



| **ASAN** WASHINGTON FORUM 2013 |

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# Opening Remarks

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**M. J. Chung**

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The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

Good morning.

Vice President Richard Cheney, Secretary William Cohen, distinguished guests and friends.

This morning, we are going to talk about Korea and our relationship with the U.S.

Before I start to talk about this important issue, I want to tell you a joke.

A North Korean teacher asks his students, “Comrades, among all the economic systems in the world, which one is the greatest?”

To which a student replies, “Well, it is a rather difficult question to answer.”

The teacher quickly corrects the student: “What kind of answer is that? Very clearly there is only one answer! Our Juche self-reliance system! It is the greatest in the world, and it is destined to conquer South Korea, and take over the world!”



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After a bit of silence, the student replies, “Well, that is great, comrade teacher. But if we are too successful and end up conquering the world, then who are we going to ask for food aid?”

This year marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Korea-US alliance.

According to Korea's traditional calendar, 60 years marks a full-cycle of the zodiac, an occasion for celebration, reflection and renewal.

Today, we are gathered here to remember, reflect, and renew our alliance.

We remember the veterans of the Korean War who “*answered the call to defend a country they never knew and a people they never met.*”

These words, inscribed at the Korean War Veterans Memorial, movingly capture the character and history of the alliance.

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Americans and Koreans hardly knew each other. In terms of history and culture, we shared so little. In terms of political tradition and economic systems, no two countries could be more different.

Yet, America's young men answered the call because they knew that they were not only defending Korea, but defending freedom, the ultimate human value.

As yet another inscription at the memorial reminds us, they understood that "freedom is not free."

1.8 million American men answered the call. 37,000 made the ultimate sacrifice. The Korea-US alliance was born of such sacrifices, consecrated by them.

In 1951, at the height of the Korean War, I was born in the southern port city of Busan. Had it not been for the US intervention, I would not be here today. Thank you for coming to our rescue. I owe you one. All Koreans enjoying freedom today feel the same.

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On such foundations, modern Korea was built. From the shattered ruins of the war, we have built our "city on the hill".

60 years ago we were a country that had only experienced absolutism, colonialism, and authoritarianism. Today, we are the most vibrant democracy in Asia.

60 years ago, we were the poorest country in the world. Today, we are a model of economic development studied by many developing countries.

All this was possible because of the military security and political model that the US has provided.

Yet, even as we remember the sacrifices and celebrate the success of the alliance, a moment's reflection shows us that our work is not yet completed.

As Korea's national division continues, the Korean War has not ended.

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North Korea has developed nuclear weapons. It claims itself to be a nuclear power and continues to threaten both South Korea and the US.

North Korea's nuclear weapons represent the single greatest failure of the alliance. As Professor Graham Allison wrote in his book *Nuclear Terrorism*, "North Korea's development of nuclear weapons and a nuclear weapons production line promises to become the greatest failure in the nearly 230-year history of American foreign policy."

To South Koreans, North Korea's development of nuclear weapons is the greatest threat to our lives in our 5,000 years of history.

That is why we need to reflect on the adequacy of the alliance structure and arrangements that can cope with this new, deadly challenge.

At the recent US-China summit, President Obama and President Xi Jinping agreed on the denuclearization of North Korea in

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principle.

While we welcome this development, there also seems to be subtle differences in the threat perception among the 3 concerned countries, the US, China and South Korea. For South Korea, our house is on fire; for China, it is a fire next door; and for the US, it is a fire across the river.

In South Korea, many people worry that the US and China are more concerned with non-proliferation than CVID, "complete, verifiable, irreversible, denuclearization." In other words, the US and China may be inclined to managing rather than solving the problem.

In order to maintain peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula we need to put all options on the table.

We need to think the unthinkable to prevent the unthinkable.



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First, as a negative incentive measure, US tactical nuclear weapons that were withdrawn in 1991 should be re-introduced to South Korea as a part of the US nuclear umbrella.

The presence of a counter-nuclear force may be the only thing that will convince North Korea to give up its nuclear arsenal by making our deterrent posture more credible across the spectrum.

Second, the agreement between South Korea and the US to transfer wartime operational control to South Korean forces in 2015 should be nullified, as was recently called for by General BB Bell, the former commander of the US Forces in Korea.

Distinguished guests and friends,

Today, the world is changing. The traditional center of the world is moving from the Trans-Atlantic axis to the Pacific.

The United States and China are at the center of this shift. Everyone is interested in the future of U.S.-China relations.



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In his recent visit to the US, President Xi called for “a new model of major country relationship.” We hope that his remark signals a new era of cooperation between the United States and China.

We also hope that the US and China will continue to work together for their mutual interests and the benefit of the international community.

South Korea, as an ally of the US as well as a strategic cooperative partner of China, has the most to gain from the success, and the most to lose from the failure, in the US-China relations.

For the US, we will remain a trusted ally even after reunification. It is time for us to start to discuss the desirable regional architecture in the post reunification era.

For China, Korea has historically been a good neighbor and it will remain so for the future. The progress of the bilateral relationship between South Korea and China can serve the vital interests of the US in East Asia.

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What is important is that the three countries can and should work together for universal values; peace, international norms, and human rights, for the peace and prosperity in East Asia.

When we look at the sheer magnitude of the geopolitics of the vast Eurasian continent, the fact that a small country like South Korea, located at the tip of the continent, remains a free democracy is a miracle, a miracle in progress.

Distinguished guests and friends, the responsibility to continue this miracle into the future has now fallen upon our shoulders.

South Korea has no greater friend in the world than America. South Korea did not come this far on its own. For 60 years, South Korea and the United States have been through thick and thin together. We have forged an alliance that defends more than just our national interests. It is an alliance that defends our shared values of freedom and peace.

As we celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our alliance, I sincerely hope that this forum contributes to the beginning of the next 60

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years of our friendship.

Let me conclude by saying “We Go Together, 같이 갑시다”

Thank you very much.

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