

Deputy Secretary Antony Blinken
“New Frontiers for Northeast Asia”
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The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
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Transcript

Thank you all very much for the very warm welcome.

We’re grateful to count you and your colleagues here as close friends of the Embassy and of the United States. In just a few short years, the Asan Institute has become a model among its global peers for its research and scholarship. So it’s particularly good to be with you today.

Nearly eight months ago, the very first stop of the very first trip that I took in my capacity as Deputy Secretary of State brought me right here to Seoul. That trip left a great

impression on me, and I've been eager to return. And while I may be a week late for Chuseok, it is still wonderful to be here with a growing group of friends.

When I was moving from the White House where I worked for six and a half years, to the State Department at the very beginning of this year, I asked President Obama what he most wanted me to focus on, and his answer was immediate and simple: Asia.

And then when I got over to the State Department, I asked Secretary Kerry exactly the same question and he gave me the same answer, which is always a very good sign. And that answer was Asia.

It's a clear reflection of the importance that both President Obama and Secretary Kerry attach to the region. And maybe the best evidence of this fact is that over the course of just a few months, President Obama is receiving at the White House the leaders of Japan, China, and of course next week—South Korea.

The reason for this focus is very simple. Nowhere in the world are our economic and strategic opportunities clearer or more compelling than in the Asia-Pacific—home to three of our top ten trading partners and some of the most wired cities and innovative minds in the world.

Our alliance with South Korea is at the core of this rebalance. It was forged in the shared sacrifice of war more than 60 years ago. Today, our commitment to a secure,

stable, and prosperous Korean Peninsula continues to animate the alliance. We can take great pride in our work to strengthen its pillars.

We've strengthened our shared prosperity with a high-standard free trade agreement that will spur growth both in South Korea and the United States.

We've strengthened our shared security by modernizing key defense agreements.

And we've strengthened the close bonds between our people by expanding educational and exchange opportunities for scholars, for soldiers, for innovators.

Today, in fact, there are more Korean students studying in the U.S. per capita than students from any other country in the world. And that's something that we're very proud of.

Increasingly, though, our partnership is not just about what we're doing to preserve a secure, stable and peaceful Korean Peninsula, it's moving to a regional partnership, to a global partnership, —and even beyond into space. The great breadth of our shared interests has been the subject of my many meetings here in Seoul over the last two days and it will be the focus of the conversation between Presidents Park and Obama next week.

What I'd like to do this evening is speak to you briefly about the importance of our alliance and describe how cooperation between the United States and South Korea sets an example for the region and, indeed, for the world.

Yesterday, when I arrived in South Korea, I went to the DMZ. There, I was honored to share a meal with Korean and American soldiers who serve every day side-by-side. They are the living embodiment of our alliance.

They stand sentry against North Korea and its provocative, destabilizing, and repressive actions.

For decades, the DPRK has cut itself off from the global community—isolating its own citizens from the prosperity, the progress, and opportunity that the world has to offer—and that is plainly in sight on the other side of the DMZ.

Together with the international community, we have tried to show North Korea that a brighter future is possible—if North Korea chooses a different path. If it refrains from actions that threaten regional peace and security. If it

abandons destabilizing provocations. If it ceases its deplorable violations of human rights. And if it fulfills its denuclearization obligations.

Any attempt by North Korea to launch a so-called satellite using ballistic missile technology or to test a nuclear device would be reckless, irresponsible and a clear violation of existing UN Security Council Resolutions. The most recent of those resolutions states that further violations will result in significant measures by the international community.

Pyongyang must understand that that is exactly what will happen.

Our own unity and determination in the face of these provocations has played a vital and, indeed, stabilizing role.

This was especially important just two months ago, when

North Korean soldiers placed land mines in the DMZ that tragically maimed two ROK soldiers.

Our response was appropriately calm and resolute because of the trust and confidence that we built through our close coordination—and thanks to President Park’s strong leadership.

The United States is and will remain open to engaging with North Korea—and, together with our partners, eventually negotiating with it—provided Pyongyang demonstrates it is serious about denuclearization.

Now, I know that some people are skeptical about the willingness of the United States to engage. To them I would say, look no further than this summer, when we

concluded a deal with Iran that will prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons.

We succeeded because Iran first agreed to freeze its program and to allow international inspectors to come into the country. That created the time and space in which we were able to negotiate a comprehensive agreement.

Or to those skeptics, I would say, consider the fact that over the past year, in addition to the nuclear agreement with Iran, President Obama resumed diplomatic relations with Cuba and welcomed the leader of Vietnam's Communist Party into the Oval Office. In other words, we engaged and made important progress with three countries—Iran, Cuba, and Vietnam—with whom we have long and complicated histories.

The United States and South Korea are also working together to press the DPRK to close its prison camps, lift its repressive policies, and halt its assault on the dignity and freedom of its own citizens. We fully support the new UN Human Rights field office in Seoul and its mandate to document the DPRK's human rights violations. And we continue to urge the international community to stand up to this behavior, including through the UN General Assembly Third Committee session later this month.

We in the United States share President Park's vision for peaceful reunification—a unified peninsula free of nuclear weapons where all its people enjoy the same social, economic, and political freedoms that have propelled the Republic of Korea to such extraordinary heights.

President Park's visit to Washington next week will strengthen our resolve in meeting these challenges. It also will energize our efforts to pioneer together new frontiers.

Frontiers in technological innovation and cyberspace, where the Republic of Korea remains an unquestioned leader—in recognizing both the power and the risks of global connectivity.

Over the last two days, I've had the opportunity to meet with not just my counterparts in government, but with some of South Korea's most enterprising students, engineers, and entrepreneurs, including those at the FabLab, where young innovators meet to turn their ideas into practical reality. Their talent is extraordinary—and so is their desire to think big.

They don't want to just create for the sake of innovation; they want to create for the sake of humanity. They want to answer questions like how do we scale access to affordable clean energy, how do we harness the revolution in robotics. Our ability to solve these kinds of challenges and others will be determined by our success in connecting these brightest problem-solvers to one another and to our greatest problems.

The Republic of Korea and the United States are also pioneering new frontiers—quite literally—in space research and exploration. We are very pleased that South Korea is a part of the community of responsible and peaceful spacefaring nations, and we look forward to working together on aeronautics, deep space communications, and solar system exploration.

We're pioneering new frontiers in health security—sharing the Republic of Korea's expertise in medicine and health with those around the world who most need it. Think about it, this time last year, doctors from our nations were working side-by-side at great personal risk to fight the scourge of Ebola halfway around the world.

Building on this experience, President Park recently hosted 56 partner countries and international organizations as part of the Global Health Security Agenda—an effort to prevent future outbreaks from becoming epidemics. Korea’s leadership in this area—including by building the capacity of other countries to prevent, to detect, and to respond to the outbreak of disease—is making a big difference and it will literally save lives.

And we’re pioneering new frontiers in environment and clean energy, as the global community works towards a new climate change agreement this year in Paris. Already, Korea is playing an important role by hosting the Green Climate Fund and implementing the world’s second largest carbon emissions trading scheme. And we look forward to seeing a carbon-free Jeju Island by the year 2030.

So what all of this tells us is that our partnership is increasingly far-reaching. But all of these efforts would not be possible without the foundation of our alliance that allows us to seize new opportunities to the benefit of both of our countries.

The same is true for the wider region. Constructive relationships in northeast Asia—among China, South Korea, and Japan—advance the security and prosperity of each of us and serve the interests of all of us. Good relations among our neighbors complement our alliance system, and we welcome the decision by the three leaders to meet in a few weeks.

As these relationships strengthen and improve, we will continue to rely on our two close allies, the Republic of

Korea and Japan, to serve as examples for the region—to model their enduring commitment to democracy and free markets, peace and stability.

Our growing trilateral cooperation—among the United States, the Republic of Korea, and Japan—also offers new opportunities to enhance security across the region. Just a week ago at the United Nations General Assembly, I was able to join Secretary Kerry as he met with Foreign Minister Kishida and Foreign Minister Yun in New York to discuss common and coordinated approaches to regional and global issues.

Just as we value our security partnership with Korea, we value Japan’s efforts to take on more regional and international responsibilities—bolstered by the passage of

its new security legislation. For the first time in nearly two decades, we've updated the guidelines for our defense cooperation so that our forces will be better prepared to flexibly face a range of challenges, from search and rescue missions to peacekeeping operations to disaster response.

This will be good for the security and stability and peace and prosperity of the region and good for all the countries in the region including South Korea. This foundation of peace and stability in the Asia Pacific has not only strengthened our nations. It has also benefited China. As President Obama has made clear, we welcome China's peaceful rise—but it matters how it rises.

For seven decades, we have invested in a system of international institutions and principles designed to protect and support everyone—and it is profoundly in our shared interests to see that these standards are updated, not undermined.

We've sought to broaden and deepen our cooperation with China. We've encouraged China to contribute more—to take up its share of the regional and global burden commensurate with a rising economic and political power. And when our two nations disagree, we don't ignore the differences. We work forthrightly and directly to narrow—if not resolve—them.

Over the past year, this approach has led to real progress on important issues.

It paved the way for a landmark joint announcement on climate change and brought city, state, and provincial leaders from China and the United States together to surface local solutions to combat global warming.

It engaged China in the global response to Ebola.

It grounded our work together to craft a deal that prevents Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

It produced new confidence-building measures between our militaries and it sparked growing collaboration to meet development challenges in partner countries, from Afghanistan all the way to Sierra Leone.

In some key areas, we find ourselves at odds with China's actions—actions that generate friction with others in the region and prevent our relationship from reaching its full potential.

Our own values and interests—which we share with the Republic of Korea, Japan, and so many other countries—compel us to address these actions forthrightly, especially China's approach to universal human rights, to economic growth, to maritime security, and to cyberspace.

As you know, President Xi recently visited Washington. President Obama raised these and other serious concerns with him during his visit. And President Xi made important

pledges to refrain from economic cyber-theft, to investigate cybercrimes, and to hold expert-level dialogues.

We welcome these words and expect them to be followed by deeds. We look forward to working with China, the Republic of Korea, and others in the international community to develop much-needed norms for state behavior in cyberspace.

Presidents Obama and Xi also had extensive discussions on China's activities in the South and East China Seas.

President Obama reiterated the right of all countries to unimpeded commerce and the freedom of navigation and overflight. And he stated that the United States will continue to sail, to fly, and to operate anywhere that international law allows.

President Xi publically pledged to pursue China's claims through peaceful means; to uphold freedom of navigation in accordance with international law; to work with ASEAN countries to conclude rapidly a Code of Conduct and set clear, predictable, binding rules of the road.

He also said that China will not militarize outposts on features it claims in the Spratly Islands. We appreciate these commitments, and expect them to be backed by action that helps significantly lower tension and peacefully resolve any disputes.

The world that all of us face today requires collaborative solutions to increasingly complex challenges. That is why we've elevated the East Asia Summit as the premier forum

for addressing political and security issues throughout the region. Over the past year, the EAS has made its voice heard on numerous issues of global importance.

As the East Asia Summit celebrates its 10th anniversary this year, we look forward to working with ASEAN, South Korea, and others to strengthen it further still.

Over the long term, we know that the single best way to promote regional security and prosperity is to work together to forge the close partnerships that unlock the talent and unleash the creativity of our citizens and to create ever stronger incentives for cooperation instead of conflict.

In this endeavor, the alliance of the United States and South Korea will remain essential—bound not only by shared history and vision but also by our common belief in the fundamental principles that have enabled the success of both of our countries.

Principles like respect for human rights, adherence to democracy, access to free and fair markets, and the paramount importance of the rule of law and an international system based on clear rules and norms.

We must continue to lead with these common values—to model our ideals in our deeds and in our example—as we strengthen relations among our neighbors of the Asia-Pacific. As we work towards a peaceful and unified Korean

Peninsula free of nuclear weapons. And as we open new opportunities for all of our citizens.

This is our responsibility—and it is one that we're honored to carry across new frontiers with the firmest of allies and the closest of friends, the Republic of Korea.

Thank you so much.

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