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**[A conversation with Marco Rubio] Senator's remarks**

Thank you very much for the invitation to be here today. It is an honor to join you at the Asan Institute to discuss U.S. policy toward Asia during this critical time for the region and for the world and for my country.

I’m wrapping up a week of travel in the region and I wanted to share some of my initial reflections on the many great signs of growth and success I’ve seen across Asia this week, including those that have spread from the democratic ideals like those so well developed right here in the Republic of Korea.

But equally important, I want to have a conversation with you about how the United States can strengthen its alliances in the region and help spread those ideals of freedom and respect for human rights to all corners of Asia.

I stand before you here today almost twenty-five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War that followed. 1989 marked the so-called “year of miracles” in Europe, as the Berlin Wall was torn down and the Iron Curtain that divided a continent was lifted, freeing millions from communist rule.

All of this occurred just a few years after South Korea made its full transition to democracy. At that time, many policymakers thought communist rule here on the Korean peninsula would soon fall as well.

In 1989, we also witnessed the Tiananmen massacre, which marked both a setback to the spread of freedom and, in hindsight, indicated the resilience of authoritarianism in Asia.

Despite this, many believed that, over time, the Chinese government would realize that the true path to prosperity, including real opportunity for its citizens, would occur only in tandem with meaningful democratic reforms.

Now, decades later, we are still waiting for liberty in both China and its ally, North Korea, even as those two countries have taken different paths economically.

In fact, in Asia we are faced with the paradox that half of the world’s population lives in Asian countries that are deemed “not free,” while at the same time, more people live under liberal, democratic rule in Asia than any other single region of the world.

That said, significant work remains ahead if we hope for freedom to fully eclipse authoritarianism and totalitarian rule in this vital region.

Our first priority must be effectively dealing with the challenge of North Korea’s ongoing provocations and its aggression. Indeed, this should be the shared priority of all people around the world who value peace, liberty and human rights.

Sadly, decades of attempts to deal with this rogue and murderous regime have failed to prove fruitful.

Diplomatic attempts by the United States and our allies to improve relations with the North have not been met by reciprocal actions.

Instead, we’ve seen the North develop its nuclear capabilities and missile programs, proliferate sensitive technology to rogue regimes, take unacceptable military actions against South Korea, seize American hostages, and deepen the repression of its own people.

Some of you may have family members living in North Korea. I can’t help but think of my own family’s experiences in Cuba. Where I’m from, in Miami, Florida, so many people are like me, the sons and daughters of Cuban refugees.

Many others have themselves fled the repression and tyranny of the Castro regime. Most have family or friends still stuck, still languishing under the iron fist of a dictatorship just miles away from where they enjoy freedom.

The American people – like the citizens of your country – value and treasure their status as a free people. They understand that when human beings are denied their fundamental freedoms, they are not being given the opportunity to fulfill their God-given potential. They realize what it says about a regime when the elite are well fed but the people are left to starve in the streets.

They understand in 2014 how reprehensible it is for hundreds of thousands of people to be imprisoned in gulags for no reason other than the family they were born into, or subject to the whims of one person.

That is why we must continue to work towards the day when there is a unified Korean peninsula that will be prosperous, stable, and most importantly, democratic.

I believe, and personally pray, that that day will happen soon and in our lifetimes.

To this end, we need to be careful that any diplomatic initiatives with the North, as well-intentioned as they may seem, do not just encourage further provocations.

We cannot continue to repeat the concessions and violated agreements of recent decades that have only led to more blustering and aggression.

Beyond North Korea, we also are faced with the increasingly important challenge of ensuring that China’s growing economic and military power does not lead to conflict and instability, as has often been the case in the past when certain powers have risen.

As I’m sure many here would agree, we need China to become a responsible stakeholder in the international system. One that contributes to the security of the global commons rather than simply benefiting from it.

We therefore do not seek to “contain” China, but rather to ensure that as it gains in military and economic power, its rise will be peaceful.

In sharp contrast to China’s system is Taiwan, which continues to show that traditional Chinese culture and democracy are not incompatible and can in fact thrive together.

We will not abandon our allies, including Taiwan, in order to improve or preserve our relationship with China. And we will not stand by quietly as the Chinese government seeks to exacerbate and exploit differences and disagreements between our partners in the region.

In particular, China’s recent unilateral announcement of an air defense identification zone over disputed territory, with no international consultation or prior notification, is emblematic of the concerns the United States and many in the region have about China’s future trajectory.

In contrast, the way in which your country declared a zone several weeks later, after consultation and in accordance with internationally recognized procedures, is a living and vivid example to others in the region, including China, of a responsible approach to these sensitive issues.

Your example in this region leaves me convinced that we as democratic allies need to stand together to advance our interests and expand our network of likeminded democracies.

What would this involve?

It starts with recognizing that the Asian region is vitally important to the future of American foreign policy, to my nation’s security, and our economic well-being.

America must make sure that rhetoric of the so-called “rebalance” to Asia meets reality, and that our allies in other regions do not feel that the United States has turned its back on them. America continues to have important work ahead in many other regions, particularly the Middle East. But our global commitments strengthen our place as Asia’s indispensable power rather than detract from it.

The fact is that the United States has long been a Pacific nation and a power and it is vital that we continue to maintain our robust military and diplomatic presence in the region while adapting that power to new realities, both here and elsewhere.

To this end, we need to utilize all of the elements of national power, be they military, economic, or diplomatic, to make clear to all nations - friendly or otherwise - that U.S. policy toward Asia is more than just rhetoric.

First, we need to continue increasing our military presence in Asia. I applaud the attention and efforts that Secretary Hagel has recently made in this regard.

Yesterday, I spent some time at the DMZ and had the chance to meet soldiers from my home state of Florida who are there, on “the edge of freedom,” as they described it, to keep peace on the Korean peninsula. I also met deployed Americans in Japan earlier this week. And in the Philippines, I was able to witness firsthand the impact our men and women in uniform made in the relief efforts after the typhoon.

I got to see up close the truly vital work that all of our brave men and women in uniform are performing every day. To ensure the sustainability of these security contributions in the region, American policymakers must find ways to ensure that our efforts to be fiscally responsible do not undermine our progress. There is still much work to be done in this regard, but I remain confident that our commitments in Asia can be adequately resourced.

Economically, the U.S.-Korean relationship is a major success story.

Given what it has achieved in the last sixty years, South Korea has become a model for others. Your country’s transition from a recipient of international assistance to one of the world’s leading providers of aid to nations in need is a transformation that we are working together to achieve elsewhere around the world.

Going forward, we need to build on the success of the US-Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and, once the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is concluded, find ways for other interested nations, such as South Korea, to join. This will allow us to further unite our economies on either side of the Pacific in the name of creating commerce and business opportunities for millions throughout North America, South America, and Asia.

Key to this, as you have seen from the experience of the US-Korea FTA, is ensuring that there is bipartisan support for free trade in the U.S. Congress. We also look for decisive action from President Obama to close a deal on the TPP and reclaim an international leadership position on free and open trade.

I’ve said before that I support trade promotion authority for the President and hope to support the Trans-Pacific Partnership once it is concluded and the details briefed to Congress. I remain optimistic that there will be bipartisan support for both.

I believe we also should look for ways to extend visas to citizens of Korea to provide opportunities for those who wish to conduct business in America. I represent a state that benefits greatly from foreign tourists and business. I know there is great interest in the Republic of Korea and in other close American allies to increase the allocation of visas for those who want to work and study in my country and we should examine that as well.

Also, as America’s energy situation goes through a dramatic transformation, I think we need to closely examine, once our own indigenous needs are addressed, how America’s energy boom can also benefit our close allies, including and especially here in Asia.

Finally, we need to ensure that our diplomatic efforts in the region match the steps we are taking in the security and economic spheres.

The United States needs Japan and South Korea to work together. A closer bond between our treaty allies will immeasurably improve security in the region and enhance America's security.

To aid cooperation and understanding between our allies, we should consider modifying the so-called “hub-and-spoke” model, in which the United States is always at the center of most important strategic interactions. Instead, we should find ways that our allies and partners can be further empowered to tackle these challenges jointly, with the knowledge that the United States remains deeply committed to the security and the prosperity of this region.

This means building and deepening the cooperation that you and other U.S. partners have begun with emerging partners, such as India. It means establishing new avenues of cooperation in the defense, civil, and economic spheres between democracies in the region. It means taking a hard look at current regional institutions to see whether they are up to the challenge we are facing in the decades ahead.

This is not always as easy as moving more military assets into the region, or capitalizing on the economic success of our partnership, but is just as important as the other areas I have discussed.

In closing, let me just say a few words about the state of the debate right now back in the United States.

As I’ve served on the East Asia subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee over the last year, I’ve been encouraged by just how bipartisan our policy toward Asia has been.

Nonetheless, it is true that there are many in Congress and across my country are increasingly skeptical about why America needs to remain so active in international affairs. Some wonder how events that happen halfway around the world have any impact on our lives.

Some ask why it matters how China develops or how it treats its people or neighbors, as long as our trade and our commerce isn’t impacted. Some even wonder why America should be bothered by a rogue regime like North Korea that seems incapable of providing for its own people, let alone taking on the United States.

But I know that whatever our challenges at home, most Americans understand in their hearts the price we pay when we step back from the world stage. We need only look to past instances when our country has attempted to ignore threats and withdrawn from the world.

The pain caused by these experiences has taught us an important lesson: that foreign policy, this is increasingly true, is domestic policy. When liberty is denied and economic desperation take root, it ultimately affects us at home as well. It causes instability, which leads to economic threats, human rights abuses, and security concerns that directly concern the interests of the American people.

Just two days ago, I paid my respects at the American Cemetery in Manila, where over 17,000 American service members from World War II were laid to rest. Just like the many Americans who gave their lives to help your country become what is now the stunning success it is today, the Americans laid to rest in that cemetery traveled halfway around the world to pay the ultimate price for a cause greater than themselves.

Similar prices have been paid by your own soldiers, who have sacrificed to stand by America in our hour of need in far flung corners of the globe, and even by North Koreans who have risked all to bring about change in their country. As a man involved in smuggling videos of life in North Korea to the outside world recently told an interviewer:

"This is dangerous. And if I get caught, I know I'd immediately be executed as a traitor to the Korean people. But I've got to do this, no matter what. I'm just one person. Even if I have to sacrifice my life, someday something is going to change."

That is an example of the sort of bravery and selflessness that built our partnership as freedom-loving people. It is why I remain confident that freedom and liberty will continue to emerge in this region, even in its darkest corners.

To support this, we will continue to work hand-in-hand with you and our other allies in the region. Working together, the United States and the Republic of Korea have achieved great things over the last sixty years. And over the next sixty, I believe that our destinies are intertwined.

Together, we will continue to stand on the side of democratic government and free markets.

Together, we will continue to stand on the side of peace and prosperity.

Together, we will continue to stand on the side of those who demand freedom for all.

In this first year of the next sixty years of our partnership, I am confident that we will continue this record of success.

Thank you for taking the time to listen and I look forward to the conversation that will follow.