

# Security on the Korean Peninsula

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### Keynote Speech

Thank you, thank you for your kind introduction. Director Niblett, Dr Swenson-Wright, ladies and gentlemen. In just a few days we will say farewell to 2014 and greet the new year. From my standpoint, this year may be recorded as one of the most eventful years in the post-Cold War era, fraught with difficulties: Syria, Iraq and ISIL [Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant], Israel and Palestine, Iran, Afghanistan, Ukraine and the Ebola outbreak, just to name a few.

Northeast Asia was going through turbulent times as well in an unprecedented way. A plethora of problems erupted simultaneously even while we are talking about it in the connected world all-around including at the recent ASEM [Asia-Europe Meeting], APEC [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation] and G20 summit. It's just like Pandora's Box has opened across the region and the globe. It is in this context that I wish to share my perspectives about the transformation taking place in my part of the world. In this regard I'm very pleased to speak at Chatham House today to trace out the challenges facing Korean diplomacy and give you an overview of how we are trying to respond to them.

After all, Chatham House is where the great historian Arnold J. Toynbee held a senior position for decades; he remains a good source of inspiration for Korean diplomats like me. His insight that history shows the pattern of challenges and responses remains relevant to Korean diplomacy, which faces a complex range of challenges these days. I thank Chatham House for offering me another platform – this time in London – following the conference in Seoul two months ago. I also appreciate the Korea Foundation's support in organizing today's event.

Ladies and gentlemen, since the end of the Cold War, Asia has been known as the vehicle of global economic growth. Thus, at this year's APEC, East Asia Summit, ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] Plus Three and Arab meetings it's no wonder that many leaders highlighted various achievements we have made over the years and plans to speed up the process of regional integration and connectivity, including through the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the free trade area of the Asia-Pacific.

However, during, and at the margin of, these meetings, one less noticed phenomenon was the tense exchanges over sensitive issues like North Korea, the South China Sea, maritime security and historical revisionism. Why is this so? At its heart lies a problem called the Asia paradox. In other words, Asia is a region of growing economic interdependence, but stunted political and security cooperation. There is a mismatch between high and low politics. This paradox is most conspicuous in Northeast Asia. It is now going through a significant transformation both in interstate relations and in the regional order, let me tell you in detail.

During the past two decades the region's main worry has been North Korea's nuclear programmes and its constant provocations, but now the region is seething with multifarious tensions. Hitherto underlying issues of history, culturally and nationalism have surfaced to the fore. We also have new challenges such as space and cyber security, as well as maritime security and boundaries. Now it is not really South and North Korea,

but Japan and China, Korea and Japan, even China and North Korea that are having troubles.

Indeed, the reason geopolitical dynamics are now featuring many new forms is that the ties between North Korea and China are not what they used to be, getting worse than ever in the wake of North Korea's nuclear tests and unbridled behaviour. A growing number of Chinese consider North Korea no longer as a strategic asset, but rather as a liability. As for Japan and China, since 2012 their ties seem to be cracking, and despite the latest summit at the margins of APEC in Beijing it seems the light at the end of the tunnel is not visible.

In the case of North Korea it is desperately trying to break out of diplomatic isolation and economic pride by reaching out for new partners, Russia and also Japan, an odd couple in the making if there ever was one. North Korea's gestures towards the South are as erratic as ever with repeated ups and downs, heightening tensions and instability on the Korean Peninsula and beyond. South Korea and China are forging closer ties, which both sides call 'the best ever relationship' since the normalization of relations in 1992. The recently concluded Korea, China FTA [free trade agreement] negotiations will be another landmark for deepening our economic and strategic partnership.

In fact all these developments I have elaborated so far are manifestations and symptoms of the old and new problems but delve deeper, and in its heart lies the problem of a new configuration of forces in Northeast Asia. It is caused by the competing dreams and visions of recent actors big and small, and their willingness to stand up for them. Rising China, Japan pursuing a new post-war order, Russia looking towards East Asia, the United States rebalancing to Asia, and North Korea trying to survive turbulent waters, last but not least South Korea is positioned to manage new challenges by using its status and influence. All of them form the region's landscape.

Ladies and gentlemen, from the Korean perspective the most urgent and direct challenge among these is North Korea's nuclear weapons programmes. Our first attempt to reach a negotiated solution 10 years ago turned out to be a failure due to North Korea's clandestine pursuit of the uranium enrichment programme. Our second attempt to solve this conundrum through the six-party talks produced some initial progress in 2005, but has got nowhere since 2009, mainly because North Korea continued nuclear and missile tests.

Most recently, North Korea threatened a first test in the week of the UN General Assembly subcommittee's adoption of the human rights resolution on DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea] and has specifically singled out our presidential compound as a potential target. Why should we be so vigilant and resolute about North Korea's nuclear programmes? Because more than anything else, it constitutes a clear and present danger to all of us.

The Kim Jong [-un] regime already revised its constitution and declared itself a nuclear weapon state. It has officially adopted a policy of developing simultaneously both nuclear weapons and its economy. Even at this very moment North Korea is advancing its nuclear weapons capability with determination through militarization and diversification and upgrading its delivery systems. This nuclear capability is much more dangerous than that

of Iran. The possibility of these weapons falling into the wrong hands will be a nightmare for the world.

Then what should our goal be, and how can we achieve that? Some tend to focus on non-preparation while others argue for denuclearization. No doubt it should be both. For my government, the complete and irreversible dismantlement is an unchangeable key objective, and several UN Security Council resolutions have made clear.

First and foremost, the close collaboration of the entire international community is essential like towards Iran. Our efforts should be continued to change the DPRK's calculus in such a way that nuclear weapons will get them nowhere and only result in unbearable pain. In this regard, the UN Security Council sanctions, together with bilateral ones, including by China, have made North Korea's economic life miserable, especially in terms of hard currency.

North Korea is now desperate to make money by all means, including through the problematic labour export to some countries in Asia and the Middle East. Also [indiscernible] pressing and persuading North Korea to dismantle its nuclear weapons through the six-party talks or other usable ways. We are now discussing the right conditions for resuming the six-party talks and are pursuing various multilateral talks to revitalize our efforts.

The good news is that the international community is united against North Korea's nuclear weapons; this includes China and Russia. The Chinese position is firmer than ever, even Russia has made it clear to Kim Jong-un that the nuclear issue will stand in the way of improving bilateral ties. If the ongoing Iran nuclear talks, sometimes likened to a Rubik's Cube puzzle, come to a successful conclusion by mid-2015, we hope that it could give a good lesson to the North.

The second challenge is the fundamental question of how to deal with North Korea under the new leadership and induce an enduring peace on the Peninsula. After all, the foregoing nuclear question is an integral part of the North Korea question. Next year Korea will mark the 70th year of its division, and [it] already has the longest armistice in modern history; the division is not like that of Germany in the past. Korea is bisected by the world's most heavy armed border; occasional clashes along the military demarcation line and the Northern limit line can immediately escalate due to miscalculation.

Over the last two decades, all the Korean governments in the South tried to change this sad reality in many different ways. Some liked it hot, as you saw in the Sunshine Policy dialogue; others liked it cool, as pursued by some hard-line conservatives. Neither approach worked effectively. Of course, given the nature of the North Korean conundrum, we all know there is no panacea for this.

Under these circumstances the new government in South Korea under President Park Geun-hye launched the policy of *Trustpolitik*, including the trust-building process on the Korean Peninsula, efforts to seek a new paradigm in inter-Korean relations instead of scoring cheap political points. This was intended to strike a fine balance between security and non-security issues like humanitarian concerns, and between inter-Korean dialogue and collaboration with the international community. We believe that this is the only way

to break the vicious cycle of the past, as well as to eventually lay the groundwork for productive inter-Korean relations.

What is the balance sheet now, 21 months after the inauguration? On the security front, anti-terrorism has worked rather well; instances like the sinking of the naval vessel *Cheonan* and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island of 2010 did not happen [again]. The well-publicized fourth nuclear test has not taken place yet. On the economic and humanitarian front, the once shut down Kaesong industrial complex has now been normalized. My government has resumed humanitarian assistance to North Korea through the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme and UNICEF to avoid the politicization of this humanitarian issue, but we know that we still have a long way to go. What is still missing is an institutionalized dialogue between the two sides, and North Korea's willingness to face sensitive issues like human rights.

This year we were able to hold some high-level contacts and meetings on humanitarian, political, military and support issues, but without any meaningful outcomes. What differentiates the DPRK today from the past is that its charm offensives come *together* with the provocations, not cyclically, as they used to do. And most noteworthy from the DPRK's behaviour this year was its unprecedented and sensitive response to its human rights issue. As is well known, the UN General Assembly's subcommittee passed last month a resolution recommending to consider referral of the situation in North Korea to the International Criminal Court as well as target the sanctions against those most responsible for actual crimes against humanity.

Furthermore, this resolution was passed with the record number of co-sponsors and with overwhelming support from 111 member states. It will be formally adopted at the primary session of the UNGA [UN General Assembly] this month and is likely to be followed up by the Security Council in one way or another. For your advanced information, the OHCHR [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights] field office for DPRK human rights will be opened in Seoul early next year.

The facts that North Korea spent almost a whole year trying to block this resolution with all our efforts to many UN members, and held a mass rally in downtown Pyongyang of 100,000 people decrying the resolution, are harbingers to us what could come on the horizon in the near future. Historically, North Korea made big strategic though short-lived decisions twice in the late 20th century – first in the early 1970s in the wake of the unexpected *détente*, and second in early 1990s in the wake of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and disintegration of the Soviet Empire. Now, 20 years later, in the middle of what I call tectonic changes, this is the right time for North Korea to make right a durable decision.

So, ladies and gentlemen, as discussed so far, the nuclear weapons programmes and all the internal contradictions, including human rights, are part of the hard reality we are facing now on the Peninsula. Such reality has prevented Koreans from envisioning Korean reunification, our further challenge as any realistic scenario. However, that mindset has begun to change this year significantly. 2014 will be remembered as a landmark year in Korea's quest for reunification, not just because my government prefers another reunification idea, but also because we awakened our compatriots as well as our neighbours and friends around the world. In this connection the key message of my

president is that reunification is thinkable and doable in a realistic manner. More than that, it benefits all Koreans, all neighbours and all the globe.

President Park spoke in Dresden, Germany, last March to put forward a vision of a unified Korea that will be nuclear weapons-free, a beacon for human rights and democracy, at peace with its neighbours, an engine of economic growth and a promoter of regional and global peace and prosperity. Towards North Korea, she laid out three key action agendas – an agenda for humanity, an agenda for more prosperity and an agenda for integration. These are partly drawn from the German experience: that we need the hearts and minds of the people was a real key to achieving reunification.

In particular, we are paying attention to the calamitous humanitarian situation of the North Korean people. Examples of this sad reality were recently reported by *The Economist*. The average North Korean man is eight centimetres shorter than his Southern cousins, his lifespan 12 years shorter. Such alarming differences between Koreans across the border are a problem that can cast a long shadow even after reunification.

Internationally, Korean reunification is no longer off limits to discussion, and the views of supporting reunification are on the rise. President Obama has backed the vision of a peaceful reunification on the basis of a democracy and the market economy. Even President Xi Jinping of China has frequently expressed support for the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula, as has President Putin of Russia.

Korea is also building a strong network of friends helping unification. This includes a joint advisory panel on unification with Germany, a forum with four central European countries called Visegrád Four on their transition experience, as well as strengthening cooperation with the United Kingdom, the EU, ASEAN, United Nations and MIKTA, a cross-border 'middle power' grouping of Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey and Australia. Last but not least, my government took the initiative of creating a group of 42 ambassadors both in Seoul and in Pyongyang – a credit to the DPRK – who are supporting Korean unification.

Ladies and gentlemen, Korea's challenges are not confined to the Peninsula. This is all the more so as Korean issues cannot be delinked from the wider regional context, so managing our neighbouring relations as well as issues between them are part and parcel of our equation. Here one fundamental problem is what I call the 'trust deficit'. This deep-rooted mistrust can easily escalate into real conflict – as you saw in a series of near collisions between military aircraft this year – so my government intends to foster a regional environment where a structure of mistrust and confrontation is replaced by that of trust and cooperation forming virtuous cycles throughout the region.

The key to this effort is to improve bilateral relations among all regional actors, including North Korea. In this regard, I'd like to share with you the achievements my government has made so far; the Korea–US alliance as well as the Korea–China strategic partnership are each at their best ever. In particular, our three countries have more converging interest on such strategic issues like the North Korea nuclear issue. In addition, Korea is now promoting various formats of a multilateral collaboration, this includes not only trilateral cooperation among Korea with Japan, but also among Korea, Japan, China,

Korea with China as well as South and North Korea and Russia. In the longer term, we could also look into the cooperation among South and North Korea and China.

In particular, Korea recently proposed the trilateral Korea, Japan, China foreign ministers meeting, and we hope that this outcome will lead to a trilateral summit meeting too. Restoring dialogue among these countries would ease the bilateral tensions and facilitate multilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia. All these efforts are closely related to Korea's initiative for a new regional multilateral dialogue mechanism called the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative, or NAPCI.

I do not wish to pre-empt your discussions which will immediately follow my speech, simply I remind you that despite all the troublesome 'jinnis', Northeast Asia is the only region lacking multilateral cooperation mechanism. This is a part of the world where a constant habit of dialogue and collaboration have yet to take shape. Certainly our idea was substantially inspired by the European experience, even now we are working in league with the EU, the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] and NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]. Thanks to such support, we successfully hosted the first-ever Track 1 NAPCI meeting in Seoul last October, and last week a regional conference on nuclear safety among nuclear regulators in Northeast Asia was also held in Seoul.

The security challenges faced by Korean diplomacy no longer emanate only from the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia. Now, many global issues affect us as well: the recent Ebola outbreak and threat of ISIL and foreign terrorist fighters are good cases in point. In this interconnected world no one is free from developments on the other side of the world. As a member of G20, our three key UN mechanisms, such as the UN Security Council, the Human Rights Council and the Economic and Social Council, Korea is playing an active role in an array of issues – non-proliferation, human rights and humanitarian assistance, counter-terrorism, climate change, development cooperation, trade liberalization and epidemic control.

Ladies and gentlemen, until now you have heard from me what daunting challenges Korea faces and will be facing on its journey to become a peaceful, prosperous and unified country serving the cause of the international community. We are aware that the road to reunification may well be rough and bumpy but our history shows we have prevailed over these challenges and have cultivated a wisdom of turning crises into opportunities.

As we charge ahead in this great journey, I know that the United Kingdom is a natural and perfect partner; our ongoing collaborations are living testament to this: in Sierra Leone to fight Ebola epidemic, crisis cooperation in such areas like Libya, the preventing sexual violence initiative (PSVI) and cyber security. All these joint efforts have been made possible by blood-forged collaboration during the Korean War, which will be symbolized by the new Korean War Memorial to be unveiled later this afternoon.

So let us stand together, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Korea, in our joint endeavours to respond to historic challenges of our times and to contribute to humanity's progress. Thank you very much.