

Center for Strategic and International Studies

“Global Leaders Forum: His Excellency Moon Jae-in, President of the Republic of Korea”

Welcoming Remarks:

**Dr. Victor Cha,
Senior Advisor and Korea Chair, CSIS;
Director of Asian Studies, Georgetown University**

Introductory Remarks and Moderator:

**Dr. John J. Hamre,
President and CEO,
CSIS**

Keynote Address:

**His Excellency Moon Jae-in,
President of the Republic of Korea**

Location: CSIS Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

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VICTOR CHA: To begin the evening and to introduce our guest of honor, I'm going to turn the stage over to John Hamre, president and CEO of CSIS.

JOHN J. HAMRE: Good afternoon, everybody. I am so delighted to see you here. I was meeting with President Moon, and I said I don't think anybody could bring out a crowd like this on a Friday before a long holiday weekend. (Laughter.) It's a miracle.

But I think it actually is a testament to how important your leadership has become. Korea has gone through a tremendous constitutional crisis. It was the biggest challenge that Korea's had in its constitutional history, and they came through it with flying colors. And we should all be very grateful for the calm leadership that the political leadership of Korea gave, and to you, President Moon. You were very good in making sure that the place was calm and democratic process would prevail, and congratulations. We're very happy for that.

We're delighted that you're here, President Moon. And, ladies and gentlemen, he's going to give some brief remarks and then we're going to have some question and answer. We don't have a lot of time tonight, and I don't think I should take any more of it. I think you should right now welcome President Moon Jae-in with your applause. (Applause.)

(Note: President Moon's remarks are made through an interpreter.)

PRESIDENT MOON JAE-IN: Thank you very much.

Respected President and CEO Dr. John Hamre, distinguished guests, I chose the United States as the first destination of my overseas trip as president. And I'm very delighted to meet you today.

Since taking office, I had a telephone call with President Trump first before meeting him in person. President Trump, during our conversation, emphasized that the alliance between the Republic of Korea and the United States was not simply a good alliance, but a great alliance, words that left me with a powerful impression. And that is why the title of my remarks, as well as the preamble of the ROK-U.S. leaders joint statement, include the word "great alliance."

Distinguished participants, standing here today, I would like to reaffirm with you together the friendship Korea and the United States have built for more than a century. In 1885, the first modern hospital in Korea, called Gwanghyewon, was founded by an American missionary, Dr. Horace Allen. American missionaries led the establishment of modern institutions for education and medicine in Korea while backing the Koreans' independence movement against Japanese occupation. The United States intelligence agency worked with our provisional government and supported our military exercises.

In 1950, the most tragic war in Korean history broke out. Two days ago, the first place I visited after my arrival here was the Changjin Reservoir Battle Memorial. This battle was recorded as one of the most fiercely fought battles of the Korean War, in which the U.S. 1st Marine Division endured what was even colder than hell to fight.

They broke through the siege of the enemies, who outnumbered them 10 times as many, and in the end succeeded in slowing the Chinese advancement in Hungnam region. And thanks to this, the

famous Hungnam evacuation was made possible. The Hungnam evacuation was a massive operation where some 100,000 refugees who flocked to Hungnam dock to escape North Korea were evacuated to safety by American soldiers. It was the largest humanitarian operation that was ever seen in human history.

And at the time, the U.S. cargo ship, the SS Meredith Victory, dumped all weapons and war supplies into the sea and took in the refugees in the cargo compartment. As many as some 14,000 refugees boarded the ship for life. Among them were my own parents. The Victory departed from Hungnam on December 23rd, my sister's birthday, and arrived on December 25th, in Koje Do, the southern land, in the Republic of Korea. Without a single casualty, it was the voyage of freedom and human rights.

Five new lives were also born during the voyage. It was, indeed, the miracle of Christmas. Two years after, in Koje, where the Victory had arrived, I was born. And today, the son of the refugees that American soldiers rescued became president and has come here to meet you.

Honored guests, after the war Korea has shown the world a remarkable development and growth, as you have already witnessed. The two wheels that drove Korea's development – democracy and market economy – were what American disseminated to Korea, the core values our countries have come to share. Over the last seven decades, the ROK-U.S. alliance not only became a linchpin of peace and stability on the Korean peninsula, but also contributed significantly to economic and democratic advancement of Korea. This is what Korean people know all too well. A foundation for growth and development of Korea was laid by the United States, a treasured ally we're grateful to.

Likewise, Korea as an important ally for the United States, played a role in the U.S. leadership in the Asia Pacific and its prosperity. As our alliance progressed and expanded, many people in our two countries came to interact, influencing each other in diverse fields ranging from religion, culture, to economic disciplines. A soldier who guarded the stronghold in the battle of Changjin Reservoir and a crewman who sailed the Victory are, in one way or another, connected to my life today. Just as so, the relations between Korea and the United States are connected not only between our two countries and governments but between our peoples.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a saying in Korea, a deeply rooted tree never sways in the wind, and deep spring water never runs dry. This speaks volumes about our bilateral relationship. Over the course of time, we have formed our friendship and let it take root. The ROK-U.S. alliance moved forward in tandem with the history of Korea. This alliance runs deep and strong. Our alliance will never sway. And to this, my commitment remains firm.

Distinguished participants, recently Korea went through an unprecedented political crisis, a crisis that was turned into an opportunity by the Korean people. In the most peaceful and beautiful way, Koreans restored democracy and the constitution, and gave birth to a new government. This is what Korean people call Candlelight Revolution. You will also agree that the Korean people's Candlelight Revolution set an exemplary model for the world of a vibrant democracy played out in the public square. The Candlelight Revolution marks the beginning for me as president.

Korea is undertaking change to become a more democratic, equitable and just country. This is what the people through the Candlelight Revolution have demanded me to undertake. Answering this call is my responsibility as president.

Deployment of THAAD prompted some people to voice concern over the future of the alliance. The discussion taking place inside the Korean government on this issue is a vital process for ensuring democratic legitimacy and procedural transparency. This is a matter of crucial importance to my government that was born on the Candlelight Revolution.

I respect the decision made by Korea and the United States; however, the Korean government's endeavors to observe the due process of law will prove to be beneficial also to the advancement of our alliance. On that note, I ask for your deep understanding and support.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me now share my thoughts on "Great Alliance," the title of my speech today. The alliance between our two countries is already a great one. Still, it can be made even greater. I have found that spirit in the battle of Changjin Reservoir. The divisional commander, Smith, who led that heroic battle called the Hungnam evacuation operation an attack in a new direction, not a retreat. This is what defines the spirit of our alliance. Ahead of us awaits a special undertaking, an undertaking that has remained unsolved for the last 20 years as a historic conundrum. It is none other than nuclear and missile programs of North Korea, a threat that is already spreading beyond the boundaries of the Korean Peninsula towards the United States.

Even as we face the most imminent and dangerous menace in the world, we should no longer continue to retreat, but move forward and take a new leap towards the future. This is how we can elevate the ROK-U.S. alliance to the next level, making it not just a good alliance, but a great one. A great alliance is the one that brings peace.

Korea and the United States already agreed on initiatives for peace on the Korean Peninsula: The September 19 Joint Statement adopted at the six-party talks in 2005 on October 4, Inter-Korean Summit declaration of 2007, that reaffirmed the 2005 statement. Both comprehensively dealt with the complete dismantlement of the North Korean nuclear program and establishment of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. Without doubt, there was close coordination between Korea and the United States. Calling for peace is one thing, but making it happen involves extremely arduous endeavors.

The truth that was driven home to us when the September 19 statement was never translated into any action for 10 years even after its implementing procedures were agreed upon. Moreover, the Kim Jong-un regime of the North has a misguided conviction that nuclear weapons and missiles will keep itself intact.

Notwithstanding this, I'm confident that now presents an opportunity to restart this daunting task. President Trump made tackling the North's nuclear and missile problems his top foreign policy priority, a decision that no previous U.S. government has made thus far. This is why I believe we have a better chance of solving the North Korean nuclear issue now. I am committed to doing my utmost to leverage this opportunity. A robust ROK-U.S. alliance should be the key premise.

Building on the foundation of deterrence against North Korea's provocations and our ironclad combined defense posture, the Republic of Korea together with the United States will embark on a journey towards a peaceful and prosperous Korean Peninsula.

This is a journey for a great alliance. This will be a long one, starting from denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and heading towards stability and peace in the whole of Northeast Asia. Our new direction should guide us away from strategic patience and bring back North Korea to the negotiating table with all available means mobilized.

Provocations by the North must be met with a stern and firm response. Yet, at the same time, engaging in dialogue with Chairman Kim Jong-un is also necessary, for he is the only one who can decide to dismantle North Korea's nuclear weapons. For such dialogue, our goal would be crystal clear: it is to induce Pyongyang to make its own decision on nuclear dismantlement. Korea is a party directly concerned with Korean Peninsula issues. As a direct stakeholder, and also to never repeat the tragedy of another devastating war, Korea will assume a leading role, more so than before. If Korea improves its relations with North Korea, in close collaboration with the U.S., the community of nations – including the U.S. – will also be able to build better relations with the North in due course.

Ladies and gentlemen, yesterday I had an in-depth dialogue with President Trump on this vision that I have. We concurred to work more proactively to preserve and build peace. Let me make myself clear here today: President Trump and I do not pursue hostile policies against North Korea. We have no intention to attack North Korea. We have no wish to see its regime replaced or collapsed. And we have no plan to artificially accelerate reunification on the Korean Peninsula.

Yet, let us also make it clear to North Korea: Without a doubt, North Korea must understand that denuclearization is the only way to guarantee its security and economic development. The North must determine its own destiny. It cannot and should not blame others for its own fate.

The door to dialogue is wide open. North Korea stands at a critical crossroads. I sincerely urge Pyongyang to exercise prudence, and seize an opportunity for peace and prosperity. If North Korea makes the right choice, I am ready to join and walk together on its path towards peace and prosperity myself.

Ladies and gentlemen, beyond the North Korean nuclear issue await numerous other challenges. Stability and prosperity in Northeast Asia must be promoted. Terrorism, environmental problems, refugees, starvation, infectious diseases, and other transboundary issues do require our concerted efforts. Restoring democracy, peace, human rights, and other values of democracy in Northeast Asia and beyond, this is a way for us to demonstrate the significance of our alliance in contributing to world peace. Our two countries will build on our robust alliance to further strengthen our global partnership. We will reinforce our coalition in the fight against global terrorism, and broaden the efforts for peace and reconstruction in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, among others.

Esteemed participants, the most formidable obstacle to alliance is complacency. The tasks confronting us are never an easy job, and unforeseen hardship may surface. Yet, we share a common goal, as well as experience and foresight gained in the course of surmounting countless adversities. We must believe in ourselves and take decisive actions to translate our new initiatives into reality. We must make sure that North Korea choose(s) by itself the path towards peace. When it's chosen on its own accord, peace can become complete and sustainable. On that note, I ask for your support for the faith I have.

If our alliance is to transcend our two countries, contribute to promoting peace and rebuilding values in Northeast Asia and the world, and to rise as a great alliance, we must pool our strength together. In particular, to the bereaved family members of Mr. Warmbier and the American people, I convey my deepest condolences. Family is the root of our lives, and the fruit they bear. As a parent myself and as a leader of a U.S. ally, I also feel the shock and grief of Mr. Warmbier's family and American citizens myself that had been caused by the brutalities of North Korea. I feel a sense of responsibility myself that an unforeseen parting with Mr. Warmbier should not mean the loss of

everything to his family. Under no circumstance should the value of family and human rights be tarnished. Together with you, I will never cease in my pursuit to preserve the values that we all cherish. To safeguard American citizens, including the U.S. military personnel, as well as my own people in the Korean soil, if not for anything else, there must be a solution to the North Korean nuclear quagmire.

As I stand before you today, I feel more resolute than ever before. And once again, I sincerely thank you for your time today. (Applause.)

MR. HAMRE: Ladies and gentlemen, we have – I know everybody here wants to ask a question. But we don't have the time. The president's here a very short period. So I have taken the privilege – I'm not even letting myself ask a question. But I picked three professionals and they're going to ask questions on behalf of all of us.

So let me ask first Catherine Katz (sp). I think she just finished her Ph.D., I believe.

Q: Almost.

MR. HAMRE: I'll ask you to give the first question, please.

Q: Thank you.

Thank you, President Moon, for being here this evening. Honored to be here for your first visit and appreciate your remarks. You touched on a lot of areas of enduring cooperation in our alliance. As we all know, this is a time of great challenge and uncertainty in the world, however. But fortunately, times of great challenge and uncertainty also bring opportunity. And I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about whether see opportunities for new areas of cooperation in the alliance in the present era. Thank you.

PRESIDENT MOON: I believe that the most serious threat that Korea and the United States face together would be the North Korean nuclear threat. But I believe that crisis is also an opportunity. So if we were to – if we were able to peacefully resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, then this would also lead the way to establishing a peace regime on the Korean peninsula. And the peace regime on the Korean peninsula would also lead to economic cooperation between South and North Korea, and the establishment of an economic community that would comprise of the total population of 80 million Koreans. And I believe that the Korean economy would be able to further expand towards China, Siberia, Russia and Europe. And I believe that this will lead to new growth in Korea's economy, and also new economic opportunities for both Korea and the United States.

MR. HAMRE: OK. Josh Rogin, where are you? You get the next one.

Q: Thank you very much.

Mr. President – thank you very much. Mr. President, the Trump administration has publicly rejected any deal that would involve reducing the scale or pace of U.S.-South Korean military exercises in exchange for North Korea freezing its nuclear or missile testing. But, one of your senior advisors recently in Washington said that if North Korea proposes such a deal, the South Korean government would ask the United States to agree to such a concession. Was this discussed in your meeting with

President Trump? Are you, in fact, advocating for such an exchange? If not, what are the concessions that the U.S. or South Korea should make in order to begin engagement with North Korea?

And, finally, President Trump said yesterday I think we have a – quote, “I think we have a very, very strong, solid plan.” Do you know what that plan is? And, if so, can you please tell us? (Laughter.) Thank you.

PRESIDENT MOON: First of all, I would like to point out that North Korea’s nuclear and missile provocations are illegal activities which violate both the various U.N. Security Council resolutions and international norms, whereas the military exercises jointly conducted by Korea and the United States are a military exercise of a defensive nature that have been conducted for a very long time. This is a legitimate exercise, and I believe we cannot trade an illicit activity for something that is legal. Furthermore, I believe that we cannot reward bad behavior. And that is why I believe that we have long maintained the position, both Korea and the United States, that we cannot stop or cease combined military exercises as a condition for – or a concession or condition for North Korea’s nuclear – to stopping North Korea’s nuclear missile tests. And that position remains unchanged. And I believe that, Professor Moon Jae-in, speaking not on behalf of myself but as his personal opinion.

But President Trump himself also mentioned that, under the right conditions, we can have dialogue with North Korea. So that raises the question: When are the right conditions fostered? And what are the conditions that enable us to engage in dialogue? I believe that we must put our wisdom together in order to find the answer to these questions.

For example, maybe we can start dialogue with North Korea when North Korea promises to stop its nuclear and missile provocations. Or another example could be when North Korea releases the three American citizens that it is currently detaining. Maybe that could be a start – the right condition for dialogue.

But I believe that at this very moment we cannot say for clear what the exact right condition would be. We would have to continue to keep an eye on the political situation, and Korea and the United States will closely coordinate and communicate in order to reach a decision. And on that point, President Trump and I have an agreement.

And, again, regarding the question of under what right condition can we have dialogue with North Korea, I would like to ask all of you here today – all the bright minds here today – to also pitch in your wisdom so we can find an answer.

If the beginning or entrance to dialogue with North Korea is a freeze of North Korea’s nuclear and missile tests, then I believe the exit – the eventual goal would be the complete dismantlement of North Korea’s nuclear program. And I believe that, beginning from the new freeze of nuclear missiles – North Korea’s nuclear and missile capabilities all the way to the complete dismantlement, I believe that we can take measures on a very step-by-step basis. And each step must be completely verified. And regarding this issue, we will continue to closely coordinate with the American government.

MR. HAMRE: The last questioner’s going to be Scott Kennedy.

Q: Thank you so much for being here and for your remarks.

I wanted to ask a question about China-South Korea relations. China has been consistently opposed to the installation of THAAD in South Korea. They penalized Lotte and took other actions against South Korea and the United States to show their displeasure. How do you plan to address the current difficulties in your relationship with China?

PRESIDENT MOON: The biggest pending issue currently in Korea-China bilateral relations is China's strong opposition to THAAD deployment and China's economic retaliatory measures in order to force a hand in Korea's decision.

Because of those economic retaliatory measures, we assess that the Korean economy has been – about \$8 billion of damages has been afflicted on the Korean economy. But one thing that I would like to make very clear is that the decision to deploy THAAD or not is an issue of sovereignty of the Republic of Korea. And I believe that it is not right for China to unfairly – to try to unfairly influence Korea's sovereign decision. And furthermore, I hope to separate the political and military issues with other issues, such as economic, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges. And I, of course, understand that China has some concerns regarding THAAD deployment. But such economic retaliatory measures are not just. And so I would like to strongly urge China to lift these measures.

Yet, it is true that before we made – we made public the decision to deploy THAAD, we did not engage in sufficient – Korean government did not engage in sufficient diplomatic discussions with China regarding this issue. From now on, the Korean government will proceed with domestic procedures, such as the environmental impact assessments. And regarding such procedures, in particular securing the procedural legitimacy of THAAD deployment, I have mentioned this to President Trump, and I have asked for his understanding. And in the process, I believe that we can sufficiently address this issue with the Chinese as well. And regarding this issue, I would also ask – I would also like to ask for the cooperation of the United States. Thank you.

MR. HAMRE: Ladies and gentlemen – (applause) – before – oh, before I let you thank the president, I'd ask you to stay here. We have to get him out quickly. So please stay here until the president gets out. And now you can thank him with your applause. (Applause.)

(END)