

The President's News Conference With President Park Geun-hye of South Korea

May 7, 2013

President Obama. Good afternoon, everybody. Please have a seat.

Let me begin by saying it is a great pleasure to welcome President Park and our friends from the Republic of Korea. Madam President, we are greatly honored that you've chosen the United States as your first foreign visit. This, of course, reflects the deep friendship between our peoples and the great alliance between our nations, which is marking another milestone. I'm told that in Korea, a 60th birthday is a special celebration of life and longevity, a *hwangab*. [Laughter] Well, this year, we're marking the 60th anniversary of the defense treaty between our nations.

Yesterday President Park visited Arlington National Cemetery and our memorial to our Korean war veterans. Tonight she's hosting a dinner to pay tribute to the generation of American veterans who have served in the defense of South Korea. And tomorrow she'll address a joint session of Congress, an honor that is reserved for our closest of friends.

And in this sense, this visit also reflects South Korea's extraordinary progress over these six decades: from the ashes of war to one of the world's largest economies, from a recipient of foreign aid to a donor that now helps other nations develop. And of course, around the world, people are being swept up by Korean culture, the Korean Wave. And as I mentioned to President Park, my daughters have taught me a pretty good Gangnam style. [Laughter]

President Park, in your first months in office, South Korea has faced threats and provocations that would test any nation. Yet you've displayed calm and steady resolve that has defined your life. Like people around the world, those of us in the United States have also been inspired by your example as the first female President of South Korea. And today I've come to appreciate the leadership qualities for which you are known: your focus and discipline and straightforwardness. And I very much thank you for the progress that we've already made together.

Today we agreed to continue the implementation of our historic trade agreement, which is already yielding benefits for both our countries. On our side, we're selling more exports to Korea: more manufactured goods, more services, more agricultural products. Even as we have a long way to go, our automobile exports are up nearly 50 percent, and our Big Three—Ford, Chrysler, and GM—are selling more cars in Korea. And as President Park and I agreed to make sure that we continue to fully implement this agreement, we believe that it's going to make both of our economies more competitive. It will boost U.S. exports by some \$10 billion in support of tens of thousands of American jobs. And obviously, it will be creating jobs in Korea as they are able to continue to do extraordinary work in expanding their economy and moving it further and further up the value chain.

We agreed to continue the clean energy partnerships that help us to enhance our energy security and address climate change. Given the importance of a peaceful nuclear energy industry to South Korea, we recently agreed to extend the existing civilian nuclear agreement between our two countries, but we also emphasized in our discussions the need to continue to work diligently towards a new agreement. As I told the President, I believe that we can find a

way to support South Korea's energy and commercial needs even as we uphold our mutual commitments to prevent nuclear proliferation.

We agreed to continuing modernizing our security alliance. Guided by our joint vision, we're investing in the shared capabilities and technologies and missile defenses that allow our forces to operate and succeed together. We are on track for South Korea to assume operational control for the alliance in 2015. And we're determined to be fully prepared for any challenge or threat to our security. And obviously, that includes the threat from North Korea.

If Pyongyang thought its recent threats would drive a wedge between South Korea and the United States or somehow garner the North international respect, today is further evidence that North Korea has failed again. President Park and South Koreans have stood firm, with confidence and resolve. The United States and the Republic of Korea are as united as ever. And faced with new international sanctions, North Korea is more isolated than ever. In short, the days when North Korea could create a crisis and elicit concessions, those days are over.

Our two nations are prepared to engage with North Korea diplomatically and, over time, build trust. But as always—and as President Park has made clear—the burden is on Pyongyang to take meaningful steps to abide by its commitments and obligations, particularly the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

And we discussed that Pyongyang should take notice of events in countries like Burma, which, as it reforms, is seeing more trade and investment and diplomatic ties with the world, including the United States and South Korea.

For our part, we'll continue to coordinate closely with South Korea and with Japan. And I want to make clear: The United States is fully prepared and capable of defending ourselves and our allies with the full range of capabilities available, including the deterrence provided by our conventional and nuclear forces. As I said in Seoul last year, the commitment of the United States to the security of the Republic of Korea will never waver.

More broadly, we agreed to continue expanding our cooperation globally. In Afghanistan—where our troops serve together and where South Korea is a major donor of development assistance—we're on track to complete the transition to Afghan-led operations by the end of next year. We discussed Syria, where both our nations are working to strengthen the opposition and plan for a Syria without Bashar Asad. And I'm pleased that our two nations—and our Peace Corps—have agreed to expand our efforts to promote development around the world.

Finally, we're expanding the already strong ties between our young people. As an engineer by training, President Park knows the importance of education. Madam President, you've said—and I'm quoting you—"We live in an age where a single individual can raise the value of an entire nation." I could not agree more. So I'm pleased that we're renewing exchange programs that bring our students together. And as we pursue commonsense immigration reform here in the United States, we want to make it easier for foreign entrepreneurs and foreign graduate students from countries like Korea to stay and contribute to our country, just as so many Korean Americans already do.

So again, thank you, President Park, for making the United States your first foreign trip. In your Inaugural Address, you celebrated the can-do spirit of the Korean people. That is a spirit that we share. And after our meeting today, I'm confident that if our two nations continue to stand together, there's nothing we cannot do together.

So, Madam President, welcome to the United States.

President Park. Let me start by thanking President Obama for his invitation and his gracious hospitality.

During my meeting with the President today, I was able to have a heart-to-heart talk with him on a wide range of common interests. I found that the two of us have a broad common view about the vision and roles that should guide the Korea-U.S. alliance as it moves forward, and I was delighted to see this.

First of all, the President and I shared the view that the Korea-U.S. alliance has been faithfully carrying out its role as a bulwark of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia and that the alliance should continue to serve as a linchpin for peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in Asia. In this regard, I believe it is significant that the joint declaration on the 60th anniversary of our alliance we adopted spells out the direction that our comprehensive strategic alliance should take.

Next, the President and I reaffirmed that we will by no means tolerate North Korea's threats and provocations, which have recently been escalating further, and that such actions would only deepen North Korea's isolation. The President and I noted that it is important that we continue to strengthen our deterrence against North Korea's nuclear and conventional weapons threat and shared the view that in this respect, the transition of wartime operational control should also proceed in a way that strengthens our combined defense capabilities and preparations being made toward that way as well.

We also shared the view that realizing President Obama's vision of a world without nuclear weapons should start on the Korean Peninsula, and we stated that we would continue to strongly urge North Korea—in close concert with the other members of the six-party talks and the international community—to faithfully abide by its international obligations under the September 19 joint statements and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Korea and the U.S. will work jointly to induce North Korea to make the right choice through multifaceted efforts, including the implementation of the Korean Peninsula trust-building process that I had spelled out.

I take this opportunity to once again send a clear message: North Korea will not be able to survive if it only clings to developing its nuclear weapons at the expense of its people's happiness. Concurrently pursuing nuclear arsenals and economic development can by no means succeed.

This is the shared view of the other members of the six-party talks and the international community. However, should North Korea choose the path to becoming a responsible member of the community of nations, we are willing to provide assistance, together with the international community.

We also had meaningful discussions on the economy and ways to engage in substantive cooperation. The President and I welcome the fact that the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, which went into effect 1 year ago, is contributing to our shared prosperity. We also said we will make efforts to enable our people to better feel the benefits of our free trade agreement for them.

I highlighted the importance of securing high-skilled U.S. work visas for Korean citizens and asked for executive branch support, to the extent possible, to see to it that the relevant legislation is passed in the U.S. Congress.

Moreover, we arrived at the view that the Korea-U.S. civil nuclear energy cooperation agreement should be revised into an advanced and mutually beneficial successor agreement. We said we would do our best to conclude our negotiations as soon as possible.

The President and I also had in-depth discussions on ways to enhance our global partnership. First, we noted together that Northeast Asia needs to move beyond conflict and divisions and open a new era of peace and cooperation and that there would be synergy between President's Obama's policy of rebalancing to Asia and my initiative for peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia as we pursue peace and development in the region. We shared the view about playing the role of coarchitects to flesh out this vision.

Furthermore, we decided that the Korea-U.S. alliance should deal not just with challenges relating to the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia, but confronting the broader international community.

I am very delighted that I was able to build personal trust with President Obama through our summit meeting today and to have laid a framework for cooperation.

Thank you.

Syria/North Korea

President Obama. All right, we've got a couple of questions from each side, so we'll start with Stephen Collinson of AFP.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Does the United States have a core national security interest in stopping the slaughter in Syria or merely a strong moral desire to see the violence end? And at what point does the cost of not intervening in a more direct way than you have done so far outweigh the cost of doing so?

And if I may ask, President Park, President Obama's critics have warned that failing to act on perceived violations of U.S. red lines in Syria could embolden U.S. enemies elsewhere, including in North Korea. Are you convinced that Kim Jong Un has taken the U.S. and South Korean warnings seriously, and do you see the withdrawal of two missiles from a test site as a sign that he's willing to deescalate the situation?

President Obama. Well, Stephen, I think that we have both a moral obligation and a national security interest in, A, ending the slaughter in Syria, but, B, also ensuring that we've got a stable Syria that is representative of all the Syrian people and is not creating chaos for its neighbors. And that's why for the last 2 years, we have been active in trying to ensure that Bashar Asad exits the stage and that we can begin a political transition process.

That's the reason why we've invested so much in humanitarian aid. That's the reason why we are so invested in helping the opposition and why we've mobilized the international community to isolate Syria. That's why we are now providing nonlethal assistance to the opposition, and that's why we're going to continue to do the work that we need to do.

And in terms of the costs and the benefits, I think there'd be severe costs in doing nothing. That's why we're not doing nothing. That's why we are actively invested in the process. If what you're asking is, are there continuing reevaluations about what we do, what actions we take in conjunction with other international partners to optimize the day when—or to hasten the day when we can see a better situation in Syria, we've been doing that all along and we'll continue to do that.

I think that, understandably, there is a desire for easy answers. That's not the situation there. And my job is to constantly measure our very real and legitimate humanitarian and national security interests in Syria, but measuring those against my bottom line, which is what's in the best interest of America's security and making sure that I'm making decisions not based on a hope and a prayer, but on hard-headed analysis in terms of what will actually make us safer and stabilize the region.

I would note—not to answer the question that you lobbed over to President Park—that you suggested even in your question a perceived crossing of a red line. The operative word there, I guess, Stephen, is "perceived." And what I've said is that we have evidence that there has been the use of chemical weapons inside of Syria, but I don't make decisions based on "perceived." And I can't organize international coalitions around "perceived." We've tried that in the past, by the way, and it didn't work out well.

So we want to make sure that we have the best analysis possible. We want to make sure that we are acting deliberately. But I would just point out that there have been several instances during the course of my Presidency where I said I was going to do something, and it ended up getting done. And there were times when there were folks on the sidelines wondering why hasn't it happened yet and what's going on and why didn't it go on tomorrow? But in the end, whether it's bin Laden or Qaddafi, if we say we're taking a position, I would think at this point the international community has a pretty good sense that we typically follow through on our commitments.

President Park. With regard to actions towards Syria, what kind of message would that communicate to North Korea? That was the question. And recently, North Korea seems to be deescalating its threats and provocations. What seems to be behind that? You asked these two questions. In fact, North Korea is isolated at the moment, so it's hard to find anyone that could really accurately fathom the situation in North Korea. Its actions are all so very unpredictable. Hence, whether the Syrian situation would have an impact is hard to say for sure.

Why is North Korea appearing to deescalate its threats and provocations? There's no knowing for sure. But what is clear and what I believe for sure is that the international community with regard to North Korea's bad behavior, its provocations, must speak with one voice, a firm message, and consistently send a firm message that they will not stand and that North Korea's actions in breach of international norms will be met with so-and-so sanctions and measures by the international community. At the same time, if it goes along the right way, there will be so-and-so reward. So if we consistently send that message to North Korea, I feel that North Korea will be left with no choice but to change.

And instead of just hoping to see North Korea change, the international community must also consistently send that message with one voice to tell them and communicate to them that they have no choice but to change and to shape an environment where they are left with no choice but to make the strategic decision to change. And I think that's the effective and important way.

North Korea/International Diplomatic Efforts

Q. My question goes to President Park. You just mentioned that North Korea—in order to induce North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons, what is most important is the concerted actions of the international community. With regard to this, during your meeting with President Obama today, I would like to ask what was said and the views that you shared. And

with regard to this, what Russia and China—the role that they're playing in terms of inducing North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons, how do you feel about that?

My next question is to President Obama. Regarding the young leader of North Korea, Kim Jong Un, I would appreciate your views about the leader of North Korea. And if you were to send a message to him today, what kind of message would you send to him?

President Park. With regard to the North Korea issue, Korea and the United States, as well as the international community, the ultimate objective that all of us should be adopting is for North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons and to induce it to become a responsible member of the international community. This serves the interest of peace on the Korean Peninsula and the world, and it also serves the interest of North Korea's own development as well. That is my view.

And so in order to encourage North Korea to walk that path and change its perceptions, we have to work in concert. And in this regard, China's role, China's influence can be extensive, so if—so China taking part in these endeavors is important. And we shared views on that.

With regard to China and Russia's stance, I believe that China and Russia—not to mention the international community, of course—share the need for a denuclearized Korean Peninsula and are cooperating closely to induce North Korea to take the right path. In the case of China, with regard to North Korea's missile fire and nuclear testing, China has taken an active part in adopting U.N. Security Council resolutions and is faithfully implementing those resolutions.

And with regard to Russia, Russia is also firmly committed to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. And with regard to the adoption of U.N. Security Council resolutions on North Korea, it has been very active in supporting them. And they've also sent a very—and they've also worked very hard to include a stern message to North Korea in the joint statement of the G-8 Foreign Ministers meeting. Such constructive efforts on the part of China and Russia are vital to sending a unified message to North Korea that their nuclear weapons will not stand, and encouraging and urging North Korea to make the right decision.

President Obama. Obviously, I don't know Kim Jong Un personally. I haven't had a conversation with him, can't really give you an opinion about his personal characteristics. What we do know is the actions that he's taken that have been provocative and seem to pursue a dead end.

And I want to emphasize, President Park and myself very much share the view that we are going to maintain a strong deterrent capability, that we're not going to reward provocative behavior. But we remain open to the prospect of North Korea taking a peaceful path of denuclearization, abiding by international commitments, rejoining the international community, and seeing a gradual progression in which both security and prosperity for the people of North Korea can be achieved.

If what North Korea has been doing has not resulted in a strong, prosperous nation, then now is a good time for Kim Jong Un to evaluate that history and take a different path. And I think that, should he choose to take a different path, not only President Park and myself would welcome it, but the international community as a whole would welcome it.

And I think that China and Russia and Japan and other key players that have been participants in six-party talks have made that clear. But there's going to have to be changes in

behavior. And we have an expression in English: Don't worry about what I say; watch what I do. And we're—so far at least, we haven't seen actions on the part of the North Koreans that would indicate they're prepared to move in a different direction.

Christi Parsons [Chicago Tribune].

Sexual Assault in the U.S. Armed Forces/North Korea

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. The Pentagon said today that there may be as many as 70 sexual assaults a day in the military—up by 35 percent during your term in office—and also that many sexual assaults may not be reported, in fact. Given what we know about an Air Force officer in charge of preventing sexual assault recently being charged with sexual assault and also the recent cases of a couple of Air Force generals who've set aside convictions of instances of sexual assault, can you speak to the culture in the U.S. military that may be at play here and talk about your response to that and what you can do going forward to improve things?

And if I may, President Park, I would ask you, yesterday you said that if North Korea does not change its behavior, we will make them pay. I wondered if you could elaborate on that comment a little bit. Thank you.

President Obama. Well, let's start with the principle that sexual assault is an outrage; it is a crime. That's true for society at large. And if it's happening inside our military, then whoever carries it out is betraying the uniform that they're wearing. And they may consider themselves patriots, but when you engage in this kind of behavior, that's not patriotic, it's a crime. And we have to do everything we can to root this out.

Now, this is not a new phenomenon. One of the things that we've been trying to do is create a structure in which we're starting to get accurate reporting. And up and down the chain, we are seeing a process, a system of accountability and transparency so that we can root this out completely.

And this is a discussion that I had with Secretary Panetta. He had begun the process of moving this forward. But I have directly spoken to Secretary Hagel already today and indicating to him that we're going to have to not just step up our game, we have to exponentially step up our game, to go at this thing hard.

And for those who are in uniform who have experienced sexual assault, I want them to hear directly from their Commander in Chief that I've got their backs. I will support them. And we're not going to tolerate this stuff, and there will be accountability. If people have engaged in this behavior, they should be prosecuted.

And anybody in the military who has knowledge of this stuff should understand this is not who we are. This is not what the U.S. military is about. And it dishonors the vast majority of men and women in uniform who carry out their responsibilities and obligations with honor and dignity and incredible courage every single day.

So bottom line is, I have no tolerance for this. I have communicated this to the Secretary of Defense. We're going to communicate this again to folks up and down the chain in areas of authority, and I expect consequences.

So I don't want just more speeches or awareness programs or training, but ultimately, folks look the other way. If we find out somebody is engaging in this stuff, they've got to be held accountable: prosecuted, stripped of their positions, court-martialed, fired, dishonorably discharged. Period. It's not acceptable.

President Park. Regarding North Korea's provocations and bad behavior, we will make them pay. With regard to that, for instance, what I meant was that if they engage in military provocations and harm the lives of our people and the safety of our people, then naturally, as a President who gives the top priority to ensuring the safety of our people, it is something that we can't just pass over.

So if North Korea engages in provocations, I will fully trust the judgment of our military. So if our military makes a judgment which they feel is the right thing, then they should act accordingly. And this is the instruction that I had made.

And North Korea has to pay a price when it comes not only with regard to provocations, but also with regard to the recent Kaesong industrial complex issue, where, based on agreements between the two sides, companies had believed in the agreement that was made and actually went to invest in the Kaesong industrial complex, but they suddenly completely dismiss and disregard this agreement overnight and deny various medical supplies and food supplies to Korean citizens left in that industrial complex, refusing to accept our request to allow in those supplies, which is what prompted us to withdraw all of our citizens from that park. This situation unfolded in the full view of the international community.

So who would invest, not to mention Korean companies, but also companies of other countries, who would invest in North Korea in a place that shows such flagrant disregard for agreements, and how could they, under those circumstances, actually pull off economic achievement? So I think, in this regard, they're actually paying the price for their own misdeeds.

North Korea/South Korea

Q. I am—[inaudible]—from Seoul newspaper. My question goes to President Obama. President Park has been talking about the Korean Peninsula trust-building process as a way to promote peace on Korean Peninsula. I wonder what you feel about this trust-building process on the Korean Peninsula?

President Obama. Well, as I indicated before, President Park's approach is very compatible with my approach and the approach that we have been taking together for several years now. And as I understand it, the key is that we will be prepared for a deterrence that we will respond to aggression, that we will not reward provocative actions, but that we will maintain an openness to an engagement process when we see North Korea taking steps that would indicate that it is following a different path. And that's exactly the right approach.

All of us would benefit from a North Korea that transformed itself. Certainly, the people of North Korea would benefit. South Korea would be even stronger in a less tense environment on the Peninsula. All the surrounding neighbors would welcome such a transition, such a transformation. But I don't think either President Park or I are naive about the difficulties of that taking place. And we've got to see action before we can have confidence that that, in fact, is the path that North Korea intends to take.

But the one thing I want to emphasize just based on the excellent meetings and consultation that we had today, as well as watching President Park over the last several months dealing with the provocative escalations that have been taking place in North Korea, what I'm very confident about is, President Park is tough. I think she has a very clear, realistic view of the situation, but she also has the wisdom to believe that conflict is not inevitable and is not preferable. And that's true on the Korean Peninsula. That's true around the world.

And we very much appreciate her visit and look forward to excellent cooperation not only on this issue, but on the more positive issues of economic and commercial ties between our two countries, educational exchanges, work on energy, climate change, helping other countries develop.

I've had a wonderful time every time I've visited the Republic of Korea. And what is clear is that the Republic of Korea is one of the great success stories of our lifetime. And the Republic of Korea's leadership around the globe will be increasingly important. And what underpins that in part has been the extraordinary history of the alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea. And we want to make sure that that remains a strong foundation for progress in the future.

So thank you so much, Madam President.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 1:44 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Bashar al-Asad of Syria; Supreme Commander Kim Jong Un of North Korea; and former Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta. A reporter referred to Lt. Col. Jeffrey Krusinski, USAF, chief, Air Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program; Lt. Gen. Susan J. Helms, USAF, commander, U.S. Strategic Command's Joint Functional Component Command for Space and 14th Air Force; and Lt. Gen. Craig A. Franklin, USAF, commander, 3d Air Force and 17th Expeditionary Air Force. President Park and some reporters spoke in Korean, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

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