

[Press Conference] Speech : Sen. John McCain (R-AZ)

I am Sen. John McCain of Arizona, and it is a pleasure to return to Seoul. I am joined by my friend and colleague, Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island. This is our final stop on a week-long trip through Northeast Asia that has also taken us to Japan, China, and Mongolia.

We have had excellent meetings today with President Park and top members of her national security team, with senior members of the National Assembly, and with North Korean activists. I would like to make a few brief points, and then we would be happy to take your questions.

First, it fills us with pride -- as I know it does the Korean people as well -- to see the remarkable progress of our alliance as we celebrate its 60th anniversary this year. The transformation of this country that has occurred in just one lifetime is nothing short of a miracle, and all Americans are proud of the historic role that we and our alliance have played in supporting Korea's astounding progress.

Second, because of our success as allies, it is not only Korea that is becoming a global actor -- our alliance is becoming a global alliance, focused on what we can do together to promote security, prosperity, and our shared democratic values, not only on the Korean peninsula but across Asia and the world. This is the highest form of success we can aspire to, and we're reaching it together.

Third, I want to be very clear that the U.S. commitment to the security and defense of the Republic of Korea, including through U.S. extended deterrence, remains the unshakable foundation of our alliance. That is a commitment on which Democrats and Republicans, the U.S. government and the U.S. Congress, all of us, stand firmly together. Nothing will ever change this.

Fourth, we continue to maintain there should be no rewards for empty rhetoric from North Korea. Until the North Korean regime shows meaningful steps toward denuclearization, there should be no relaxation of pressure and no resumption of six-party negotiations.

Finally, let me say a few words about history. As you know, the United States does not take a position on the ultimate sovereignty of competing territorial claims, but we do know a little bit about confronting the past and moving on.

The Vietnam War was a painful chapter in American history. It divided our

nation, and Americans and Vietnamese came to see each other as enemies. I served in that war, and I spent a fair amount of time as the guest of the Vietnamese in Hanoi. But one of my proudest achievements is the work I did in the Senate with our current Secretary of State, John Kerry, in facing and coming to terms with the legacy of the Vietnam War, especially the sensitive issue of accounting for American prisoners of war in Vietnam. Then, together with President Bill Clinton, we worked through the extremely difficult process of normalizing U.S.-Vietnam relations.

Confronting the more painful aspects of our past is never easy, but it is possible. It is vital. And it is liberating. It allows nations to build new ties of friendship with old adversaries, and move forward. This is a point that the United States has stressed to our Japanese allies.

We know how much Korea has suffered the horrors of war. And we know it feels like every day brings the sad news of the passing of another Korean veteran or victim of the Second World War, including Korean women who suffered the most unspeakable atrocities. We honor this dignified generation of Koreans, as we know you do.

What we also recognize is an inescapable reality of the 21st century in Asia: Trilateral cooperation between the United States and our two historic allies, Korea and Japan, as well as bilateral cooperation between them, is indispensable to the security, prosperity, and freedom of all of our peoples, and peoples everywhere. Indeed, all of our shared challenges are best addressed, and all of our shared opportunities are best realized, when Korea, Japan, and the United States are working together. And when we do not, it only creates opportunities for those who do not have our best interests at heart to make greater trouble for each of our countries.

We met with Prime Minister Abe in Tokyo, and in him I see a Japanese leader who wants to revitalize Japan's economy, expand Japan's ability to contribute to peace and security in this region, and improve relations with the Republic of Korea. I believe this is good for Japan, good for the United States, and ultimately, good for Korea as well.

For this reason, all of us must continue to look forward and move forward together, and the United States stands ready to do anything you ask of us to be helpful in this important endeavor.