying thousands of nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles in the former Soviet Union, I am more optimistic than some about disarmament initiatives focused on implacable enemies. Late last year, Congress passed the Nunn-Lugar Expansion Act, which broadens the Defense Department's authority to provide cooperative disarmament assistance outside the former Soviet Union. If we maintain alliance cohesion and American resolve and apply creative diplomacy and disarmament tools to the situation on the Korean Peninsula, we can achieve our goals.

In this context, we welcome Dr. Hecker's testimony. As a former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, Dr. Hecker possesses extraordinary expertise related to the construction and operation of nuclear programs and facilities. Two of the central issues related to North Korea's nuclear activity are whether 8,000 spent fuel rods stored in the Yongbyon facility have been reprocessed -- with plutonium extracted from them -- and whether North Korea has a highly-enriched uranium program.

Before we turn to these questions, however, I would like to underscore the work done by our Committee in relation to human rights and humanitarian issues in North Korea. This has been a particular interest of Senator Biden and myself, as well as other members of the Committee, including the East Asian subcommittee chairman, Senator Brownback. The visit of Dr. Hecker and the Stanford delegation to the Yongbyon site, understandably has gained international attention. Keith Luse and Frank Jannuzi, Professional Staff of the Committee, were in North Korea and accompanied Dr. Hecker and the Stanford delegation to the Yongbyon facility. However, Mr. Luse and Mr. Jannuzi traveled to North Korea with additional agenda items. They met with high North Korea officials to discuss the deplorable conditions of the North Korean prison system, the harsh treatment of North Korean refugees, food scarcity in North Korea, and the matter of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korean agents since the mid 1950's. Mr. Luse and Mr. Januzzi have briefed Senator Biden and me on these issues and they will be issuing a comprehensive report on their findings in the near future. In addition, they briefed Executive Branch officials in both Beijing and Washington.

At this time, I would like to highlight a couple of the most urgent human rights issues. North Korean refugees seeking food and shelter continue to cross the border into China. Unfortunately China has not yet allowed the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to establish assistance centers.

In September 2003, I wrote to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, asking for a written response outlining steps taken by the UNHCR to gain access to China and to assist North Koreans. Based upon the UNHCR response and after consultation with experts familiar with the refugee situation, I am hopeful that the Bush Administration is actively encouraging the Chinese to meet their international obligations so that North Koreans in need of protection in China may be assisted by the UNHCR.

A 2003 report by the U.S. Committee on Human Rights in North Korea has documented the existence of two distinct prison systems in North Korea. That country maintains a gulag of forced-labor camps and prisons where, according to the report: “scores of thousands of prisoners -- some political, some convicted felons – are worked, many to their deaths, in mining, logging, farming, and industrial enterprises...” The report documents a second penal system composed of detention camps near the border with China that are used to mete out punishment to North Koreans who are caught attempting to flee to China or who are forcibly returned to North Korea by the Chinese authorities.

This dual-system of repression must be eliminated. The United States should press the North Koreans and the Chinese continuously on this point. We also should insist that a survey of food needs within the two prison systems be conducted by the U.N. or a non-governmental organization familiar with North Korea.

The points that I have outlined related to North Korea represent a sizable agenda for the oversight activities of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. We are pleased to continue our inquiries today with the benefit of insights from Dr. Hecker.

###