

Luncheon Remarks by Myung Hwan Yu
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First of all I would like to say that the timing of today's conference on "North Korea in 2012" is very appropriate. The year 2011 will be a crucial one for both Koreas, mainly because of their domestic political dynamics.

Furthermore, the attendance of so many distinguished scholars and guests, including the former Speaker of the National Assembly, Dr. Hyung-Oh Kim, speaks to the importance of the topic of this conference.

I consider it a great honor to be able to speak here, and would like to thank the staff of APARC and its director, Dr. Gi-Wook Shin, for their hard work in preparing this conference.

(The meaning behind 2012)

It seems that North Korea has been preparing for the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Great Leader and Eternal President Kim Il-sung's birth, making 2012 the target year in which the idol worship of the Kim family and the third generation succession will be complete.

North Korea has most likely planned a natural succession to the third generation at the time when Chairman Kim Jong-il turns seventy and Kim Jong-un turns thirty. While it cannot be said for certain exactly how old Kim Jong-un is, the year 2012 may be declared the year that he turns 30.

If so, the sum of Kim Jong-il's and Kim Jong-un's age would be the same as the age of the Great Leader Kim Il-sung, who is still posthumously ruling the country. This would have significant symbolic value. Symbolism is a very effective tool for governing the people in a totalitarian and extremely closed country like North Korea.

In addition, 2012 will be a year in which South Korea, the U.S., China, and Russia face presidential elections and possible changes in administration.

North Korea may not have taken these factors into consideration when designating 2012 as the target year of becoming a “Mighty and Prosperous Nation.” But it is certain that there will be many changes in the international political environment in 2012.

While it is true that North Korea has been militarily and economically exerting a great deal of effort to prepare for becoming a “Mighty and Prosperous Nation,” it seems there is little progress it can display to its citizens. Not only have there been no improvements on the economic front, but complaints by North Korean citizens have heightened in response to the currency reforms of the autumn of 2009, which are known to have been a complete and devastating failure.

Heir apparent Kim Jong-un has promised “white rice and meat soup” to North Korea’s citizens by 2012, but his grandfather made the same promise a long time ago. Looking at the current state of economic affairs in North Korea, Kim Jong-un’s promise is also unlikely to be fulfilled.

Consequently, North Korea is trying to attribute its chronic economic failure to external causes. For its hardships and failed economy, the North blames the hostile policies of South Korea and the United States, as well as the economic sanctions of the international community, which were levied in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions.

On the other hand, in order to claim that it has already achieved some of its “Mighty and Prosperous Nation” goals, the Kim Jong-il regime actively advertises to its public the success of the second nuclear test and insists to the international community that it is now a nuclear power state. North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs were probably meant to serve also a symbolic purpose, so as to maintain Kim’s legitimacy to rule.

North Korea most likely initiated its nuclear program in the late 50s, soon after the Korean War was ended. It is possible, too, that North Korea saw its nuclear program as a means of elevating the international stature of Kim Il-sung and his regime, as he wanted to become a leader of the non-aligned movement at that time.

Consequently the weight North Korea places on its nuclear program as a way of consolidating idolization of Kim Il-sung's family and "Juche Ideology" through the "Military First Policy" should be also taken into consideration.

Given these circumstances, it is unlikely that North Korea will give up its nuclear program—or make any other bold compromise that might be seen as capitulation—before it declares that it has achieved its goal of becoming a "Mighty and Prosperous Nation." The continuation of its nuclear and missile program and its alleged claim of success, to their minds, will play a critical role in solidifying the new Kim Jong-un regime.

During the last 20 years of negotiation with the United States and other parties, North Korea continued to lie about and conceal its nuclear programs. Whenever it found a good excuse to do so, it openly developed and tested missiles and nuclear devices to make it a *fait accompli*. While continuing to negotiate under the banner of the Six Party Talks, the North conducted several long-range missile tests and two nuclear tests.

And now, as Dr. Hecker revealed last November, North Korea boastfully acknowledged that it is currently operating a modern uranium enrichment facility in the Yongbyon area after a decade-long official denial of its existence. The extent and sophistication of its centrifuge program demonstrate how frustrating it is to negotiate with a regime that utterly disregards the rules and norms of international community.

It is time for all concerned to take more aggressive and intrusive steps to shut down Pyongyang's nuclear program. It is a direct threat to the security of Northeast Asia as a whole, and to the United States as well. The ongoing construction of LWR on its own in the Yongbyon area will also pose a serious safety concern to neighboring countries. Some can argue that nuclear safety will be a more urgent issue than nuclear weaponry.

The uranium enrichment program of North Korea is a clear breach of UN Security Council Resolution 1718, which was adopted unanimously in 2006 after nuclear tests by North Korea.

(Lee Administration's North Korea Policy)

During his election campaign, President Lee made it clear that the continued pursuit of nuclear programs by North Korea and the normalization of North-South relations are not compatible.

It would be fruitless for North Korea to seek economic assistance from the South while at the same time continuing to develop nuclear weapons.

North Korea should accept the change in the political climate of South Korea and consider its implications rather than ignoring it. In the 2007 presidential election President Lee won in a landslide victory.

President Lee also promised during the campaign that he would repair South Korea's damaged relationship with the United States. Under the oversight of Lee's predecessors, the political confidence that the two nations had in each other was tarnished, apparently because of the perception gap on the threat of North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

At the outset of the Lee Administration, agreeing on the threat posed by the nuclear weapon program was a major diplomatic agenda item between the U.S. and South Korea.

Economic assistance to North Korea during ten years of the two previous South Korean administrations amounted to approximately \$7 billion. And it is likely that a large portion of this assistance went into funding nuclear weapon and missile development programs.

Of course, a majority of the South Korean population supports genuine humanitarian assistance to, and a more active engagement policy with, North Korea. But large-scale economic assistance without transparency and without conditions cannot be considered solely humanitarian.

The Lee administration's "co-existence and co-prosperity policy" is also aimed at reconciliation and cooperation with North Korea. There has never been a denial that there should be dialogue between North and South.

However, dialogue must be aimed at implementing measures to promote reconciliation between the two countries. It should not be talk for the sake of talks, nor should it be used as a means of granting North Korea the time it needs to develop missiles and nuclear weapons.

The North did not show any interest in talking to the South about its nuclear programs when the Lee Administration identified the nuclear issue as a priority topic to be discussed before committing to any large-scale economic assistance.

As a matter of policy, North Korea will discuss economic cooperation issues only with South Korea, and military or security issues only with the United States. The fundamental reason for the tensions between North and South is this absurd posture of North Korea.

Some argue that if the current administration had continued its predecessor's lavish economic assistance to North Korea, the inter-Korean relationship would be better today. That may be true, but that would not make it a correct policy choice. South Korea is a democracy, and it cannot pursue a policy that its people do not support.

The way for North and South Korea to coexist peacefully and co-prosper is for North Korea to surrender its nuclear weapons program and speed up economic cooperation with the South to rehabilitate its economy.

South Korea's capital and technology, coupled with North Korea's labor force, could provide ample opportunities to expand the Korean market to Far Eastern Siberia and Central Asia. In fact, the South Korean government has proposed to the Russian government the construction of gas pipelines and railroads in North Korea connected to the South.

The Russian government took the proposal to the North Korean government, but North Korea has yet to respond to this lucrative suggestion.

At the beginning of the Lee administration, we hoped that North Korea would cooperate in creating a new paradigm for North-South dialogue. However, North Korea has refused such cooperation and has tried to pressure the South Korean

government to change its policy toward the North by means of intimidation, threats, and military provocations.

In March 2010, North Korea sent a submarine into South Korean waters and fired a torpedo to sink the corvette *Cheonan*, killing 46 sailors. And in November, North Korean artillery shelled Yeonpyung Island indiscriminately, killing two Marines and two civilians.

Such reckless brinksmanship will not change South Korea's policy toward the North, and will further isolate North Korea from the international community. In the end, the North's actions will only lead to more extreme economic difficulties for the regime. There must be an end to this vicious cycle.

Such a miscalculation on the part of North Korea might be partly due to the regime's lack of flexibility and to the myopic calculation of the regime's hardcore leadership. Or it may be that the military tension between North and South was necessary for Kim Jong-un to win the respect of the military—a prerequisite to power succession.

Furthermore, it is possible that North Korea maintains its reckless policy toward South Korea because it doesn't understand the diversity and resilience of democracy.

On the other hand, in South Korea, a substantive change in perception regarding North Korea was brought about by the Sunshine Policy. The increase in exchanges between people and exposure to the reality of North Korea has decreased the fear of a military assault by the North. Before the Sunshine Policy took effect, there was much concern about complacency regarding national security.

North Korea still poses a significant military threat with both conventional and non-conventional weapon capabilities. If North Korea develops a delivery technology for its nuclear weapons, the military threat to South Korea and to the region will be extremely high.

Nevertheless, many people on the street in South Korea do not seem to regard the North Korean nuclear program as a serious security threat to them. That is

one of the reasons for the lack of consensus in the South about its North Korea policy.

Unfortunately, it is still unclear how much sacrifice the South Korean citizens are willing to make in order to stop North Korea's nuclear weapon program. The task ahead for the Lee Administration—namely, to build a domestic consensus—is enormous.

(North-South Relations and Surrounding Major Powers)

The South Korean government desires to solve all issues that have arisen as a result of the division, including political and military ones, through direct dialogue and negotiations with the North. Of course, the North also claims that it desires to solve the issues through the principle it calls “our nation by ourselves.”

But in fact, the North has consistently refused to discuss long-term military and security issues with its neighbor to the south.

This pattern of behavior derives from the North's denial of the South Korean government's legitimacy. During the Cold War era, North Korea considered the South Korean government a puppet government set up by the United States.

Of course, today this is an absurd, anachronistic view, but North Korea is not yet free from such Cold War era misperceptions.

North Korea continues to claim that the Korean War was fought against the United States to liberate South Korea from occupation. Therefore, it argues the peace treaty that would terminate a state of war must be signed with the United States.

This is a serious distortion of history. The United States Army left the Korean Peninsula before the Korean War started, and left behind only a small corps of military advisers.

During the last 20 years of nuclear negotiation, North Korea has never been serious about discussing nuclear issues with the South. The North has always insisted that nuclear issues should be negotiated solely with the United States.

It also claimed that in order to defend itself from the threat posed by the U.S., it needed to develop nuclear weapons. However, if the North does not attack South Korea militarily, the U.S. will not intervene in the Korean Peninsula.

The division of the Korean Peninsula is an unmistakable result of the annexation of Korea by Japan and the ensuing East-West confrontation during the Cold War. The geopolitical situation of the Korean Peninsula is of continuing interest to the surrounding major powers.

Thus, maintaining peace and stability in the peninsula will not be possible without the understanding and cooperation of those powers. In other words, there is a need to ensure that the interests of the neighboring states do not clash with one another.

But North Korea's nuclear program is a tangible threat to the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula, since it has the potential to shake up the security dynamics of the region as a whole.

Also, maintaining peace and stability in the region will be very difficult if North and South Korea's neighbors view their bilateral or multilateral relationships as a zero-sum game, as was the perception in the past.

There will be a greater opportunity to create win-win relationships for the neighboring states of the Korean Peninsula by eliminating the North Korean nuclear program.

South Korea is not against a nuclear-free North Korea developing close relations with the United States and Japan. Nor does it view the strengthening of the ROK-U.S. relationship as a hindrance to the development of ROK-China or ROK-Russia relationships.

(Conclusion)

With the public confirmation of a power succession to Kim Jong-un, the North recently reasserted the old “Self-Reliance” policy. It seemed to be aimed at tightening the regime’s internal grip over the power structure with a view to solidifying the succession process.

However, that policy failed under Kim Jong-un’s grandfather, and it has no chance of success in this era of globalization.

Rather, in bringing their people out of starvation through reform and an open-door policy, the North Korean regime would have a better chance of survival. North Korea now needs even more economic support from its neighboring states, mainly from the South, in order to ensure a smooth power succession to the third generation.

So, North Korea is at a crossroads. If it continues to keep the door closed, and if it continues to develop nuclear weapons, there will be no outside help, which North Korea badly needs to feed its people. The starved citizens will no longer follow their leader, as nuclear weapons cannot feed them.

North Korea has been asserting that it had to develop nuclear deterrence to defend itself against outside threats, but on the contrary, the continuation of its nuclear weapons program will only invite more pressure from the outside and ultimately undermine the regime.

North Korea must understand that it cannot cheat the international community anymore and muddle through with its nuclear program. The bright path is still open for it to take. We all agree that time is not on their side.

Thus, we all hope that the year 2012 will be a meaningful centenary for North Korea to take the right path and become a responsible member of the international community. (End)