

Speech

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At the World Journalist Conference 2015

April 13, 2015

International Convention Hall, Press Center

President Park Chong-ryul,
President Jim Boumelha,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In terms of historical milestones, the year 2015 is a very significant year for Korea as it marks the 70th anniversary of both national liberation and division. At this historical juncture, an event such as this one in which global opinion leaders have gathered at the heart of a divided land to engage in discussions on the prospect of its reunification holds special meaning. I would like to thank the Journalists Association of Korea for inviting me to this important event and giving me the opportunity to share my views on the Changing Geopolitical Dynamics in Northeast Asia and the Future of the Korean Peninsula.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Germany, a divided nation until 25 years ago, has not only achieved reunification, but is also now taking the lead in

the European integration process. Unfortunately, however, despite 70 years of the painful history of national division, distrust, conflict and tension still run high between the two Koreas. Moreover, the political and security environment surrounding the Korean Peninsula has never been so challenging since the end of the Cold War. Today, not a single security or foreign policy issue in Korea can be addressed through a simple equation. As such, the foreign policy of the Republic of Korea faces multi-layered and multi-dimensional challenges.

The reason why Korea's diplomacy is encountering such challenges today is because major countries in Northeast Asia are acting in mutual distrust and playing the games with new strategies and calculations aligning to their respective national power and stature amidst the changing dynamics in the region.

Northeast Asia is currently witnessing tectonic shifts in its geopolitics. More than anything else, the rapidly rising China lies at the core of such change. Backed by growing

self-confidence as the second largest economy in the world, China is gradually shifting away from its discreet attitude of waiting for the right time while building strength to one that is more proactive and assertive.

The Chinese Dream that President Xi Jinping declared in his inaugural speech in 2013 is now being implemented one by one with concrete policies and actions. During his first summit meeting with President Obama in June 2013 in Sunnylands, President Xi presented the so-called New Type of Great Power Relationship as the vision of the U.S.-China relationship. At the CICA summit meeting last May, he came up with a concept of a New Asian Security and at the Boao Forum this past month, he announced a detailed implementation plan for the One Belt One Road initiative and proposed to build an East Asian Economic Community by 2020 with ASEAN, China, Japan and Korea as its members. And, with many countries expressing their willingness to join the AIIB, a financial platform for the One Belt One Road initiative, the China-led regional

multilateral development bank is soon expected to come into existence.

The rise of China provides new challenges to Korea's foreign policy, the backbone of which is the Korea-U.S. alliance. The Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) incident in the East China Sea in November 2013 and the recent controversy over the issue of joining the AIIB are only a few of the cases that symbolically illustrate the magnitude of such challenges. Going forward, Korea will continue to run into new challenges of a level and extent previously unknown.

However, such challenges could turn into opportunities as the Korea-U.S. alliance and the Korea-China relations are not in a zero-sum relationship. They are not only compatible, but also carry the potential to even develop into mutually complementary and reinforcing relationships depending on Korea's role therein. President Obama made a public statement along these lines during his visit to Korea in April last year. And I believe that President Xi's

visit to Korea last July also provided an excellent opportunity for Koreans and people around the world to better understand and recognize the compatibility of the Korea-U.S. alliance and the Korea-China strategic partnership.

Second, Japan's attempt to unshackle itself from the post-war regional order and become a normal state under the name of Proactive Contribution to Peace is exacerbating the already complicated political landscape of Northeast Asia. It is all the more so because the attempt represents historical revisionism emerging within the country today.

The results of the Japanese government's screening of their middle school history textbooks and the description of the Korea-Japan relations in Japan's Diplomatic Bluebook for this year, which were both released last week, vindicate that such a move in Japan is growing even stronger with the passage of time. Adhering to a distorted historical view that can be likened to 'calling a deer a horse' and continuously instilling this into its future generations represents more

than historical amnesia; it is an alarming sign that Japan is headed toward repeating its past mistakes.

In a seminar recently held in Tokyo, David Sanger, chief of The New York Times Washington bureau, said that in order to pursue its strategic interests, Japan must overcome the issue of enforced sexual slavery during the Second World War and that as long as the issue remains on the table, it will not be able to look towards the future. During her trip to Japan last March, German Chancellor Angela Merkel also emphasized the importance of squarely facing up to history, pointing out that Germany was able to reconcile with its neighboring countries by clearing up its wrongdoings in the past. Many leading media and intellectuals across the U.S. and Europe have also been voicing their similar concerns in chorus. This demonstrates that Japan's historical revisionism is raising concerns not only in Northeast Asia, but also in the international community as a whole.

We hope that the Japanese Government will take heed of these voices from across the world. The past mirrors the present and the future. Without healing the wounds of the past, we cannot anticipate a healthy future. In an interview with the Washington Post last March, Prime Minister Abe described the “comfort women” as victims of “human trafficking”. We sincerely hope that his failing to mention who committed such crimes was not an attempt to blame the private brokers and deny the Japanese government’s involvement and responsibility.

Notwithstanding the conflict over historical issues between the two countries, significant progress has been made in the trilateral cooperation among Korea, Japan and China. The Trilateral Foreign Ministers’ meeting held in Seoul last March after three years of hibernation has restored the trilateral cooperation mechanism. At this meeting, the three foreign ministers agreed to work towards a trilateral summit at the earliest possible date. This achievement was made possible thanks to Korea’s leadership, initiative and

tireless effort as chair, for which both Japan and China have expressed their appreciation.

We hope that the Korea-Japan relations will move gradually towards improvement within the trilateral, if not bilateral, cooperation framework. We also hope that Prime Minister Abe's forthcoming speech to the U.S. Congress and his statement expected to be made in August will confirm Japan's willingness to face up to its past with a forward-looking attitude towards genuine reconciliation and cooperation. It is our earnest desire that these events will transpire to be an occasion to move one step forward rather than backward so that our two peoples can joyfully celebrate together the 50th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic ties between the two countries this year.

Third, the conflict between Russia and the West in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis is posing another great challenge for Korea's diplomacy.

Some even refer to the developments following Russia's annexation of Crimea as the "return of history" or "return to the Cold War". The confrontation between Russia and the West has been intensifying to the point that Russia declared early on that it will not be attending the Nuclear Security Summit to be held in the U.S. in 2016. The current situation demands of Korea prudent and skillful diplomacy. After all, Russia is Korea's important partner not only in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue, but also in our pursuit of Trustpolitik and realizing the vision of a reunified Korea. Moreover, this year is the 25th anniversary of our diplomatic relations. Therefore, it is all the more important that Korea and Russia, with a shared vision for and commitment to the future, make joint efforts to keep our bilateral relations on track towards stable, long-term development.

This coming July, the Eurasia Silk Road Friendship Express will depart from Seoul and run through major cities in Russia, China and Europe. Projects for trilateral cooperation among the two Koreas and Russia, such as the

Najin-Hasan Project, will also continue to be pursued. These projects are significant as they can promote the connectivity between the continents and contribute to building the foundation for reunification of the Korean Peninsula. Therefore, we will continue to work closely with Russia for their successful implementation.

Finally, a bigger challenge to our diplomacy than the three challenges I have mentioned is North Korea, which has yet to give up its nuclear ambitions and has been continuing to heighten tension on the Korean Peninsula, refusing to engage in dialogue.

Notwithstanding the international community's united stance and sanctions against its nuclear weapons program, since Kim Jong-un assumed power, North Korea has been simultaneously pursuing economic development and nuclear armament, threatening not only the South, but the rest of the world as well.

North Korea has also become a subject of serious concern in the international community for its human rights situation. Last year was a special year in terms of bringing this issue forward under international scrutiny. Based on the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) on the human rights situation in North Korea, which was set up by the UN Human Rights Council, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the North Korean human rights situation. Even the UN Security Council adopted the situation in North Korea as its formal agenda. Despite these warnings from the international community concerning the grave human rights violations perpetrated by its authorities, North Korea has reacted belligerently by threatening to wage a nuclear war, posing a new menace to international peace and security.

While responding firmly to such provocations by the North, we have been making continuous efforts to give dialogue a chance to improve inter-Korean relations. In particular, in the hopes of using the 70th anniversary of the division of the Korean Peninsula as an opportunity to substantially

improve the relations between the two Koreas, we have proposed to hold an inter-Korean dialogue without any preconditions and discuss issues of mutual interest in a comprehensive manner.

North Korea, however, has been refusing to accept our proposal by insisting on preconditions, such as the suspension of the annual joint Korea-U.S. military exercises and anti-North Korean NGO's sending of propaganda leaflets into the North. We cannot help but feel a deep sense of despair when looking at the North Korean authorities engrossed in developing nuclear weapons, while turning a blind eye to the plight of its own people whose human rights are being seriously violated and the tragic reality of thousands of separated families passing away every year.

As such, Korea's diplomacy is now faced with multifaceted, but closely intertwined challenges. From a broader perspective, however, such challenges imply that Korea's strategic value has increased as much. Therefore, as

Korea's national power and global stature rises, diplomatic challenges will pour in with greater force and speed. However, as Winston Churchill once said, "Kites rise highest against the wind, not with it". I believe that such challenges will provide invaluable opportunities for Korea to expand the scope of its diplomacy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Referring to the collapsing international order, the Munich Security Report released early this year warned that an era of unprecedented level of crises is on the rise. The report went so far as to compare the Asia-Pacific region to a powder keg. At its very heart lies the Korean Peninsula. Yet, the future of the Korean Peninsula is not as bleak as it appears as opportunities always accompany danger.

In hindsight, almost every two decades, the Korean Peninsula has encountered historical opportunities to seek fundamental change in inter-Korean relations.

In the 1970s, amid the détente between the East and the West, inter-Korean relations experienced a brief thawing period producing the July 4th Joint Communiqué, the first-ever document jointly signed and announced by the two Koreas. And in the 1990s in the wake of the end of the Cold War, further progress was made in improving the relations, including the adoption of the Basic Agreement between the North and the South. These two periods were both marked by major change to the international order, but fell short of bringing about fundamental changes to the relations between the two Koreas. Now, twenty some years after the end of the Cold War, I believe that another historical turning point is approaching the Korean Peninsula. In Northeast Asia today, just as in the 1970s and 1990s, another geopolitical tectonic shift is taking place, as the rise of China indicates.

It was in this context that at the New Year press conference and later at the Davos Forum early last year, President Park Geun-hye compared reunification to winning the jackpot. And in her Dresden speech during her visit to Germany in

April, she presented the Initiative for Peaceful Unification on the Korean Peninsula known as the Dresden Initiative. A series of follow-up measures, including the launch of the Presidential Committee for Unification Preparation have since been implemented. All of these stem from her sense of historical mission as a leader standing at a critical time in history calling on us to make necessary preparations for the future of the Korean peninsula.

With this historical perspective, the Park Geun-hye government is committed to overcoming the security challenges in Northeast Asia that I mentioned earlier with the vision and strategy envisioned in our Trustpolitik, and to proactively creating an environment conducive to reunification. Such efforts will be guided by the following three principles.

First, a balance between peace-keeping and peace-making. As the division of the Korean Peninsula continues for a protracted period, previous administrations took different approaches to North Korea. Some focused on peaceful

management of a divided nation rather than reunification per se, whereas some others made focused efforts to break the status quo. The Park Geun-hye government's policy towards North Korea is a balanced approach that encompasses both approaches without tilting to one side. Based on strong deterrence, we will respond firmly to North Korea's provocations, while proactively creating an environment in which North Korea has no other choice but to change, and faithfully execute small but meaningful trust-building measures.

Second, a unification policy focusing on improving quality of people's life. President Park's Dresden Initiative contains actionable proposals to address the humanitarian issues of the people of the two Koreas, to build infrastructure to improve the livelihood of the North Korean people, and to restore a sense of unity and deepen integration between the peoples of the two Koreas. If North Korea shows any interest at all, these proposals can be executed at this very moment. President Park's proposal in her Liberation Day speech last year to set up a channel for

inter-Korean cooperation on environment, livelihood and culture, and the proposal in her Independence Movement Day speech this year to hold periodic reunions of separated families, promote exchange in sports, culture and arts and strengthen cooperation in improving livelihoods, were all made with the goal to realize “small unification”.

Third, reunification that is in harmony with the interests of neighboring countries, is blessed by the international community, and contributes to humanity as a whole. As Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se emphasized in his speech at the Davos Forum on the vision of reunification earlier this year, reunification of Korea will be a geopolitical blessing. A unified Korea will be a herald of peace and a bastion of freedom, democracy and human rights. When the abundant natural resources and diligent human resources of North Korea are combined with our state-of-the-art technology and creative entrepreneurship, it will not only serve as a catalyst for growth of the Korean economy, but will also generate new economic opportunities for neighboring countries. Northeast Asia will then enjoy peace

and prosperity, and the whole world will be able to share the resulting peace dividends.

The Korean government will actively communicate to the international community the vision and benefits of a unified Korea, expand networks that can be of substantial assistance to Korea's unification and thereby further strengthen the base for international support towards Korean reunification. Building on the outcome of the two meetings of the Korean-German Advisory Group on the Foreign Policy towards Reunification, we will continue to reinforce strategic cooperation with the countries relevant to the future of the Korean Peninsula, through such channels as the Korean Peninsula Club and Peace Club, channels for dialogue with countries maintaining diplomatic relations with both Koreas.

The Dresden Initiative I mentioned earlier, and the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI) which constitutes one of the two key pillars of the Park Geun-hye government's Trustpolitik aim to build an

infrastructure of trust by accumulating small but meaningful practices of cooperation and dialogue that will help dismantle the current structure of distrust and confrontation in the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia.

Some question whether such attempts are realistic at all given the grim political situation in the region. Some others also question whether or not the approaches are too idealistic. However, we are all aware of many cases where age-old conflicts have been resolved or a different path of history has been paved by building trust.

We may not immediately see tangible results, and the progress may be rather slow. But, looking far into the future, we will continue to pursue this peace-building initiative across the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia with patience and unwavering determination. The Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia, rebuilt on an infrastructure of trust, will be able to break out of the Asia Paradox to fully fulfill its potential, and thereby make significant contributions to global peace and prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme of today's discussion, Korea's reunification, is not a mere dream, but a future that the Korean people are committed to realizing. Pope John Paul II famously remarked that "the future starts today, not tomorrow". The future belongs to those preparing for it at this very moment. If we fail to properly prepare for the future today, then we will painfully regret having lost the golden opportunity for Korean reunification.

I hope that today's event will be an opportunity to gather our wisdom to prevent such regret. Thank you. /END/