



U.S. wants comprehensive nuclear deal with N. Korea

WASHINGTON, Jan. 17, Kyodo -

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said Friday that any new deal with North Korea on its nuclear program would be comprehensive, covering its uranium-enrichment and plutonium-extracting capabilities as well as chemical and conventional weapons.

"We found out now that North Korea has highly enriched uranium facility which they are pursuing. Any new arrangement would have to capture also the highly enriched uranium facility as well," Armitage told Japanese reporters.

"We desire also having discussions with North Koreans about conventional military threats, entire WMD (weapons of mass destruction) arsenal to include chemical weapons," he said.

The United States signed an agreement with North Korea in 1994 to cap Pyongyang's capability to extract weapons-grade plutonium from its nuclear reactors. The pact, however, virtually died with North Korea's admission in October of a secret program to enrich uranium for nuclear arms.

In an interview with the Wall Street Journal earlier this week, Secretary of State Colin Powell said if North Korea agrees to abandon its nuclear ambitions, the U.S. still would need "a new arrangement" that would better constrain Pyongyang's ability to produce nuclear weapons.

This is the first time a senior U.S. government official has mentioned specifics in an envisaged new arrangement with North Korea.

On Pyongyang's repeated demand for a nonaggression pact, Armitage ruled out the possibility of a formal treaty, but indicated it would be possible for the U.S. to provide a security guarantee to North Korea - if it dismantles its nuclear weapons programs - by exchanging letters or official statements.

"There is no possibility, today, that any treaty of nonaggression would pass the Congress," he said.

Armitage said the U.S. will assure North Korea, a country U.S. President George W. Bush branded as part of an "axis of evil" along with Iraq and Iran, that Washington has "no hostile intentions" against Pyongyang.

"We have recently spoken out that we have no hostile intentions. We are not going to invade North Korea. We believe that there is a way to document this, whether an exchange of letters or official statement, something like that," he said.

Armitage said the U.S. has no intention to topple North Korean leader Kim Jong Il and reiterated the U.S. wants to resolve the nuclear standoff peacefully through diplomacy, not war.

"If we respect their sovereignty, and their economic activity, then, there is a basis to move forward," he said.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula were sparked in October, when North Korea told a U.S. envoy that it has a uranium enrichment program and said it is no longer bound by the 1994 agreement.

The accord requires North Korea to freeze and dismantle its existing nuclear facilities in exchange for the construction of two proliferation-resistant modern nuclear reactors and shipments of fuel oil as a stopgap measure pending the construction of the first reactor.

We are grateful for the Chinese response to Jim Kelly.

To what extent are you confident in terms of getting tangible and substantial cooperation from Russia and China?

I think it's unlikely that China would be seen publicly pressuring North Korea, but China has enormous abilities. It is concessionary oil and food which very much keeps North Korea afloat. And so China has the ability to exert influence, but I'm sure that the exertion of her influence will not be visible to the naked eye.

On the question of the Russian Federation, equally, we will be seeing (Russian) Foreign Minister (Igor) Ivanov on Monday. I'm going to Moscow on Tuesday for discussions, among other things, on this issue.

So I think the end of the day we'll be able to fashion an international approach to include China and Russia, which is not threatening to North Korea, but also does not give up any of the equities that Japan, the United States, or for that matter China and Russia possess.

In response to Pyongyang's admission of the uranium enrichment program, the U.S. suspended fuel oil shipments to North Korea in December.

North Korea has intensified efforts to resume its suspended plutonium-based nuclear program by removing seals at its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon and expelling International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors from the country.

Last week North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and threatened to restart long-range missile testing.

If North Korea resumes missile tests, it would "not be a surprise," Armitage said.

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