

Keynote Address

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Thank you for your warm welcome. I had the pleasure of accompanying President Moon Jae-in when he came to address here in late June, and it is wonderful to be back in your midst. This is my first own visit to Washington D.C. as Foreign Minister, but today's event is already my second one with the CSIS, following the first in Seoul just weeks after taking office. And much has happened since then, and I am grateful to the CSIS and the Asan Institute for giving me this opportunity to share some thoughts on the abiding importance and strength of the ROK-US alliance, in particular vis-à-vis the heightened threat of North Korea's nuclear and missile programs.

My deep appreciation goes to Secretary Albright for being here with us today. You remain an inspiration for all of us.

I arrived here yesterday, after spending an eventful week in New York, the first part of it accompanying President Moon on his first engagement at the UN General Assembly, and the rest in bilaterals and group meetings with my counterparts from various corners of the world, including, of course, Secretary Tillerson and United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Indeed, the North Korean nuclear issue was the main focus of the high-level discussions in New York last week. By many accounts, North Korea's nuclear program seems to be at a tipping point. The yield of its sixth nuclear test on September 3rd was greater than all of the previous five tests combined. North Korea fired two ballistic missiles over Japan, as if to substantiate its threat of "enveloping fire" around the island of Guam. Indeed, the recent advances made in North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities have been much faster than anticipated, and Pyongyang seems fast approaching its stated goal of having nuclear-tipped ICBMs capable of targeting the continental U.S.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In tackling the North Korean nuclear issue, the vital importance of close coordination between the Republic of Korea and the United States cannot be overemphasized.

So at their second face-to-face meeting in New York last week, our two Presidents once again condemned North Korea's continued provocations in the strongest terms. They agreed that maximum pressure had to be placed on North Korea in response, and stressed the importance of faithful and thorough implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2375 and all previous resolutions. The same strong will was also expressed by members of the Security Council during the open debate on non-proliferation.

There was also overwhelming support for my government's approach to the challenge that is firm and stronger pressure against the provocations, while leaving the door open to dialogue should North Korea change course towards a peaceful and diplomatic solution. The call for diplomacy is also the clear wish of the public, both in Korea and the United States, as recent polls indicate.

Sanctions and pressure against North Korea are a diplomatic tool. They are not meant to collapse or bring down North Korea, but to bring it to the negotiation table for serious denuclearization talks. Furthermore, they are necessary but not enough. They must be accompanied by strong deterrent capabilities. Thus, Presidents Moon and Trump reaffirmed that maintaining overwhelming military superiority over North Korea was essential, and committed to strengthen our robust combined defense posture.

The meeting between the two Presidents served to underscore the clear focus of our alliance in achieving the goal of complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization of North Korea in a peaceful manner, and rallying the support of the international community. Toward that end, the close coordination between the ROK, US and Japan is essential, as is the constant engagement to win the full support of China and Russia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am sure you have already seen the North Korean leader's statement, threatening 'the strongest countermeasures ever' against the United States. This message, delivered in his own name for the first time was echoed by the North Korean Foreign Minister in his speech at the UN. He ramped up the rhetoric this morning to the press stating, "Since the U.S. declared a war on our country, we'll have every right to take counter-measures." Indeed, it is very likely that North Korea will conduct further provocations. Under these circumstances, it is imperative that we, Korea and the U.S., together manage the situation with astuteness and steadfastness in order to prevent the further escalation of tension or any kind of accidental military clashes in the region, which can quickly spiral out of control. There cannot be another outbreak of war in the region. There cannot be another war on the Korean peninsula. The consequences would be devastating not just for the Korean peninsula but for Northeast Asia and indeed the whole community. We cannot put at risk the safety and security of our citizens who have worked tirelessly for seven decades to build a model democracy and market economy from the total destruction of war.

At this very venue last June, President Moon envisioned a very different future for North Korea and the Korean Peninsula. He urged North Korea to choose wisely in deciding its destiny, rather than blaming others for its deepening isolation and economic hardship. In his speech to the General Assembly in the United Nations, President Moon once again stressed that the Korean government does not seek the collapse of North Korea, nor unification by absorption or artificial means. Rather, what we seek is permanent peace on the Korean peninsula and denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner. I echo President Moon's message, which fully resonates with Secretary Tillerson's "4 no's" policy, calling for a diplomatic solution as the first and foremost preferred approach. North Korea must take heed of our messages and change course. The first step would be for the North to stop its provocations.

The political and diplomatic efforts towards the denuclearization of North Korea and improvements in South-North Korean relations can and must be pursued in a mutually reinforcing manner. In this regard, we once again urge North Korea to respond to our proposals to revive South-North contacts, beginning with the two concrete proposals made on July 17, and start laying the building-blocks for inter-Korean reconciliation and lasting peace on the Korean

Peninsula. As President Moon remarked at the United Nations, peace is our calling and our historical duty.

Indeed, the North Korean nuclear issue is the most difficult challenge the Korea-US alliance is facing, but it has also made the alliance even stronger.

In fact, the alliance is as robust as ever, and the ties between our two countries have never been so rich and diverse, so wide and so deep. Over the years and decades, we have seen the alliance evolve into a uniquely vibrant, strategic and fulsome partnership of all-round mutual benefit and ever-expanding horizon for future growth. Allow me to elaborate.

First and foremost, the alliance has served as the anchor of peace and security on the Korean peninsula and in the Asia Pacific region. In the process, it has safeguarded the evolution of a vibrant democracy in South Korea and its emergence as an economic powerhouse of global stature, as well as a reliable military ally of the US in many corners of the world, with increasingly robust capabilities of its own. In the process, Korea's contribution to the alliance has continued to grow. Korea now is spending 2.4% of GDP for defense, bearing a significant cost of the stationing of U.S. Forces in Korea, and providing the lion's share for the relocation of Camp Humphreys, which is the largest overseas U.S. military base.

Second, the economic pillar of the alliance, the KORUS FTA, has enabled the U.S. to secure a strong foothold in the Northeast Asian market. The KORUS FTA, America's first FTA in the region, has provided American companies with greater access to the Korean market, while inviting Korean investments throughout many states in the US. The US has a deficit in goods traded but a surplus in services, and Korean investments in the US have grown many folds during the past five years since the FTA went into effect. Overall, the KORUS FTA has been a win-win deal and a driving force for greater growth and prosperity in both countries. It is, if I may use this word, the material key, far beyond economic ties, that locks in our peaceful and prosperous future together.

Thirdly, Korea has stood shoulder to shoulder with the U.S in tackling global issues. We are working together to meet new challenges in many frontiers and multilateral arenas, most of all at the United Nations. Our collaborations in global health security, human rights and gender equality, science and technology and space, in fighting the threat of ISIS terrorism and violent extremism are only a few of many good examples that I am proud to put forward.

And last but not least, Korea has become a stronghold of democracy and liberal values, of free market economy and trade in a region of vital interest to the United States. The alliance will continue to safeguard the future of a peaceful and prosperous Korean peninsula and the region, and serve our shared security and economic interests, not to mention the values that we together stand for.

Our alliance is now sixty-four years old (or young). It has achieved much, but has a great deal more to do. This is an alliance forged in blood, transformed through decades of painstaking efforts, and striving for lasting peace and prosperity on the Korean peninsula and beyond.

But like all enduring and thriving relationships, the alliance also has issues to work through and problems to solve with care, attention and investment in time and resources. In particular, we must muster the very best of our security and diplomatic endeavors in leading the global community to face down the North Korean nuclear threat, and safeguard our shared security and economic interests. This is also fundamental to preserving nuclear non-proliferation. Committed to denuclearization on the Korean peninsula, Korea is a leading voice in the WMD non-proliferation regimes, which are essential to the global security architecture.

However, this is a task not just for our governments. At the core, the alliance is grounded upon the shared values of democracy, rule-of-law and human rights that are the foundations of both of our countries and cherished by our two peoples. And there is nothing as abiding and strong as values that make for abiding and strong relationships. Thus, we need the active interest and support of our citizens, especially opinion leaders such as all of you here today and future opinion leaders from Asan Institute fellows here at CSIS.

Born of the candlelight rallies and the earnest aspirations of the people for greater transparency and accountability in our democracy, my government is committed to taking public diplomacy and outreach, both inside and outside the country, to a whole new level. Central to that effort is to assure the continued grounding of our alliance in the hearts and minds of our peoples. We will take the alliance from good to great together, and that calls for the active and thoughtful support of all of you here.

Thank you.