

U.S. Sends Conflicting Signals on North Korea

- [Arms Control Today](#)

September 2002

By Paul Kerr

Secretary of State Colin Powell briefly met with his North Korean counterpart July 31 in the highest-level exchange between the two countries since the Bush administration took office, but the United States continued to call the North Korean regime “evil” and has not yet decided whether to send an envoy to Pyongyang as had been discussed.

Powell met briefly with Foreign Minister Paek Nam Sun during the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum meeting in Brunei. The meeting followed a U.S. decision July 2 to cancel a planned delegation to North Korea. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher cited Pyongyang’s failure to respond to a proposed July 10 meeting date, as well as a June 29 naval skirmish between North and South Korea, for canceling the visit.

U.S.-North Korea talks that began during the Clinton administration had focused on implementing the 1994 Agreed Framework and negotiating a new agreement to end North Korea’s missile program and exports. The Bush administration stated in June 2001 that it was willing to meet with Pyongyang but linked progress on nuclear weapons and missiles to a broader agenda, including conventional forces on the Korean Peninsula and Pyongyang’s human rights record.

The administration is now considering whether to send Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly to Pyongyang in the near future. “Our view now is that at an appropriate time a trip by Mr. Kelly is probably warranted,” Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said August 28.

Despite these signs that the Bush administration is interested in dialogue with North Korea, John Bolton, undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, gave a strongly worded speech in Seoul August 29 criticizing its government. North Korea is “an evil regime that is armed to the teeth, including with weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles,” Bolton said, adding that the country “has one of the most robust offensive bioweapons programs on Earth.”

In addition, the State Department announced August 23 that it had imposed sanctions the previous week on Changgwang Sinyong Corporation of North Korea and on the North Korean government itself for proliferating missile technology to Yemen. The sanctions prohibit the U.S. government and businesses from participating in North Korean government activities related to the development or production of missile equipment or technology, electronics, space systems, or military aircraft. However, because of existing legal restrictions on U.S. interaction with North Korea, the new sanctions are largely symbolic.

Apparently to indicate that the sanctions were not intended as a diplomatic signal, White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer said August 23 that the sanctions were a “pro forma requirement under the law for the State Department” and that Washington is willing to “talk with North Korea any time, any place.”

U.S. Sends Conflicting Signals on North Korea

Published on Arms Control Association (<https://www.armscontrol.org>)

Source URL: https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2002_09/nkorea_sept02