

The Development Direction of the Future  
ROK-US Alliance

Presentation to the Korea Foundation  
Seoul, Korea

by

General (Retired) B. B. Bell

3 December 2010

Minister Lee, Ambassador Lee, Ambassador Kim, Ambassador Sun, Dr. Ju, International Ambassadors, and invited guests. Thank you so much for inviting me to speak here this morning on the current state and future of the Republic of Korea -- United States Security Alliance. First, it's really wonderful to be back in Korea. Due to serious illnesses by both my wife and my son, I have been unable to return to your marvelous land since my retirement from the military in the summer of 2008. However, with their medical issues much improved, I'm delighted to be here. I would also like to remind everyone that the views I will express here today are my own personal views as a private American citizen, and not necessarily the views or policies of the United States Government.

Wow, what a country -- the Republic of Korea. The twelfth largest economy in the world. Prosperous, while much of the rest of the world struggles with recession and financial crisis. A model democracy with peaceful elections and peaceful changes of governmental leadership power. A country that protects individual freedoms across cultural, religious and ethnic lines. A country that reaches out to help the world, including deployments of military assistance teams and individuals to fourteen of the world's countries, including a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan, peacekeeping units in Lebanon and Haiti, and a naval presence in the waters off Somalia, assisting the international community in combating piracy.

What a country--From the ashes of war to one of the most modern and prosperous countries in the history of this planet Earth. The Korean people are a very special people, and the Republic of Korea is a very special place.

In spite of all these marvelous advances, sadly the Republic of Korea remains divided, 57 years after the signing of the Armistice Agreement. And, great challenges and indeed opportunities remain in the continuing and inevitable -- that's right inevitable -- march to reunification and lasting peace on the Korean peninsula. Let me talk a bit about these challenges and opportunities.

When I served in Korea between the years 2006 and 2008, I thought the issues with north Korea and with the Alliance were very daunting. North Korea exploded their first nuclear weapon and repeatedly launched missiles to test Alliance resolve. North Korean challenges and incursions along the Northern Limit Line were frequent and very disturbing. North's Korea's rhetoric was offensive and threatening with almost daily proclamations about bringing a firestorm onto the South.

Meanwhile, in the south many Korean citizens were exhibiting their displeasure with the United States and the Alliance. Almost daily demonstrations proclaiming that United States forces were carelessly polluting the land. Demonstrations proclaiming that United States beef was infecting the population. Demonstrations proclaiming that U.S. Forces personnel were drunken, drug crazed renegades.

Significant, and in my view as the then CFC Commander, there was a precipitous directed downsizing of Republic of Korea military forces, in the face of a very threatening north Korean army. Also, there was pressure from Washington to further downsize the number of U.S. military personnel and units stationed on the peninsula.

Disagreement between Washington and Seoul regarding security policy and the future of the Alliance was common and frequent. Demonstrations in Seoul proclaimed that the United States Forces should go home.

Those were very complicated days for us all, and as Combined Forces Commander, I worried about them every day, and I worried about them a great deal. Nonetheless in looking with clear eyes at the situation in the region today -- just over two years later -- I suppose I could conclude that the days of my service here were perhaps "the good old days."

Today, while many of the challenges between the ROK and the US have been or are being resolved, the challenges put forth by the north have been growing, and growing significantly. I do not need to restate current events to this group. All of you know what is going on with provocations and attacks on ROK sovereignty by the north, ranging from the sinking of the Cheonan and the loss of 46 sailors, to the shelling of Yeon Pyeong Island, with the loss of both Marines and innocent civilians. We all know about the north's secret Highly Enriched Uranium program which was clearly ongoing clandestinely at the same time as the nuclear disarmament agreement coming out of the six party talks process.

We know about what surely must have been north Korean assistance to the Syrian development of a probable weapon's grade plutonium producing reactor, which thankfully was bombed and destroyed by the Israelis.

This secret nuclear proliferation in violation of international sanctions was also ongoing during the supposed good days of engagement and peaceful coexistence between the north and South.

We know about the Taepodong two and three stage missile development program. We know about north Korea's long standing military first policy, a policy which keeps a huge military capability, far beyond any realistic defense needs of the regime, while denying the civilian population the basic necessities of wellness, happiness, and even life.

Indeed, we all know that north Korea is a belligerent rogue aberration of history, which has repeatedly proven that it cannot be trusted, and with whom good faith negotiations are simply not possible. I will repeat myself. In the current environment and with the continuing leadership of Kim, Jung Il, good faith negotiations are simply not possible with north Korea.

The north's strategy is clear, and it has been repeatedly and predictably demonstrated over the past decades -- they conduct provocations, short of general war, until there is a crisis environment, thus in their view compelling South Korea and the United States to come to the negotiating table to defuse the situation and grant the north concessions. This strategy of brinksmanship can no longer be tolerated and can no longer be rewarded. The north has gone too far -- way too far. Too many south Korean lives have been lost. Not only is the sovereignty of the Republic of Korea being tested and violated by the north, but the very viability and credibility of the Alliance is on the line.

It is time for all nations in the region, including China, to wake up to the realities of north Korea. Sixteen years of failed diplomacy since the signing of the Framework Agreement have resulted in a nuclear armed north Korea, more belligerent than at any time since the signing of the Armistice. It is time to change course.

It is time to recognize the threat that north Korea poses to the entire region, and yes to the world. It is time to confront and contain north Korea with military might, total economic sanctions, and resolute diplomacy.

Towards this end, I was heartened by and thankful for the proclamations made by Republic of Korea President Lee, Myung Bak this past Monday in his address to the nation. I applaud President Lee's statement that, and I quote, "If the North commits any additional provocations against the South, we will make sure that it pays a dear price without fail."

I can also state that from my discussions here in Seoul, it is clear that the Republic of Korea and United States military and civilian leaders are working well together to ensure that the sovereignty and security of South Korea is preserved, and that appropriate responses to north Korea provocations and aggression are planned and ready for execution. The cooperation and coordination is very impressive, and South Korean citizens should be comforted by that.

From my perspective, I believe that South Korea and the United States should immediately adopt the following policies regarding relations with north Korea: Again, these are my views alone and I state them as a private American citizen.

First, announce that as long as Kim, Jung Il remains in power in the north, all efforts towards engagement, negotiations, and reconciliation are suspended. Now is the time for the Alliance to show strength, and it must not negotiate or compromise with an individual who since March of this year has ruthlessly and without warning killed dozens of South Korean citizens -- 46 sailors, 2 marines, and 2

innocent civilians, while grievously wounding dozens more. Negotiations are simply not possible with a leader who never abides by the agreements he makes.

Next, announce and enforce a policy of containment and economic embargo. The Alliance must show strength and work with all other parties in the region, the United Nations, and the World Community to contain and further isolate the north. Bargaining with north Korea in hopes that they will end their belligerency in exchange for economic assistance or other concessions is misguided and indeed preposterous.

Additionally, it is important for South Korea to fully recognize that the citizens of the north are not hearing the truth about the regime of Kim Jung il, nor are they hearing the truth about the potential for their own economic advancement and personal wellness which would result from a reunified, free and democratic Korea. As such, South Korea should immediately and without hesitation initiate a long term strategic communications campaign aimed at reaching all north Korean citizens. The campaign should be designed to provide the citizens of the north with the truth about their own government's threat to regional peace, and the opportunities for freedom, economic growth, quality of life, and wellness that wait for them in a reunified Korea.

Next, we must enforce the Proliferation Security Initiative -- the PSI -- vigorously as it relates to north Korea. We must prevent the north from internationally dealing in nuclear weapons, nuclear weapons technology, and nuclear weapon delivery systems. As long as Kim, Jung II is in power they will continue to attempt to do this, and they must be stopped.

Also, the Allies must for now abandon the six party talks process.

This process has failed and any notion that north Korea might return to the talks and negotiate in good faith is absurd. Their proven track record demonstrates that they will not. As long as Kim, Jung il is in power, the six party talks process is dead, and both the United States and the Republic of Korea should give the talks an official funeral.

Once there is a change of leadership in the north and a new leader solidifies power, the five parties of the six party process should reengage with him to determine north Korean intentions and his desire for meaningful negotiations. Then and only then is there a possibility to restart the Six Party Talk process. It would be appropriate for the five parties -- the United States, the Republic of Korea, Japan, China, and Russia -- to meet now and agree on a united view to contain north Korea; but any notion of bringing north Korea back into a Six Party talk format should not be permitted at this time.

Last, the allies should clearly reestablish with the north and other regional players that reunification is the only right and proper course for the Korean people. A permanent division of the two Koreas is unacceptable. Anything that furthers the notion of a permanent division, such as recognizing north Korea as a separate nation or signing a peace treaty with them outside the provisions of the Armistice Agreement, will not be discussed by either the United States or the Republic of Korea. A reunified democratic nation of one Korean people is the right answer for northeast Asia, and it can help lead the region and the world to a more permanent situation of peace and stability. This must be our most outspoken and well articulated policy.

In the context of confronting the north and as the former CFC Commander, I believe it is prudent for the Republic of Korea to state clearly that it is terminating all efforts to downsize the South Korean Army. Additionally, the ROK should strengthen the South Korean Marine Corps with modern and mobile command and control systems. It should improve the capability of South Korean Warplanes to deliver precision munitions.

The ROK should procure ground based missile defense systems and fully integrate them with United States missile defense capability. South Korea should vigorously train and exercise its forces in both joint and combined exercises to respond immediately and resolutely to further north Korean provocations.

And, while Combined Forces Command is fully prepared to conduct combat operations to defeat north Korea in a large general war, South Korea needs its own standing joint task force headquarters for smaller scale strike missions to be conducted principally by South Korean forces. As such, South Korea should form, equip, and train a Standing Joint Task Force Headquarters capable of synchronizing selected combat power from all the South Korean military services, and conducting limited but powerful retaliatory strike missions in response to north Korean military provocations and aggression.

For its part, the United States should immediately return an Army attack helicopter battalion to South Korea. This would be the quickest and most effective way to strengthen the U.S. military contribution in defense of the ROK, while sending a powerful Alliance message to Pyongyang.

Land exercises between the ROK and U.S. should increasingly include U.S. combat units deployed from the United States, and U.S. forward bases in the region. Naval exercises, including U.S. carriers, should be ramped up and conducted more frequently. An additional U.S. Air Force combat fighter squadron could be forward deployed to Korea, while additional elements of U.S. bomber capability should be forward deployed in the region.

The alliance must quickly show strength and resolution to the north, and we must do it now -- and it has to be more than just words and a single naval exercise in the West Sea.

Also, the alliance must stop threatening retaliation -- unless it means it. Again, I am heartened by President Lee's speech this past Monday. Frankly, the north likely sees little credibility in past statements that there will be military retaliation to further provocations, when indeed there have been none. While we all know that military retaliation can potentially lead to uncontrolled escalation and a deepening military crisis; it is nonetheless my sense that asymmetric military retaliation to north Korean aggression is needed and necessary in the future.

This year alone the north has attacked a sovereign South Korean warship and sovereign South Korean territory. Next time the north attacks, there should be an immediate and properly measured asymmetric retaliatory military strike by South Korea. Allowing north Korea to attack the south with no counter-strike consequences sends a message of weakness and timidity to Kim, Jung il. It clearly emboldens him to conduct further attacks in hopes of bringing the Allies to the bargaining table. For now the only way to respond to attacks by Kim, Jung il is with measured and focused steel and fire.

Now, let me address the ROK -- US Alliance itself. Where is it now and what should it look like in the future?

For the past ten years it is my assessment that the ROK - US Alliance has remained effective, but it has drifted. Efforts by the north to weaken the Alliance have had some effect. In the past, some South Korean citizens have even opined that the United States is a larger threat to peace in the region than is Kim, Jung il.

Meanwhile, many in the US have focused on radical Islamic jihad terrorism, and thus their minds have not been properly concentrated on northeast Asia, and our long standing friend and ally, the Republic of Korea.

However, the facts are clear. Northeast Asia is enormously important to the United States from both a security and economic perspective. Indeed America's economic strength depends more on this area of the world than on any other. Further, the long term Security Alliance between the ROK and the US has ensured peace on the Korean Peninsula since the signing of the Armistice, and provided an environment in which South Korea has been able to become a leading economic and social power on earth. This is good. It is very good.

Last, America owes South Korea our continuous support and strongest security guarantee. We all know that following World War II, America was not as clear and resolute as it should have been regarding our readiness to help defend South Korea.

Today, however, we are blood brothers and sisters, with a relationship forged in war and cemented over the years since the Armistice. Because of the renewed threat posed by north Korea, there can be no more drifting by either the United States or the Republic of Korea.

For America's part, I am certain that today we are committed to our brothers and sisters in Korea. I know America will be committed to our Korean partners tomorrow, and I am equally certain that America will remain committed to our Korean ally throughout this century and beyond. Koreans must know that the United States will remain here with you as your military and economic partner as long as we are welcome and wanted in your land.

In this context, I believe strongly that the military relationship must continue to evolve and mature. OPCON transfer makes sense to me, and it is right and proper for a sovereign nation like Korea to directly command her own forces in wartime. And let me assure everyone that after serving as CFC Commander for nearly two and a half years, I am totally convinced that the Generals and Admirals who lead your military are as fine a set of military leaders as exist in the world. They will lead your forces with dignity and honor, and should war break out they will lead your forces to certain victory.

While I support our leaders' decision to postpone OPCON transfer from 2012 until 2015, I do not believe that threats, intimidation or provocations from a rogue north Korea should stand in the way of executing the transfer. Once OPCON transfer is completed, the Korean people will see that the Alliance remains as strong as it has been since the Korean war, and that the United States will fight with you to overcome and defeat any attack on your sovereign land.

America will remain firmly committed to our security Alliance with Korea -- both before and after OPCON transfer -- as long as we are welcome and wanted in this land.

I am also very pleased that Korea is now strongly supporting the transition to three year family accompanied tours for U.S. forces personnel in Korea. Having our families with our troops here in Korea is right for our troops and it sends a powerful message of Alliance solidarity to the north Koreans, and other nations in the region. It is my fervent hope that the ROK will continue to encourage, support and assist the transition to normalcy for U.S. forces stationed here on the peninsula.

Let me conclude my presentation with some comments about China. We all understand the role and influence of China in this area of the world. We all appreciate China's economic strength. We recognize that China is America's second leading trading partner and clearly a key trading partner for South Korea. Furthermore, we all know that China keeps north Korea afloat with economic and diplomatic support and assistance.

Over the last several decades our diplomats have lectured us insisting that while China wants to maintain the status quo on the Korean peninsula with a divided Korea, China likewise would rein in north Korea and prevent it from instigating lethal provocations which might fully destabilize the peninsula and potentially lead to general war.

Over the last year, however, China has failed totally in reining in the north Koreans. While China says it wants to play an important role in securing peace and stability in northeast Asia, it has not acted responsibly in its relationship with north Korea.

Either the Chinese want to see a more provocative and aggressive north Korea to destabilize the region, or they are totally unable to control north Korea's behavior. In either case, China again has failed in its leadership role to help maintain peace and stability in northeast Asia. For whatever reason, China is allowing north Korea to execute its rogue nation assaults on the good people of South Korea.

China is culpable in the current crisis. In spite of both America's and the Republic of Korea's important economic ties with China, they have failed in their role as responsible leaders in the region. There is only one conclusion to be drawn regarding China. China is not being helpful in reining in Kim, Jung il and his rogue regime. Indeed, China may be encouraging north Korea's rogue behavior.

America, the Republic of Korea, and indeed Japan must take the lead to contain and punish north Korea. We must continue to ask for and seek China's assistance, but as long as China refuses to be helpful, the three partners -- the ROK, Japan and the United States, must deal with the situation as it presents itself. We must tell the Chinese clearly that we need and want their help, but that regardless of their decisions we must contain and indeed when necessary confront north Korea and, as such, we are implementing the policies I laid out earlier in this presentation.

If and when China decides to exercise mature leadership and responsible engagement with north Korea, we could reconsider our decisions. Until then, the north is simply too dangerous for us to sit idly by. We must take resolute action, again as I proposed earlier in this presentation.

Ladies and gentlemen, my granddaughter, Jin Hui Bell, is three and a half years old. She lives in Tampa, Florida with her mother and her father, who is my son. She is an incredibly wonderful little girl and a true Korean Princess. Some day she and I will walk hand in hand across what was once the demilitarized zone into a free and democratic north, fully reunited in peace with her brothers and sisters in the south. This is not a dream. This is my and your future. It is not natural for a people to remain divided. Reunification must and will come to pass in our lifetimes.

Members of the Korea Foundation and invited guests, thank you for inviting me to Korea and giving me the opportunity to speak before this most esteemed forum. For years the Korea Foundation has played an important role in providing forums for discussion of crucial foreign policy and security matters regarding the Korean Peninsula. Given the belligerent and unpredictable conduct of the rogue north Korean regime, it will be important for the Korea Foundation to continue to provide leadership and opportunity for examining key issues affecting the security of the Republic of Korea. Again, thank you. Kamsamnida. And what a pleasure it is for me to say one more time, Katchi Kapshida. I will be pleased to respond to your questions.