

Vision for Korea US Alliance

A Morning Conversation at
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

July 27, 2015

Good morning.

It's a privilege and an honor to be here at this venerable institution, Woodrow Wilson Center, and exchange ideas with Korean peninsula experts.

I thank President and CEO, Hon. Madame Jane Harman for this occasion

I heard about the establishment of the (Hyundai Motor-Korea Foundation) Center for Korean History and Public Policy in June of this year. I wish the very best for the new Center. And I look forward to insightful studies on Korea's modern history from the Center.

On a separate, but an important note, Mr. Don Oberdorfer, author of the Two Koreas (with Robert Carlin), an expert on Korean peninsula issues, passed away on July 23. I express my deepest condolences. He is no longer with us. But, his work will be remembered for long.

[Korean War and Ship of Miracles]

This year marks the 70th year since the end of the World War II. It is also the 70th year since the liberation and division of Korea. The division of the nation into South and North resulted in Korean war which brought on a tremendous sadness to the people of Korea.

At Woodrow Wilson Center's home page, I saw a very meaningful video clip. It was about the "greatest rescue operation ever by a single ship" which took place in 1950 amidst the Korean war.

The merchant marine ship SS Meredith Victory safely evacuated 14,000 Koreans from Hungnam in North Korea to Koje Island at the southern tip of Korea. Without the resolve and bravery of the Americans who placed utmost value on the lives of the refugees, the miracle of Meredith would not have been possible.

The miracle that arrived in Koje island on Dec. 25, 1950 was a great Christmas gift.

Not too long ago, in Korea, there was a blockbuster movie with the title "Ode to My Father". The movie gave a detailed account of what happened in Hungnam that day. The movie moved many young people who were born after the war. It was also a learning experience for them.

If I may add. My son is an actor. In the movie, He played the role of the interpreter Bonghak Hyun who persuades the captain of SS Meredith Victory, Captain Leonard LaRue, to rescue the refugees. The scene was quite impressive. But, I thought the scene could've been longer.

[Korea US Alliance: Democracy and Foundation for Economic Development]

Today is a very special day for Koreans. 62 years ago, on this date July 27, the armistice ending Korean war was entered into.

With the end of the war, Korea US alliance was formed. Korea was at the forefront, facing the communists. Nevertheless, based on strong security founded on Korea US alliance, Korea achieved economic development and democracy known as the miracle of the Han river.

There were about 140 nations which became independent after the World War II. Of them, Korea is the only country to become an advance nation. Along the way, Korea had to overcome many challenges and obstacles. Korea now serves as a role model for the preciousness of free-democracy and market economy. The values which US holds dear.

The relationship Korea and US shares is developing further into a global alliance. Beyond security, economy and culture, our relationship is expanding into areas of science, energy, environment and the space. Our alliance is becoming broader in its coverage and stronger at its foundation.

[North Korean Nuclear Issues: a Global Issue]

North Korea and South Korea share the same peninsula. However, we have walked a different path. Measured by purchase power, South Korea is the 12th biggest economy in the world (1,786 Billion Dollars, CIA basis). North Korea is 112th (40 Billion Dollars). A mere 1/40th of South Korea.

North Korea is a closed system alienated from the outside world. In recent years, there was a third generational power succession. Rule by brutality persists and pursuit of nuclear weapons development continues at the expense of its people. All this only for the survival of the current regime. It appears that the regime determined that alienation instead of opening and reformation would be better for the stability of the regime.

The succession was completed with the rise of Kim Jung Eun into the supreme power within 6 months after the death of his father Kim Jung Il. However the continuation of ruthless purge tells a different story. It appears his power base is not solid. Accordingly, there is a high possibility that Kim Jung Eun will seek military provocation as a means to address his domestic situation. We need to stay constantly mindful of that.

Korea and US must strengthen combined defense readiness so that Kim Jung Eun would not dare to even consider military provocation. The message must be clearly sent to

Kim Jung Eun that he will pay a heavy price for every military provocation.

The time is ripe for us to focus all our efforts on resolving the North Korean nuclear issues. US achieved resolution to Iranian nuclear issues and normalized relationship with Cuba. Now, we need to find creative solutions that go beyond strategic patience to resolve North Korean nuclear issues which is a perplexing burden for the global village.

Korea and US need to come together as leaders and find alternative ways to force North Korea to give up its parallel pursuit of nuclear program and economic development. We need to find ways to force North Korea to honestly tell us what they really need.

[Korean Peninsula Unification]

As the division on the peninsula is prolonged, there is a tendency for some people in Korea and in the international community to accept the situation as being natural. But, the division is not natural. Naturalization of the unnatural; that is the unification on the Korean peninsula.

The vision for unified Korea is a non-nuclear nation that contributes to global peace as an advanced democratic society where happiness and human rights are cherished. Unified Korea will pay out peace dividend to its people and neighboring countries; and, will be an engine for economic growth in Northeast Asia; and, will contribute towards global peace and stability.

In 1990, with the end of cold war, Germany achieved unification by taking the initiative for the same. This was in spite of the checks by the neighboring super power. The unification was possible with the strong support and facilitation of the U.S. The German experience gives us some insight into the future.

When we consider the rapid changes taking place in Northeast Asia, the unification on the Korean peninsula may happen sooner than many expect.

Further strengthen Korea-US alliance, draw out China's cooperation, and bring about understanding and support from Russia and Japan. That's Korea's unification diplomacy.

[Order in Northeast Asia]

With the rise of China, Northeast Asian order is rapidly changing. Based on 2nd largest economy in the world, China is strengthening its military capabilities. Japan opened a path to external military involvement by stepping up on its collective self-defense rights. Under the current situation, a small friction in the region can result in serious conflict. This foretells a threat to peace and stability in Northeast Asia and the world.

Rather than confrontation and contest, I believe it is essential for US and China, and

China and Japan to pursue cooperation and mutual assistance for peace and stability in the region. This bodes well not only for the national interest of Korea but also for that of all stakeholder nations. Korea intends to be the facilitator for peace and cooperation in the region.

Korea has superpowers as its neighbors. We have the ability and resolve to utilize our geopolitical setting as our strength.

We reinforced our strong alliance with the U.S. Based on this, we were able to form a strategic partnership with China, and friendly cooperating relationship with Russia and Japan. We wish to establish a new international order characterized by peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia. And for this, Korea US alliance will be the strong backbone and a linchpin.

I believe Korea US alliance is the most successful creation of its kind in history for both Korea and US. One survey of Koreans indicate that 83% of Koreans support Korea US alliance post-unification. I am certain, our alliance will continue long into the future.

Thank you for your time. I wish you the very best.

Moo Sung Kim,
Saenuri Party, Republic of Korea