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“Is the U.S. Back?”

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Let me thank my friends Dr. MJ Chung and Dr. Hahm Chaibong for giving me an opportunity to make a few remarks for this very important conference. My understanding is that the title of this conference is “Is the U.S. Back?” Of course there are people who will argue that America never left and that therefore it is not a subject that requires deep discussion. But it calls attention to a very important challenge of our period. In our time, there are more upheavals going on in more parts of the world than in any previous period in history. Moreover, these events in different parts of the world are connected with each other in a way that has never been the case before. Finally there are evolutions of great consequence in technology that will change the major of the interactions of society with each other and indeed of people with each other.

So the important question is, “Is America able to contribute to so many crises simultaneously?” I will argue that most of these crises require a significant American contribution and all of them require some participation by America in their definition and in their execution. In the political field, the most important, immediate issue is the number of crises that are occurring in regions such as the Middle East that have different origins and that are occurring simultaneously. But in other parts of the world, the traditional balance of power has shifted to some extent under the impact of a globalized economy and the advancement of technology.

First of all, what is the role of the U.S. in relation to this? In the end of the Second World War, the United States produced over 50 percent of the world gross national product (GNP) and they were inevitably in the position to dominate the solution of crisis by the allegation of its resources. Today, the percentage of the United States GNP in relations to the rest of the world is between 20 and 25 percent. That still represents a significant role, but it means America now has to have a greater understanding of the global consequences of its actions.

In the decade ahead, I think it will be seen what will look like an American withdrawal was really a necessity of the United States to redefine its role in the world and to find a new pattern of relationships. I am confident that in the decades ahead it will be seen that the role of America will be different, but equally crucial than it has been in the past.

The complexity arises because some of the problems within each region have their own momentum. What must be prevented is that the international system becomes a conflict of regions with each other, because that will inevitably lead to a kind of balance of power of conflict that led to World War I.

So the United States is inextricably a part of Asia, and involved in the Middle East, and tied to Europe, but of course the regions themselves will grow insignificant and the challenge will be how to find patterns of cooperation that are not confrontation and how to make sure that the requirements of evolution take precedence over the purely confrontational aspects.

This is the challenge that your conference faces. It is a very important subject for our period and the chief message I want to bring is that America will be a major contributor with commitment and ideas to the solution of a world that will evolve peacefully towards greater cooperation.

Thank you very much.