

U.S. Senators Press Conference

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Dr. Hahm: Ladies and gentleman welcome to the Asan Institute this afternoon. We have two very distinguished guests from the United States. Senators John McCain and Sheldon Whitehouse. They're here on a very brief visit. A whirlwind tour through the region, and we're very grateful that they chose Asan Institute as where they would come to meet the press, both Korean and foreign. Just to let you know, senators, we have among us of course the press core, who are both domestic and foreign, but we also have what we call—I'll explain it to you later— this Asan Academy Young Fellows. It's a group of young fellows that we train, and they all go to Washington, D.C. to work at thinktanks.

Senator McCain: That has a male connotation to it.

Dr. Hahm: What do we do about it? (laughter) So what we'd like to do is ask each of the senators to open with a brief statement, and then we'll go straight to the Q&A session. So why don't we start with Senator McCain?

Senator McCain: Thank you, and if some of the fellows have questions, we'd be glad to respond to them as well because we view them as the future leaders, so Senator Whitehouse and I would also like to interface with them. I'm Senator John McCain, and it's a pleasure to return here in Korea. I'm joined by my friend and colleague Senator Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island. By the way, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse's father and uncle were members of the diplomatic core in this part of the world so he's very familiar with the region. 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—and I know it does the Korean people as well—to see the remarkable progress of our alliance as we celebrate the 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 towards 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 a 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, I believe, all of us must continue to look forward and move forward together, and the United States' people and Congress stands ready to do anything you ask of us to be helpful in this important endeavor. Thank you very much.

Dr. Hahm: Thank you Senator McCain. Senator Whitehouse.

Senator Whitehouse: Thank you Dr. Hahm. It is a pleasure and a privilege for me to travel with my friend and colleague, Senator McCain, and to enjoy what is my first visit to Korea, and it gives both of us a chance to celebrate the very special alliance and unique history between our countries. The Republic of Korea is a remarkable example of economic and democratic growth, and it's exactly the sort of example that we need to spread throughout the world. So the friendship between our countries is a special one. It is clouded by a common threat. One of the most dangerous threats the world faces right now from a nuclear armed and

untested North Korean leadership. But working together, we can address that issue and we are both here to pledge to the very strong commitment of the United States government, which has now lasted for more than six decades to the continued friendship and success that both of our countries enjoy. So thank you very much for coming to hear from us, and thank you for your hospitality, Dr. Hahm.

Q&A Session

Dr. Hahm: Thank you. Now the floor is open.

Yun Hee-Hun (ASIA TODAY): I have a question for Senator McCain. And my question goes to Senator Whitehouse as well. Senator McCain, you just mentioned that the trilateral relationship including Korea, US and Japan is very important. However, as of now the Korea-Japan relations is in a very unstable situation. In particular, I would like to hear your thoughts on Japanese militarism. This is something we call a rightist movement in Korea. President Park Geun-hye refers to this as 'Asia's Paradox'. What are your interpretations and recommendations on this situation?

Senator Whitehouse: Well, we have some worries about a rightist movement here in America as well. I do think that the common interests of Japan and the Republic of Korea, both in a strong, joint defense against the threat posed by North Korea. And the continued success of the free market economies in the region provides a basis for overcoming those sorts of difficulties.

Senator McCain: The only thing that I would add to that is that the Republic of Korea and Japan are democracies. And in democracies, sometimes things are said in a free society that is offensive. That actually happens quite often in the United States of America. In North Korea, nobody says anything that is offensive. So I believe that we have a very strong and popular president here in the Republic of Korea. We have a very strong and popular prime minister in Japan, and both of them will be in power for a period of time. We do face a challenge from China in regard to the East China Sea and the South China Sea. That means that there are common interests and common values. Two democracies can work together. Totalitarian governments and democracies don't work together. So I believe that both leaders of the Republic of Korea and Japan have an opportunity with the support of their people to at least embark in dialogue for the hopes of resolving differences. That's the way democracies deal each with other.

Sara Kim (Korea Joongang Daily): Welcome to Korea Senators McCain and Whitehouse. My name is Sara Kim from the Korean Joongang Daily Newspaper here. I have a two-part question. My first one is that I am aware that you both met with North Korean activists and experts here and as well as spoke with President Park Geun Hye. If possible can you relay what sort of background you got from these people and what sort of message you conveyed to President Park. What kind of information you gathered from your meetings with the North Korean activists and also if you spoke regarding this to President Park Geun-hye. I'll ask the second question afterwards.

Whitehouse: From the activists, what struck me was the confidence they had that the present mode of governance in the North was not sustainable. That it was doomed to failure. The

access to North Korean people of cell phones, computers, CDs, DVDs—free information from outside will continue to raise the expectations of the people in North Korea and continue with discontent with the often miserable conditions they are forced to live in. It was a very touching thing for both of us—I think particularly Senator McCain—to hear about the difficulty of the conditions. One of the defectors had served as a prison guard and because of an unguarded comment by a member of his family, he had gone from being a prison guard to being a prisoner very suddenly. So he had seen abuse of the North Korean prisons in a very intimate way.

Senator McCain: The only thing that I would add is that when you talk personally with someone who has experienced the horrors of the gulag of North Korea, it has a greater impact and inspires fortunate people like us to work harder to see that someday they can be free.

Sara Kim: I just have a second question. As you mentioned Senator McCain, the trilateral relationship between United States and its allies Korea and Japan is very important. However, there is concern on the Korean side because the Japanese government's move toward trying to amend its post-war constitution. I have heard reports that you are in support of this amendment and just wanted to ask what you consider Korea's and other countries' concern regarding this.

Senator McCain: Well, first of all I don't believe that there's going to be—I may be wrong but, I don't believe there's going to be a formal amending of the constitution. I think there's going to be an interpretation that is in keeping with the international law. For example, right now there is a strict interpretation that the Japanese Constitution does not allow them to engage in search and rescue activities. That's not logical. I also believe that if there is any change in interpretation, it may be considered legit in the Diet. It will be considered the by Japanese people and it will be scrutinized by the world. So, it will be a process that is open and transparent. Japan is a sovereign nation. I think that you can make an argument that conditions in the world are very different than they were when the Constitution of Japan was first enacted.

Dr. Hahm: Once again if you could identify yourself before you ask the question. That would be great. Thanks. Gentleman in the back.

Andrew Salmon (The Washington Times): Thank you very much. Andrew Salmon of the Washington Times. Gentlemen, there's been an armistice in place for sixty years on the Korean Peninsula here. There's no peace treaty. In your opinions, under what circumstances should the United States grant this repeated demand by the North Koreans for a peace treaty in place the armistice that we now have in place?

Senator McCain: I think it depends on the conditions under which this treaty would be negotiated. I cannot imagine the North Korean government allowing a free and fair election with international observers. It seems to me that that would have to be the basis of a peace treaty. So, I see some practical impediments to that. But, ideally I think all of us would like to see a permanent in to the conflict, but we have had experience with these kinds of governments in the past and the fact that they would really reflect the will of the people would have to be something that I would be very skeptical about.

Senator Whitehouse: It would be very hard to engage in that way without seeing actual physical progress in denuclearization, or at least demilitarization of the nuclear capability of the North.

Senator McCain: Could I just mention one additional point. We stand, and the world stands, for human rights. There would have to be some accommodation for human rights in North Korea as well if you really wanted a lasting treaty.

Jung-Hoon Lee (Yonsei University): *Thank you. I'm Jung-Hoon Lee and I'm a faculty at Yonsei University and also the newly appointed ambassador for human rights here in Korea from this August.*

Senator McCain: Did you agree with my last comment?

Jung-Hoon Lee: *Absolutely, I've been a fan of yours. Your visit here coincides with the ending of the Commission of Inquiry Public Hearing that just ended, and we will come up with some sort of a press release here tomorrow. There are many layers to the human rights violation that goes on everyday in North Korea. One of which of course is the North Korean defector issue, and I'm sure you probably also aware of the fact that almost 80% of the North Korean defectors are women, and girls in their teens and very young—in other words, vulnerable and weak, and falls easy prey to brokers and all sorts of things. We know for a fact from one of the NGOs on North Korean human rights that many of them are basically living a life of household arrest of slavery. So we try to locate especially distressed ones and at least try to put them into safe houses and so on. Now, I just mentioned that because I wanted to know what your take or your efforts might be. I mean all it takes is a little bit of convincing of the Beijing government to open its arms a little bit. To particularly those people under distress, but I think you know that Chinese government in fact has intensified its security in sending and catching the North Korean defectors and sending them back to North Korea, knowing fully well what kind of predicament they would be facing. So, do you see the Chinese government ever trying at least setting up some kind of safe haven? Maybe even a refugee camp in the near future so that these people will at least have a chance of a taste of freedom even if it doesn't necessarily mean them coming to Korea or to the United States?*

Senator Whitehouse: One of the activists with whom we've met today was a woman who engaged in supporting women defectors. As you mentioned, she pointed out that 75% of the defectors are women. The reason that she indicated to me was that because the men have to regularly report for work, it's harder to make the escape, initially. So, they have more freedom to seek freedom, but it does raise a lot of issues about the protection of those women once they do leave. I don't have any information specifically on the Chinese reaction to that. All I can tell you is that we've heard from a wide variety of sources here during our visit that the recent misbehavior by the North Korean government has prompted what people believe to be a lasting change in the relationship between China and North Korea, that the level of sponsorship of North Korean activities is reduced in a way that is likely to continue. And I think that's a good sign the more that China can back away from having the North Korean government be in a declining state, the better off everybody will be. But, I can't answer more specifically about the Chinese treatment of the defector women.

Senator McCain: The only point that I would add is that more and more around the world, human trafficking is becoming an issue of greater visibility and greater concern. There is a broader core that the issue of human trafficking is an international one and the best way to try

to stop a lot of it is first through exposure and then legal efforts to punish those who are guilty. I believe that the Chinese government should be embarrassed that when a woman or man is able to escape the gulag and then apprehended and sent back to at least what is certain if not death. Then we should be highlighting that aspect of Chinese policy.

Jia Kim (TV Chosun): *I would like to ask you a question about Japan and the interstate relations in East Asia. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is taking bold steps this year and many high level Japanese officials visited the Yaskuni shrine. And he also sent a ritual offering to the shrine at his own expense. And South Korea also had long-term strained relationship over the dispute on Dokdo Island along with other historic issues, such as the issue of comfort women. Do you agree with the idea that Japan is bringing tension to the East Asia region, and what will be the U.S. status about this?*

Senator McCain: None of us excuse what happened in the past, particularly on the issue of “comfort women.” [It was] outrageous and atrocious. And whatever needs to be done to help ease the pain of that memory, obviously, we support. But as I said in my remarks, and I will continue to say, that sometimes we have to resolve these issues and move forward, and hopefully these issues can be resolved in a way that are agreeable to the people who have been so grievously offended. But just to say because of what happened, as terrible and tragic as it is, is a reason for never making any progress in relations between countries, I don’t think is the right approach. We are in the 21st century. We are facing a young leader in North Korea who has been engaging in reckless behavior, that has access to and capabilities of nuclear weapons. We see a newly assertive China, asserting things and certain rights in the South China Sea and East China Sea that, don’t in my view, bear historic scrutiny. So we have to sit down, as I’ve said before, as democratic freely elected governments and try to resolve these differences. With all due respect to how grievous and terrible they were, and no excuse, but sometimes we have to move forward and help our people enjoy the benefits of good relations between our countries.

Senator Whitehouse: It perhaps goes without saying, but the man sitting next to me on this stage was tortured savagely by the North Vietnamese and saw his colleagues and friends murdered by them, and he has been able to make his peace with that, and not only make his peace with that personally, but participate in an important leadership way in redeveloping the bonds between those former deadly enemies. And so I think he presents to us all a very good personal example of the way in which one can and often should move beyond even very real grievances.

Jeyup S. Kwaak (The Wall Street Journal): *You already mentioned the Korea-Japan alliance several times in your statement. Could you just clarify once again, what is the role of Korea-Japan alliance to the U.S.?*

Senator McCain: Korea and Japan are countries which we share our values, we share democracy, we share economic interests, obviously, that are huge. We all know that the world’s economy is shifting from the European part of the world to the Asia-Pacific, and the emerging strong economies are here. There are cultural ties. There is shared sacrifice, certainly in the case of the U.S. and Korea because of the Korean War and the thousands of Americans who gave their lives and were wounded. And so, here are three countries, in my view, that are three democracies, and we are certainly flawed from time to time – and look at the U.S. Congress today if you want an example of that: we have a 12% approval rating, we

members of Congress; we are now down to our supporters are paid staffers and blood relatives. And so there is so much that we have in common, and there is no doubt that there is a rising superpower in the region. And that superpower, we want to do everything possible to make sure that that entry into the world as a super power is a peaceful one. But it also helps motivate China to have this peaceful entry by knowing that they have three democracies such as ours that will stand up for human rights and the things that we value and believe in.

***Sam Kim (Bloomberg News):** I would like to move the topic a little toward the Syrian issue. Senator McCain, you have called for a limited military response on Syria. And the UN investigation has probably been done looking in to the site of the chemical weapons attack by now. How optimistic or skeptic are you of this investigation that is underway right now. Do you think that will reveal much that will result in any sort dialogue between Syria and the opposition forces? What are your prospects of things that will come?*

Senator McCain: First of all, I am totally convinced that, again, not for the first time, remember, not for the first time, Bashar Assad has used chemical weapons. Anyone who saw the video on television, there are bodies of women and children stacked up without a sign of violence is certainly, we don't need UN corroboration, but it'd be nice to have it. But it's hard for me to believe that Bashar Assad is going to allow the UN to investigate something that he's done that will be harmful to him. So I do not believe that a thorough and complete investigation will be allowed by the Syrian government. And again, I'd like to reemphasize that the President of the U.S. over a year ago has said that if Bashar Assad uses chemical weapons, he crosses a red line. We know for sure that he's used them at least once. Now here's the second time. Horrific. Horrific. And if the U.S. stands by and doesn't take very serious action – not just launching some cruise missile – then again our credibility in the world is diminished even more, if there's any left. Could I just remind you – 100,000 people dead. The conflict is becoming regional: we're seeing the bombs going off in Lebanon, we're seeing the King of Jordan saying that he doesn't believe that he can stay in power with this huge influx of refugees, we're seeing Iraq unravel and al-Qaeda reconstituted in the Iraq-Syria border. While 4,000 Hezbollah are fighting on the ground, while armed shipments are coming in from Iran and from Russia, and we give little or no help to those who are struggling against this butcher.

Senator McCain: Could I finally say – what should the U.S. do? We should establish a safe zone that we can protect, so that the Syrian National Council and Syrian National Army can go in and operate and funnel the weapons to the right people. We should be using standoff weaponry, without a single American boot on the ground, take out the airfields that he's operating out of, that Bashar Assad is operating out of, take out the fuel facilities and the maintenance facilities, and take away their air capability, and provide the right kind of weapons to those who are struggling. And we know who those people are – they are headed by General Idris – and we can get the weapons to the right people. And that is not a difficult task, even though many in the administration portray it as something incredibly complicated and incredibly expensive. The Israelis, four times using standoff weapons, have taken out weapons that were supplies that were destined for Hezbollah. They did it with impunity. If the Israelis can do that, the U.S. can do that as well. And you know how passionate I am. We are writing a shameful chapter in U.S. history.

***James Kim (The Asan Institute):** Thank you Senator McCain and Senator Whitehouse for those comments and reassuring us about U.S. commitment on the alliance. But I wanted to*

push you a little bit on this and probe this issue a bit further. Ever since the passage of the Budget Control Act, there has been some concerns about the U.S. defense spending in the years ahead. Both of you probably weigh in on this quite well because, Senator Whitehouse, you're on the budget committee and Senator McCain, you're in on this issue as well. The latest study by the DoD suggests 1 trillion dollar cut over a ten year period. What this means in terms of active military strength, we're talking about going from, and in just the army alone, 490,000 to somewhere between 380,000 to 420,000, retirement of all B-1 bomber programs, among others. What does this mean for U.S. strategic priorities in the region as we move ahead, especially in those instances where you have these kinds of conflicts emerging in the Middle East, like in Syria?

Senator McCain: The problem with sequestration – and I'm probably insulting your intelligence to mention this – is not that we are having cuts, because we are going to have cuts in defense spending, it's the meat-ax approach that's dictated by sequestration, where we throw the baby out with the bath water. And some of us are working together as hard as we can to try to understand, make our colleagues understand, that we are not against some reductions in defense spending, but it has to be done in a measured, thoughtful way, in keeping with our strategic priorities. And I'm sorry to say that your opening part of the question is correct: if it continues this way, our military leaders have testified before our committees, that it will be difficult to sustain our responsibilities around the globe. Now, the Korean commitment and Asian commitment is of the highest priority, but sooner or later, sequestration is bound to affect all of our capabilities everywhere.

Senator Whitehouse: I would echo what John said. There is going to be some defense rebalancing if we reduce our war posture in the Middle East. There is going to be a continued move towards more self-sufficiency by the Republic of Korea as its economy grows and as this country becomes a world economic power. But all of that is something that can be managed very readily within the existing expectations because that happens on a deliberate and thoughtful basis. We don't always get everything right in Congress. The sequester was designed to be stupid and harmful. We got that right. Unfortunately, from a defense perspective, in the coming year, the secondary effect of the sequester will fall even more heavily on the defense side, so trying to work our way through that is the problem. And unfortunately, the U.S. system of government bends over backwards in a variety of ways to protect the view of small minorities, and there is a small minority right now that has looked around and decided that they are so desperate for spending cuts that they actually like the sequester because it's guaranteed cuts and they're going to stick with it. And so that creates a problem, the notion that there is zero revenue that can be produced in order to offset some of this, particularly at a time when you have billionaire hedge fund managers paying lower tax rates than brick masons. That's the discussion that we're still at some distance on, and we need to press our way through that. And you're right to point out that, in the intervening period, until those democratic mechanisms come to work so that the changes are deliberate ones, there are going to be some unintended consequences, and we need to be very alert to that and do what we can to make sure that it doesn't affect our security or our national security.

Senator McCain: Can I say a word to our fellows? Congratulations on being part of this institution where I hope you will enjoy as well as learn. It's a great opportunity. You are the future leaders. And I only give you one word of advice, and that is that the lessons I've learned and not learned in my life, there's nothing more rewarding than to serve a cause

greater than your self-interest, and I believe that's what this institute is all about. Congratulations and good luck.

Dr. Hahm: Thank you all for coming and please join me in thanking the Senators.

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