

Address to World Summit 2013

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For decades South Korea has been inexorably rising as an economic power and more recently as a cultural force in East Asia and now globally. During this same period, North Korea has achieved considerable military prowess boasting the fifth largest standing army in the world and evidencing most recently its probable status as a nuclear power. Both Japan and South Korea have relied heavily on the United States for their security needs and have until recently stood confident in American willingness and capacity to make good on their expectations for immediate and effective defense of their homelands if attacked. Some now believe that the US present capability seems less certain not only because of systemic problems in the US economy but also because of the growing potency of East Asia's gargantuan nation. China as with North Korea devotes a significantly higher percentage of their GDP to military expenditures than does either Japan or South Korea. Some would say that the greatest deterrent to war is the unlikelihood of victory for a would-be aggressor, if that is so then should a rebalancing of the defense priorities of the democratic nations of East Asia be more vigorously debated. The civil societies of both Japan and South Korea have manifested considerable resistance to such a path prompting one American Presidential candidate recently to propose that the US should be paid by Japan and South Korea for the military protection that it offers.

The Founders of the organization sponsoring the conference that we are now attending have advocated and invested in alternative means for procuring peace. Both economic and cultural projects as well as citizen's diplomacy have all been vigorously pursued by them. The South Korea government for its part has vacillated between a stick and carrot policy vis a vis North Korea and we are happy to welcome a representative of the latter here today on this panel. One may also wonder what potential the significant North Korean and South Korean populations of Japan (Chongryon and Mindan) may play in the relationship between Japan and especially North Korea.

How important are the political/social values of the involved nations on the East Asian scene? Given the extraordinary variance of such values among the four nations mentioned, one certainly may marvel at the plasticity or malleability of traditional and homogeneous people as they adopt markedly contrasting political, moral and spiritual values. The contrast between South and North Korea is stark. Ideas matter. If one holds that human beings are just so much pieces of flesh and that government has the right to do whatever it wishes to its citizens as opposed to the view that human life is sacred and that a government's right to rule derives from the consent of its people then two entirely different social, economic and cultural realities result. Japan is witness to the quality of life both material and cultural that's possible when constitutional democracy is upheld. The great question is China. It has allowed economic freedom which we all applaud but maintains tight political control and disdains freedom of expression and religion. Sadly, the new President of China has stated that his primary political agenda is to keep the economy moving but not at the expense of the Communist Party's total political dominance. When a nation's political leaders have as their primary value to retain power, reasonable people may be concerned that the option to create external enemies to maintain internal cohesion and to stimulate expansive nationalism could more readily be exercised. These are among only a few of the issues that I anticipate we may discuss today and without further adieu, I am most pleased to introduce our distinguished speakers.

In late 1991, a private citizen of the Republic of Korea who was both a religious founder and the leader of a worldwide anti-communist movement met the then President of North Korea, Kim Il Sung, the very man who had imprisoned him in a North Korean concentration camp four decades earlier. After having first visited his hometown and the few surviving members of his family in the North, Sun Myung Moon the next day upon meeting President Kim thanked him and then immediately reminded him that there were ten million Koreans who were members of families separated between North and South and were unable to know whether their relatives on the other side were alive or dead. He then directly asked Kim Il Sung to grant them the same opportunity to meet each other that he had just been given. Kim agreed and the next year initiated the process to allow separated family members of North and South to meet one another albeit it took change also in the South to fulfill that dream.

In that same meeting, the private citizen moved on to discuss the nuclear issue proposing the de-nuclearization of the Korean peninsula and the signing of a safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency. Soon after he ended the week-long stay, Prime Minister Hyung Muk Yeon led a North Korean delegation to Seoul and signed an agreement to de-nuclearize the peninsula. Then on January 30 of the following year, North Korea signed an agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency, thus fulfilling the commitments that President Kim had made to Rev. Sun Myung Moon.

This same private citizen however also advocated a strong military and founded the Washington Times newspaper that supported Ronald Reagan as well as his policy of peace through strength. Recall that Reagan was also known as the great communicator. As a young graduate student, I encountered a philosopher Archie Behme who was known for one key insight namely that either/or logic although the primary modality of most intellectual discourse is less useful than the logic of both/and. We almost certainly need at this critical moment to pursue both a strong defense and all the means of soft diplomacy public and private that can be mustered. Then perhaps, a reunified peninsula nation in East Asia may in the end usher in a Pax Koreana just as a small peninsula nation in Western Europe more than 2000 years ago initiated an era of peace and prosperity.