



ASAN WASHINGTON
FORUM 2013

Gala Dinner Speech

Madeleine K. Albright

Former U.S. Secretary of State
Chair, Albright Stonebridge Group

Transcript

Good evening and greetings to everybody and I'm delighted to be here and I want to thank Dr. Hahn and the institute for inviting me. It is truly an honor to be part of a forum celebrating the 60th anniversary of the alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea. I have to say in watching that video, it reminded me of where I was in June 1950 when the war broke out. We had just come to the United States in 1948 from Czechoslovakia and my father—who had been with the United Nations and had left because communists had taken over Czechoslovakia—said to me, “You always have to remember who your friends and enemies are, and we have to fight Communism.” So I grew up with that story and watching those pictures again and understanding the basis of our alliance meant a great deal to me. I have to point out that my father went to teach at the University of Denver where the Graduate School of International Studies was named after him and Chris Hill is now the dean, so we are very connected. I would like to thank Senator Lieberman for voting for me for confirmation. Senator DeMint was not there yet.

Since 1953, there have been many twists and turns in the relationship between our two countries, but throughout our underlying friendship, it has been unshatterable. This enduring alliance has been a blessing to people on both sides of the Pacific while promoting prosperity and advancing the cause and peace in East Asia and across the globe. I hope and believe that it will continue for decades, even centuries to come. During my four years as America's Secretary of State, I had the pleasure of visiting South Korea many times. Although I no longer represent the United States, I can say with confidence that America's commitment to the Republic of Korea's security remains beyond question. Two months ago Secretary of State John Kerry was in Seoul to reiterate that message and during his own visit last year, President Obama reinforced it. I'm sure that I speak for most Americans—and especially those who have troublesome neighbors—when I say that we admire South Korea's steadiness, patience, and courage.

In the past sixty years, there have been many moments of crisis when tensions on the peninsula increased and the possibility of war loomed. To cite one example, in the early 1990s, North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and announced its plan to build nuclear weapons. At that time, I was America's ambassador



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to the United Nations and had to sit through a particularly vituperative and offensive speech from the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It was just before my birthday and I was trying to figure out what to say without getting involved in the ugliness of the discussion. And I said I would like to thank the representative of North Korea for making me feel forty years younger before my birthday by that disgusting speech from the Cold War. Since then, two more decades have elapsed but the rhetoric from Pyongyang is still the same and the nuclear threat has become a good deal worse.

As many of you know, I am one of the few American diplomats—and here I exclude Dennis Rodman—who have negotiated directly with North Korea's leaders. I have promised never to play basketball if he promises not to go back. This was in October 2000 and my immediate purpose was to obtain a halt in the North's provocative missile programs. I was privileged to have conversations with President Kim Dae-Jung before I went in order to get a little bit of a better sense of what I was getting into. President Kim Dae-Jung described to me what it was like to deal with Kim Jong-il. I had in mind of a much larger goal than dealing with the missile programs. It was to persuade Kim Jong-il to end his country's isolation and move toward a more normal relationship with the world. I met with him for many hours and we disagreed on almost everything. But I was encouraged that he at least seemed aware of the need for change. He spoke respectfully of South Korea, and he actually said that it would be possible for us to keep our troops there. He expressed a desire for better relations with the United States, and because Communism had been exposed as a failure, he was also plainly searching for a new economic model. It took me a while at the dinner that we had together for me to understand when he said that I needed a new Swedish model what he was really talking about. However despite having the powers of a dictator, he was afraid to run the risks that openness and reform might entail. So instead of pursuing a new economic strategy, he settled for a few, small experiments. Instead of addressing the world's concerns on the nuclear issue, he backed away from his commitments and continued to play the role of victim—insisting that his country was being treated unfairly. To date, his son seems inclined to offer roughly the same combination of self-pity and bluster with similarly destructive results. It took years of effort and goodwill to build the Kaesong industrial park but only a few months of bullying and bad faith from Kim Jong-un to shut it down.



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In the past, the North was willing to discuss the goal of a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula. Now, its number one demand is to be recognized as a nuclear power, which is patently unacceptable. So the question arises: where do we go from here? We know that in recent weeks, the North has expressed renewed interest in talking to the United States and to the South. This reflects a change in tactics, but that is something we have seen many times before. Under the circumstances, our leader should pursue a diplomatic strategy that emphasizes cooperation not so much with North Korea as towards North Korea. We need the highest degree of coordination among policy makers in Seoul, Washington, Tokyo, and to the extent possible, Beijing. We must speak with one voice reminding North Korea that it still has an opportunity to choose compromise over confrontation and real dialogue over repeated threats. It still has a chance to renounce nuclear weapons and thereby move away from a security policy based on fear to a strategy grounded in law. If it does make the choice, the potential rewards are many. If it does not, the DPRK will remain in the prison it has built for itself and the gap will continue to grow between the North's weakness and the South's prosperity and prestige.

For here is the great contrast: sixty years ago, North Korea was in better shape than it is today while the South was devastated by conflict and dependent on foreign help with the population among the poorest in the world. But because of the Republic of Korea's commitment to innovation, discipline, and productivity, we have witnessed in recent decades what many call the "miracle on the Han River." Today, South Korea boasts one of the globe's largest and fastest growing economies. It's a leader in exports, per capita income, and technological prowess. It is the first country to have graduated in status from recipient to donor in overseas aid. The Republic of Korea has also built a robust and competitive democracy for which its voters should be congratulated not only because they have done what certain others have failed to do, but it has also elected a woman president.

Finally, I have to mention that South Korea's soccer—or football team—has just qualified for the World Cup. But whether measured economically, politically, or athletically, the country's rise is mirrored by the enhanced nature of its international standing. Three years ago, the Republic of Korea played host to a meeting of the G20 heads of state. Two years ago, Ban Ki-Moon was unanimously re-elected as the Secretary General of the United Nations. Last year, Seoul was the site of the second



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Nuclear Security Summit and earlier in 2013, South Korea began a two-year term on the United Nations Security Council. Meanwhile, a long overdue free-trade agreement between Korea and the United States has gone into effect. There can be no question that the Republic of Korea has moved to its rightful place on the center stage of world affairs and that the United States welcomes this development. Historically, we know that the United States and Korea have viewed certain events differently, but we also know that our alliance has helped both countries to become stronger and to live in freedom and peace.

Looking ahead, it is vital that our cooperation continues on matters of security, diplomacy, and prosperity. The United States should never become an obstacle to reconciliation on the Korean peninsula but neither should America ever abandon its ally. In turn, I'm confident that South Korea will do its part by further strengthening its democracy and by upholding global norms. Meanwhile, both countries must and will remain resolute in dealing with the North. Neither threats nor empty promise can force us apart. Since 1953 and especially in the past twenty years, East Asia has been a driving force in the economy. But it is also a place where tensions between individual countries persist. Even though bitter memories from the past have not yet been fully erased, the region is rushing headlong into the future. This creates a climate of risk and an urgent need for sources of stability. It is essential, therefore, that ties between the United States and Korea remain firm so that future challenges, both foreseen and unforeseen, can be met. So in closing, let me say that because of everything that is going on in the world, I am often asked whether I'm an optimist or a pessimist. My reply is that I am an optimist who worries a lot. I worry for all the obvious reasons, but I'm an optimist because I truly believe that free people working tougher can achieve whatever they set out to accomplish even in the most trying of circumstances. I also have faith in democracy and an abiding trust in the ideals that have sustained the alliance between the Republic of Korea and the United States of America for the past sixty years—the same ideals that have brought us together tonight. Over the years, our alliance has been tested many times and has never ruptured. We know we will be tested again, but have no doubt as we turn to face the future that it will grow in strength and purpose for generations to come.

Thank you very much.

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Question and Answer Session

Dr. Hahm Chaibong (The Asan Institute):

Thank you Madame Secretary. Truly wonderful and inspiring speech. She has graciously agreed to take actually some questions from the floor, so she will be happy to entertain some questions. So if you have a question, we have microphones waiting outside and if you could briefly identify yourself... Chris, you wanted to ask a question, right? Yes, of course.

Ambassador Christopher Hill (University of Denver):

Chaibong, thank you so much for putting me entirely on the spot giving me zero warning of this. I'm tempted to ask Secretary Albright how important were here formative years of growing up in the campus of the University of Denver, but I won't do that. But what I will ask is the question of... Today we have a very different Korea than when we had just ten years ago. Korea operates off of a global platform; Korea is really a country with a kind of perspective now that is very different from the past. It is not just a Northeast Asia; it has a cultural reach that reaches all around the world at this point. It has in short something we call "soft power." So now we have the new Korean president going to China and China certainly—if China is going to make a pivot—I hate to use that word, but I can't resist. If China is to make a pivot from North Korea, it would have to make that pivot to South Korea, and I wonder if you can comment on how the Chinese might be thinking about this upcoming visit that President Park Geun-hye will be making to Beijing. Surely, it is not just a matter of talking to Xi Jinping, it is also a matter of talking to the Chinese people. So I wonder if you can give some general comments about the emerging, or the evolving—I should say—South Korean-Chinese relationship.

Secretary Madeleine K. Albright:

Thank you and I think that what I find very interesting always about South Korea—the comment was made in the video and I also made the remarks myself—is how a country that had been so poor and devastated managed to become a vibrant democracy. I have always believed that when you create a middle class, you then have the basic



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foundation for democracy. People make their choices, they are able to make a living, and are able to exert the example of their values. So I think it will be very interesting to see. I just came back from Beijing where you basically can't breathe because the pollution is so bad. They are a little confused about the direction they need to go in. I think it will be very interesting to see if as president, she can explain that a lot of what has been the miracle of the Republic of Korea is to give people the freedom to make their own decisions. I happened to have been involved in some peculiar discussions with the international department of the Chinese communist party. The question is why they want to meet with political leaders and I think partially is because they have pressure at the bottom of the pyramid and they need to figure out how to release some of the possibilities of people making their own decisions, so it will be interesting to see what effect she can have in a quiet way about what the right model is. Then I hope that in some way, she is able to persuade President Xi and others there is that a denuclearized Korea is not a threat to China and that instability in North Korea is not a threat to China and that actually, they are much better off if they were all on the same side in dealing with the North Korean problem.

Dr. Lee Chung Min (Yonsei University):

Thank you, Madame Secretary, for a very moving speech. My question to you is when you were in office, I recall that you once said that the U.S. was the indispensable power, or words to that effect. I still believe as a Korean who is deeply committed to the alliance of the U.S. that it is an indispensable power. But there are many people in this room and outside who are worried about the long-written trends of U.S. presence in Asia. As an academic and practitioner of U.S. foreign policy, how do you foresee the U.S. role in Asia as China rises and as we see a much more dispersed, multi-lateral balance of power? Thank you very much.

Secretary Madeleine K. Albright:

Thank you. I'm glad you asked that because I would love explain what I meant and why I said it. I was at the United Nations starting in February 1993. It was after that Cold War and after the first Bush Administration and there was a rule sense among the American people that we should worry about ourselves and not worry about the rest of the world. I was born in Czechoslovakia and know what it means when the United



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States is involved. President Clinton was the first to use the term “indispensable power.” I just said it so often that it became identified with me. The reason that we said it was that we were very concerned that the American people were turning inward and we would not understand the importance of American engagement abroad. There is nothing in the definition of indispensable that says alone. It just means that the United States has to be engaged abroad. In fact, President Clinton and I made a big fetish, really, of always saying that we needed to operate. I use the term multilateralism. Americans don’t like the word multilateralism—it has too many syllables and it ends in an “ism.” But it is basically only partners and sharing the burden. So I believe that that is the best approach for the United States. President Obama believes in partnership and it fits exactly into what I think needs to happen in Southeast Asia and Asia generally is for us to be partners in dealing with the various issues that are out there. Not that America’s power is declining but that there are other countries’ powers and partners that can help in solving a lot of the problems. What is always unpleasant is when words that one uses acquire some other meaning and I believe that we are an exceptional nation. It’s just that we can’t ask that exceptions be made for us. So I do believe that we are an indispensable power in partnership with countries such as the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Frank Jannuzi (Amnesty International):

Madame Secretary, Frank Jannuzi with Amnesty International. At the risk of embarrassing you, I want to remind you of the time when you played softball with Senator Jesse Helms and you put on the back of your jersey as I understand it, “Jesse’s girl,” which I thought was a masterful effort to court favor and to build a relationship with the senate of the foreign relations committee. As you look at the Congress today, what advice would you offer to your successor Senator John Kerry, Secretary Kerry as he tries to convince the U.S. Congress of the importance of the U.S. as an indispensable player in the global environment and that we not turn inward and that we continue to fulfill our global responsibilities?

Secretary Madeleine K. Albright:

I think I actually do not need to give Secretary Kerry advice on how to deal with the Senate. He did it for a long time. But let me say how it all happened with Jesse Helms. What happened was I was ambassador of the U.N. and he called me to ask whether I



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would go and give a speech at a women's college in Raleigh, North Carolina. I have to admit, I actually thought that I could get out of it by saying, "I'm happy to do it if you come with me." So he called me up in half an hour and said that I've rearranged my schedule; I'm coming with you. So, usually when somebody invites you to speak, they can introduce you saying this is the dumbest person I ever met and I wish you weren't here. So he gave me a very nice introduction and then he said, "Next time, I need to have you come to my alma mater Wingate." So I arrive and we get in the car in Raleigh and we start looking for barbeque places and we drive all through North Carolina and Senator Helms was fairly bionic by then. He had two artificial hips and so I was helping him out of his car and holding on to him and the press all of a sudden took a picture of me holding onto him and they nicknamed it the "odd couple." He was wonderful when I was named Secretary of State. He called me up and he said Ms. Madeleine, we will make history together, and he did a lot of things together. We expanded NATO, we did a lot of things, and if you look at the tapes carefully of the hearings, there's a lot of winking going on. I respect it. We disagreed on many, many issues, but I respected him and I treasured his friendship. I think that the basis of it and I honestly don't have to tell Secretary Kerry because he has a lifetime experience on the hill. In fact, we are much better off as a country when we can see each other and respect each other's differences and try to figure out where to make a difference. Compromise is not a bad word. I am an authority on appeasement. I was born in Czechoslovakia. That is Neville Chamberlain on appeasement. Compromising with members of the other party is not appeasement. I really do think that we have to make clear as we on Chris's question about soft power. Our soft powers are our values. I'm chairman of Board of the National Democratic Institute. I've just come from Burma, China, India, and Jordan. It is an honor to talk about our democracy and at the moment it's kind of screwed up. We need to figure out exactly. If I can work with Jesse Helms, then I think people on the hill can figure out how to work with each other. Thank you for asking me that.

Captain Tim Richardt (U.S. Navy):

Good evening ma'am. Captain Tim Richardt. United States Navy. Thirty-seven years continuous act of service. My question to you, first of all, as a State Senator regarding your dealings with Kim Jong-il and now we have his son Kim Jong-un. Kim Jong-un in control—so to speak. It's my belief, my experience that it's the system that controls all



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the way to the very top of the pyramid in that country that even if you put your best powers of persuasion to try to convince someone to change that they really can't because they're prisoners of the system themselves. So with that said, during today's panel discussion, I've heard such things as we need to help them, we need to help them, we need to be patient with them, we need to be patient with them. As well as we need to begin developing strategy towards doing what we can to continuously box them in more, more, and more to grind them down—so to speak. What is your prescription for how we should face the future in dealing with North Korea? Thank you.

Secretary Madeleine K. Albright:

First of all, thank you for your service. Let me just say that my talks when I was over there—we had gone through some pretty tough times with the North Koreans where they've gone as I mentioned: pulling out of the treaty a number of different aspects had they agreed on the framework; a number of things where we tried to work out deals with them. We then, President Clinton asked former Secretary of Defense Bill Porter to do a complete review of our policy. In many ways we kind of told them they were the fork in the road—that we certainly had the force to put them out of business, but we also did they want to negotiate. They picked negotiating and I hold no brief for the North Koreans—I can tell you that. But we were very deep into negotiations. I had signed an agreement with Vice Marshall Cho about no hostile intent. We had a missile moratorium. I have to tell the story. When I went over there and by the way what had happened was that Vice Marshall Cho had come to my office in a pinstripe suit and, then he went to the oval office in full uniform certainly with medals of having killed Americans somewhere. He gave President Clinton and red leather folder, in which was an invitation for the president to come to North Korea and the president said, "Well maybe I'll go at some point but the secretary of state has to go first. We were not pleased about that. We had no embassy there so I had no idea what we were going to do. So we did have—and this is where I appreciated President Kim Dae-Jung's intelligence and information to me because he said, "Kim Jong-il is not crazy and you could have very good negotiations with him." I won't go through all of it, but I think that I am really regretting that we did not continue the negotiations that I had started. We do know that they cheated on the HEU stuff, but I think that we made a mistake on not following through with those negotiations. I think that we would need to do now is again to—we



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can't keep selling or buying the horse from them. That is for sure. I think that we are best off in diplomatic negotiations and sanctions until they really change their mind. I do not see us bombing them or taking that kind of action, but we don't know what is going on there. That is the major problem that we have. The supposition and lot of the blusters that Kim Jong-un is trying to get control is a very bad situation. There is no question. We're depending on the Chinese to use their pressure and I think that we should not stop doing any of our military exercises with the Republic of Korea. We have to keep going at it. But it is a very bad and very hard position. Mainly we have to remain calm as we get this pattern in and out all the time, and they are tough negotiators. We have to be also. We have to make them live up to the promises they make. Not a satisfactory answer—I know that. But I don't think we can do anything but keep pushing with our partners and keep the sanctions on until they change their behavior.

Thank you all very, very much.

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* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.