

Lugar calls for direct talks between U.S. and North Korean officials

Tuesday, February 4, 2003

Hearing opening statement on North Korea by Senate Foreign Relations

Committee Chairman Dick Lugar:

This is the first of a number of hearings pertaining to the Korean Peninsula. In future hearings we will review food assistance, human rights concerns, economic reforms, Peninsula reunification and other pertinent issues.

Today's hearing will review Weapons of Mass Destruction on the Korean Peninsula.

In recent weeks, following admission by North Korean officials of their uranium enrichment program, in violation of the Agreed Framework of 1994 and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the level of public exchange between North Korea and the United States has reached a new intensity.

Unfortunately, we have been at this juncture before. In 1994 North Korea was removing spent fuel which could be reprocessed for use in nuclear weapons. Negotiation of the Agreed Framework brought a halt to immediate prospects for war. In 1998, North Korea launched a ballistic missile over Japan. While the United States had become distracted by other international issues North Korea remained focused on its nuclear program. It appears that maintenance of the Agreed Framework became policy in itself; its fragility demonstrated by the 1998 missile launch by North Korea.

Last year I outlined my thoughts regarding the vulnerability of the United States to the use of weapons of mass destruction, whether from terrorist organizations or rogue nations. I stand by my premise that every nation which has weapons and materials of mass destruction, must account for what it has, spend its own money or obtain international technical and financial resources to safely secure

what it has, and pledge that no other nation, cell or cause will be allowed access or use. A satisfactory level of accountability, transparency and safety must be established in every nation with a weapons of mass destruction program. When nations resist accountability, or when they make their territory available to terrorists who are seeking weapons of mass destruction, our nation must be prepared to use force as well as all diplomatic and economic tools at our disposal.

This doctrine which I espouse also applies to North Korea. While the United States is and should be prepared to use force related to North Korea's weapons of mass destruction, we must guarantee to the American public and to Americans serving in Korea that all diplomatic options are being pursued.

The stakes are high. We must not discount the horrific consequences to American, Korean, and perhaps Japanese lives resulting from a misunderstanding or miscalculation on the part of either side.

I would like to recall partial text of a joint statement issued by Senator Sam Nunn and me in 1994 as part of a "Summary of Findings and Recommendations" regarding the crisis at that time.

"Our policymaking and coordination with our allies, the timing of our statements and actions, our responses to developments on the Korean Peninsula and our communications with our diplomatic and military leaders in the field must all be sharpened and strengthened in the days and weeks ahead. Korean developments must be the subject of clear, frequent focus by top Clinton Administration officials, including the President. The United States should designate a single senior official with access to the President, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense to help develop and coordinate U.S. policy and action on Korea. We must speak with one voice on this sensitive matter."

This recommendation still applies today. While Americans have been deeply concerned about war with Iraq many have also considered the Korean crisis a more serious situation. In fact, both are very serious. Both are dangerous. Both need our full attention.

It is apparent that North Korea has taken several provocative actions recently including steps which could lead to production of nuclear weapons in the next few months. I believe that United States officials should talk to North Korean officials about ending North Korean nuclear weapons programs with provisions of comprehensive international inspection to insure a successful cleanup procedure. North Korea may mention in these talks its desire for non-aggression guarantees, potential commercial relations with other countries, and urgent humanitarian food and fuel contributions through international agencies to assist the North Korean people. We should be prepared to talk to North Korea about all of this.

I ask the Administration to address, promptly, not only the importance of international, multi-party diplomacy with North Korea, but the importance of immediate United States leadership including direct talks between the United States and North Korea