

Thursday, March 10, 1:00 to 2:00 p.m.
Solomon P. Ortiz
Member of Congress
Before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission
Proliferation, China Defense Budget and Operational Trends; North Korean Issues

I thank the commission and its co-chairs, Larry Wortzel and Carolyn Bartholomew for allowing us to testify today regarding the important issues of war and peace in Asia, specifically along the Korean peninsula. I am honored to be here today beside my friend, Curt Weldon, who is a visionary when it comes to the issues of finding a resolution to the nuclear issues we face in North Korea (DPRK). His peace initiative, a 10 point plan, should be adopted by our State Department.

We have 36,000 soldiers in South Korea, and some of their dependents, and it only takes five or six minutes for a North Korean missile to strike the middle of Seoul, so this is a pivotal issue for all of us.

As we talk about the issues of a solution to the nuclear conditions of the Korean peninsula, we must bear in mind how DPRK views us and the world. There are 2 major points to consider: one, the leadership there is sensitive to the things we say and do ... they perceive us as antagonistic militarily, so they feel boxed in; and two, with our current ops tempo in Iraq, the DPRK views this moment in history as the optimum time to confront us militarily.

Chairman Weldon and I have been to the DPRK twice, both times were monumentally important visits. As a result of the last visit (in January 2005), the Korean Central News Agency issued a statement saying Pyongyang was “ready to resume the six-way talks...” That was the very first time the DPRK had indicated they were interested in peacefully resolving this crisis.

The DPRK is walking a very delicate line, as are all nations involved in a peaceful resolution of this nuclear impasse. They are watching all that we do and say in the United States. While it was helpful that President Bush, in his State of the Union, did not refer negatively to the DPRK or their leaders, his history of doing so remains a matter of great anger and sensitivity with the DPRK.

Certainly, Secretary of State Rice’s remarks at her confirmation hearing calling DPRK an “outpost of tyranny” were remarkably unhelpful. This week’s nomination of Undersecretary of State John R. Bolton as UN Ambassador will be similarly unhelpful, given his history of strong statements on North Korea's nuclear program that has irked the leaders in Pyongyang.

In our talks with DPRK, we repeatedly assured them that the U.S. would not initiate a military attack on the DPRK. Yet they see our public comments and actions in Iraq and elsewhere as evidence of our desire to invade their country. They feel boxed in.

We asked them to look, instead, at our example in a new relationship with Libya as evidence that the U.S. can reach accommodation with countries with which it has strong differences without regime change.

I cannot emphasize enough that it is important to discuss other regional issues such as energy as a way to help the DPRK understand we want to find a peaceful way to denuclearize that peninsula.

More importantly than anything else, we must continue to put a human face on America, with the ultimate goal of avoiding war. Our discussions with their representatives were extremely positive, with openness and candor displayed on both sides. We spoke for ten hours with Vice Minister Kim Gye Gwan and held a 90 minute substantive, unscripted, cordial meeting with the North Korean head of state, Kim Yong Nam, President of the Presidium, Supreme Peoples' Assembly. The meeting with the President was his first meeting with a U.S. congressional delegation.

And these discussions were a valuable opening for people in the DPRK to understand that Americans are not warmongers, but peaceful people who want our children and grandchildren to live in a peaceful world.

With regard to the six-party talks, Minister Kim said that the foundation is destroyed. Let me share what he said to illustrate the difficulty we face in persuading DPRK that our intentions are peaceful: **“There is no justification to be at the six-party talks. All the parties had agreed upon the principle ‘word for word,’ ‘action for action.’ However, since the June 2004 meeting finished, the U.S. delegation has said we should give up our nuclear program and the U.S. would think about what to do next. Technically the DPRK and the U.S. are at war. We cannot accept the demand to lay down our arms first. We believe that the only way that we can prevent war in this circumstance is to have a capable deterrence...All agreed for the 4th round last September. However, as soon as the third round was over the U.S. delegation turned down everything it had said and assumed a hostile policy, saying it intended to invade our country. We would like the Administration to make clear whether there is any intent to change its policy on the DPRK. We will follow closely the State of the Union address and watch closely the appointments of top officials of the second Bush term and judge the likely policy of Administration.”**

Those are precise, direct quotes from Minister Kim. It is important that we all understand the mindset of the DPRK officials as we navigate these delicate matters.

Thank you.