

Remarks at SAIS

“Kim Jong-il and the prospects of unification”

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Introduction

Thank you very much for your warm introduction. I would like to thank Mr. Oberdorfer and this very distinguished school for giving me the chance to speak in front of you today.

1. The importance of non-proliferation in the 21st century

The cold war has ended. But despite this fact, the world continues to be threatened. The proliferation of terrorism around the world shows that we live in a world with a greater threat than the balance of terror we experienced under the cold war order. I don't want to imagine the disaster of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the hands of a terrorist group.

For this reason, there is an absolute need for an active policy intervention that will stop the proliferation of WMD. Thus, the solution to the nuclear problem in North Korea and Iran lies in showing that they indeed can live better without nuclear weapons and that economic incentives will follow. While regime change in North Korea has been emphasized, the situation has

worsened. Instead of non-proliferation, we now have greater proliferation.

In October 2002 the United States announced its suspicion of North Korea having an HEU program. However, the North did not admit to this and strongly rejected (repelled) this allegation, which ultimately led to the termination of the Geneva Agreement. What was the outcome of all this? As a result, Pyongyang by reprocessing 8000 spent fuel rods was able to secure 30-40 kg of plutonium needed to carry out its nuclear test.

The Republic of Korea is deeply concerned about the proliferation of nuclear weapons in Northeast Asia. Nationalist rightists in Japan are open about their argument for Japan to build its own nuclear arsenal. Japan already has 40 tons of plutonium and should it decide to pursue its nuclear ambition, this will create a nuclear domino effect in the region. Should Japan, Taiwan, Korea build their own nuclear weapons, the implication on global security would be much graver than North Korea's nuclear ambition. And we don't need to imagine the destruction that it would create. If the non-proliferation regime in Northeast Asia breaks down, I would have to say that the NPT for the entire world will be threatened. It will not be able to survive. It is thus, very alarming for me to hear some people in the US supporting the idea of a nuclear Japan.

In this sense, we cannot accept North Korea's nuclear ambition; the nuclear domino effect in Northeast Asia and eventually the breakdown of the NPT in the world is too great of a threat to all. From Korea's perspective, North Korea's nuclear threat will not only jeopardize our security but also make the

peaceful unification of the peninsula extremely difficult. For the survival of its regime and progress to take place, North Korea must join the rest of the international society and in this process, it will need our help. However, whilst possessing nuclear weapons it will not be possible for North Korea to be part of the international community and it is clear that the South will not be able to provide the help it needs.

South Korea and the United States share the common goal of dismantlement of the North Korean nuclear weapons and program and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. North Korea's nuclear capabilities are still elementary. And the six-party talks and its processes are still much alive. And thus, this is the time. This is the time to actively take part in the negotiations to get rid of North Korea's nuclear weapons.

2. North Korean policy: isolation or reform, which is more effective?

The idea of bringing down the Pyongyang regime through isolation is somewhat unrealistic and not very desirable. We have seen in the past that pressure and sanctions tend to reinforce the regime rather than weaken it.

North Korea, Iran, Cuba have founded the justification of their regimes on anti-US policies. As a matter of fact, economic sanctions and policies have provided the grounds to prolong their authoritarianism.

Korea will not pursue a hasty unification of the peninsula by absorbing the North. As you know, the gap between the South and the North is ever growing – political, social, cultural and of course economic. It has been 16 years since the two Germanys were reunified. Till this day, they are still covering the economic and social costs. Majority of our people in the South do not want to bear the economic burden and social confusion that a hasty reunification may bring.

But we have our reason to continue the contact, the exchanges and cooperation with the North. If you look at the world, the Korean peninsula is the only region in the world that remains divided with the exception of Taiwan. The Cold War ended 15 years ago but there are still 1.8 million soldiers guarding the DMZ. 1.8 million soldiers! That is greater than the entire number of US soldiers – which I believe is 1.5 million.

For the two Koreas to overcome their differences and realize a peaceful reunification some day, they must first reduce the economic gap between the two and ease the political and social differences. North Korea must pursue economic reforms toward an open market and we are pursuing economic cooperation toward this end.

We must consider simultaneously how to get North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambition and how to pull them toward reform and opening.

3. Prospects for the 6-party talks: the key to success is active dialogue

The shortcut to solving the North Korea nuclear problem is to provide the right environment that will encourage Pyongyang to give up its ambition. The Joint Declaration agreed upon on September 19 last year in Beijing provides for the North to destroy its nuclear weapons in return for the establishment of a peace regime on the Korea peninsula, economic assistance including energy, and the normalization of ties with the US and Japan. In this sense, both the September 19 Joint Declaration and the 1994 Agreed Framework are comprehensive and integrated approaches.

A comprehensive approach calls for long hours of hard negotiations. In this process, we need conviction and confidence. It will take a substantial amount of time to investigate, dismantle and verify North Korea's nuclear program. The implementation of some kind of energy assistance and the normalization of relations will also take time.

The US financial sanction on North Korea is very much like the kidnapping issue that is also holding back the dialogue between Japan and the North. The North's position on this was that of regret. It recognized its past wrong doings and wanted to settle the matter. Unfortunately, North Korea's acknowledgement brought great anger among the Japanese people, creating an uncontrollable situation for Pyongyang. With regard to the counterfeiting issue, Pyongyang is afraid it will fall into this trap once again.

The US, first of all, must announce its findings on the BDA accounts. It must publicly show which are the accounts from illegal, illicit activities. The US must lift the sanctions on the accounts proven to be clean. It is needless to say how important it is to clear past suspicions. But more importantly, we must provide a measure to prevent North Korea from repeating such wrong doings in the future.

The US must prioritize, focusing on the immediate issue first.

The nuclear issue is a pressing matter before us now. North Korea's change will take longer.

I met with Dr. Kissinger in New York before coming here. He also advised that the US should focus on the nuclear problem first and then look at North Korea's regime change as a long term issue.

While saying that the North Korean issue is an easier problem than Iran, Dr. Kissinger stated that if diplomacy cannot function to solve the problem of a country like North Korea with such small population and poor resources, it will become meaningless.

All our energies must be devoted to solving the pressing problem. And if necessary, the US must be willing to talk directly to the North. During the Cold War, for the sake of peace and security, the US chose to talk to China. It also worked for the peace process in the Middle East. These were all pragmatic approaches to find concrete solutions to problems it faced. This

kind of realistic approach is called for once more in order to solve the North Korea nuclear problem rather than relying on an idealistic wishful thinking of bringing down the Pyongyang regime.

If the Bush Administration nominates a North Korea Policy Coordinator and send this person to Pyongyang, for example, this will provide an opportunity for a closer solution. I would also like to see the launching of a ministerial level meeting in addition to the current working level within the 6-Party-Talks. This will create an atmosphere of trust as well as effectiveness.

Recently, President Bush announced at the APEC summit meeting in Hanoi that if the North gives up its nuclear weapons, the US will consider declaring the end of the Korean War. This is certainly very positive. The declaration of the end of the war will provide the opportunity to transform the current Armistice into a peace agreement both legally and structurally. And it will be a new start to end the antagonistic policies between the US and North Korea.

The issue of the peace agreement is already mentioned in the September 19 Joint Declaration, calling for the pertinent countries to take on separate talks toward this end.

The Northeast Asian region has been marred with wars, conflicts, hatred, and bloodshed during the past century. Never before has there been in the region concerted efforts for a common peace and prosperity. Ironically, the North Korean nuclear problem brought the major powers together before one table.

They were able to not only agree upon the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, but also recognize the importance of security cooperation for peace and prosperity in the region. Along the way, these countries have agreed to turn the current Armistice on the Korean peninsula into a permanent peace regime. This has great historic significance. If the September 19 Joint Declaration can be realized, this will later be called a small peace magna carta of Northeast Asia.

Very much like NATO contributed to maintaining peace and prosperity in Europe, I can see the 6-Party-Talks developing into a multilateral security cooperation body in Northeast Asia. It will be a vehicle to opening the era of the Pacific.

4. Peace Strategy for the Korean Peninsula: complementing bread and peace

Korea depends highly on its trade – 70% of its gross domestic product depends on it. The amount of foreign investment in our stock market is over 40%. Dr. Samuelson, the Nobel laureate for Economics, said that “the economy is like a fragile flower” This is so true for Korea. And we know more than any other people how valuable peace is for us.

I firmly believe that more important than anything is to create a circular structure where peace is established, stabilizing the economy which in turn will create greater peace, and the circle goes on and on. This is the vision for

peaceful economics.

Peaceful economics will give both South and North Korea peace and economic benefits. By improving dramatically relations between the two Korea, we will be able to reduce the tensions and create an atmosphere of peace and cooperation in the region. We will reduce this so called Korea discount that comes from this state of tension on the peninsula and seek a new economic dynamism.

From the American perspective, you'd be surprised to hear that South-North economic cooperation is mutually beneficial. There can be benefits for the North, naturally, but there are also ways for the businesses in the South to gain from it. The Guesung Industrial Complex is an experimental model for North Korea's reform and opening. This is the site where we must try to nurture the theory of peaceful economics. And I believe that this experiment deserves to be given the chance to prove its value's worth.

'If you want peace, prepare for war' – this is an old Roman saying, I believe. How wrong this statement is! War today is totally different from the war of the past. For a region with the greatest number of soldiers facing each other, war is total destruction.

Peace is for those who dream of it. It is possible when it is reached for with conviction and confidence. No doubt, the current situation is not easy.

However, it is not impossible. If we are to pursue it with conviction and confidence and devote all our diplomatic efforts, I think we can achieve it.

Thank you very much.