

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Moon Jae-in of South Korea and an Exchange With Reporters

April 11, 2019

President Trump. Thank you very much. It's a great honor to have President Moon of South Korea with us and a very, very great privilege to have Mrs. Kim. Thank you very much. Very much. We hope you enjoy your stay.

We are discussing many, many important things, including, obviously, North Korea, the relationships with North Korea. I had, in many respects, a very good meeting. We did not fulfill what we wanted to, but in many ways, we—certain things were agreed to.

My relationship is very good with, as you know, Chairman Kim. And I think that it will go on that way. We'll see. We'll probably know. But we'll be discussing that. We'll be discussing trade, military, military purchases. South Korea buys a great deal of equipment from us, especially military equipment.

[At this point, President Trump addressed an interpreter as follows.]

President Trump. Please, go ahead.

[The interpreter translated President Trump's remarks into Korean. President Trump then continued his remarks as follows.]

President Trump. We've just recently completed a new and very, very large trade deal with South Korea, and it's just now going into effect. And it will very much increase trade both ways between our two countries. It's a very important transaction and something we've been working on for quite a while. I know that, for years, they've been working on trying to redo it. And we have a new deal, and it's been, I think, very, very good for both our countries. Big difference.

President Moon and South Korea have agreed to purchase a tremendous amount of our military equipment, from jet fighters to missiles, to lots of other things. And we make the finest equipment in the world by far, and we appreciate the purchase. It's a very large purchase. And we always appreciate that.

I think I can say that our relationship has never been better. Our relationship is, on a personal basis, very, very close. Our First Ladies, likewise, extremely close. And I think that that will continue to for a long time into the future, forever.

So we'll be having individual meetings later on and all throughout the day with different people from different departments and representatives. The President and myself will be meeting right now in the Oval Office. Then, we'll meet with our groups in the Cabinet Room, as you know. And I think it will be very productive. It's going to be a very productive day.

I just do want to tell you that great progress has been made, and a great relationship has been made in North Korea too. Kim Jong Un has been, really, somebody that I've gotten to know very well and respect, and hopefully—and I really believe that—over a period of time, a lot of tremendous things will happen.

I think North Korea has a tremendous potential, and I believe that President Moon agrees with that. And we will be discussing that and even potential meetings, further meetings, with North Korea and Kim Jong Un.

So I want to extend my warmest wishes to the people of South Korea, and I think indirectly I can truly say I want to extend my warmest wishes to Kim Jong Un and the people of North Korea. I think the relationship has become far different and far better than it was when I first took office or at the end, certainly, of the Obama administration.

And it's a great honor to be with you, Mr. President. And thank you very much.

President Moon. Mr. President, I would like to thank you for inviting our couple to the White House and also warmly welcoming us. In particular, last night at the Blue House, I saw the flowers—the beautiful flowers that you had sent—with a personally signed card. [*Laughter*] I was really moved by your meticulous care, and especially, my wife was moved.

President Trump. Very nice.

President Moon. In particular, I have two accounts on which I would like to express my gratitude to the United States. First, recently, there was a big forest fire in Korea, in the Province of Gangwon. At the time, the USFK supported us through the provision of many helicopters, and this really helped us put out the fire. And lots of Korean people were very grateful for this.

President Trump. Thank you.

President Moon. And today is a meaningful day for all the Korean people because it marks the centenary anniversary of the establishment of the provisional government of Korea. And I heard that both at the Senate and at the House, they introduced a resolution celebrating this momentous day. So I would like to thank you for that also.

President Trump. Thank you.

President Moon. And after you had met Chairman Kim in Singapore on June 12 last year, we have witnessed a dramatic turnaround regarding the political situation on the Korean Peninsula. Previously, because of the repeated nuclear and missile tests from North Korea, the—we saw that the military tension at the time had been at its greatest, and we were in a very precarious situation.

However, since you met Chairman Kim and you initiated personal diplomacy with him, we saw the dramatic, significant reduction of military tension on the Korean Peninsula, and now peace has prevailed. And also, in terms of North Korean nuclear problem, now—all Korean people have now—now we believe that you will be able to solve this problem through a dialogue. So I have to say that this dramatic turnaround that we have witnessed is solely down to your strong leadership.

President Trump. Thank you very much.

President Moon. Well, in this sense, I believe that the Hanoi summit is not actually—was not a source of disappointment, but it is actually the part of a bigger process that will lead us to a bigger agreement.

So the important task that we face right now is to maintain the momentum of dialogue and also express the positive outlook, regarding the third U.S.-North Korea summit, to the international community that this will be held in the near future.

So, in this regard, I'd like to express my high regard for how you have continued to express your trust towards Chairman Kim. And also, you have made sure that North Korea does not deviate from the dialogue track. I would like to express my gratitude for this.

And let me reiterate that the Republic of Korea is very—absolutely on the same page when it comes to the end state of the complete denuclearization of North Korea. And I can reassure you that we will remain in such great collaboration with the United States. There will be no daylight until we achieve our ultimate goal.

President Trump. Thank you very much. I have to go just one step further, and I want to thank China, who's really helped us a lot at the border. I also want to thank Russia because they have helped us, and they've helped us quite a bit more than people think, at the border. So both China and Russia have really been quite good. That doesn't mean they can't get better, but they've been quite good at the border. And I just want to thank both of those countries.

As we've said, a lot of progress has been made. We will have further dialogue, and I look forward to it. My relationship with Kim Jong Un has been a very strong relationship. I've had some very strong relationships with others, but I have a very, very good relationship with Kim Jong Un, and I think you see that.

And we'll see what happens. Hopefully, it will end up in a great solution for everybody and, ultimately, a great solution for the world. Because it is about the world. It's more than just this area, it's about the world. And frankly, the world is watching.

I want to thank you for your leadership. Your leadership has been outstanding. And I look forward to talking about other things also, and in particular, all of that equipment that you're buying. We like that in the United States. We like that you buy our great equipment. So again, thank you very much. And thank you for your leadership. Thank you.

Q. Mr. President, Mr. President——

[The President motioned for the interpreter to translate his above remarks. After the interpreter finished her translation, he continued as follows.]

President Trump. Okay? Yes, please.

South Korea/North Korea

Q. Mr. President, on economic projects for South Korea and North Korea, are you willing to allow some leeway in relaxing sanctions so that South Korea can pursue some more economic projects with North Korea?

President Trump. Well, we are discussing certain humanitarian things right now, and I'm okay with that, to be honest. I think you have to be okay with that. And South Korea is doing certain things to help out with food and various other things for North Korea. And we'll be discussing different things inside.

Again, the relationship is a much different relationship than it was 2 years ago—you remember what that was all about—and certainly during the Obama administration, where nuclear weapons were being tested often, where rockets and missiles were being sent up, in many cases, over Japan. And we are in a much different situation right now.

So we'll be discussing that very much, actually.

WikiLeaks

Q. Mr. President, do you still love WikiLeaks?

President Trump. I know nothing about WikiLeaks. It's not my thing. And I know there is something having to do with Julian Assange. I've been seeing what's happened with Assange. And that will be a determination, I would imagine, mostly by the Attorney General, who's doing an excellent job. So he'll be making a determination. I know nothing really about him. It's not my deal in life.

Q. What would you like to see happen? What punishment?

President Trump. I don't really have any opinion. I know the Attorney General will be involved in that, and he'll make a decision, okay?

2016 Donald J. Trump Presidential Campaign

Q. Mr. President, are you pleased that your Attorney General yesterday said that there was spying into your campaign in 2016?

President Trump. Yes, I am. I think what he said was absolutely true. There was absolutely spying into my campaign. I'll go a step further: In my opinion, it was illegal spying, unprecedented spying, and something that should never be allowed to happen in our country again. And I think his answer was actually a very accurate one. And a lot of people saw that, and a lot of people understand—many, many people understand—the situation and want to be open to that situation. Hard to believe it could have happened, but it did. There was spying in my campaign. And his answer was a very accurate one.

North Korea

Q. Mr. President, do you have the third summit with North Korea's Chairman in mind? And does that also include——

President Trump. It could happen.

Q. And does that also——

President Trump. A third summit could happen. And it's step by step. It's not a fast process; I've never said it would be. It's step by step.

Q. And does it also——

President Trump. I enjoy the summits. I enjoy being with the Chairman. I think it's been very productive. And it really is: It's a step by step. It's not going to go fast. I've been telling you that for a long time. If it goes fast, it's not going to be the proper deal.

North Korea/South Korea

Q. Is a three-way summit with the leaders of the two Koreas also—[inaudible]?

President Trump. Well, that could happen also. I think that would be largely dependent on Chairman Kim, because President Moon will do what's necessary. I know President Moon has been fighting this battle for a long time. He's done an excellent job. I consider him a great ally.

And a lot of good things are happening. A lot of good things are happening in the world. Our economy is the best it's ever been. Our employment numbers—unemployment and employment—are the best they've ever been. We have more people working right now in the United States than we've ever had before, almost 160 million people. And likewise, South

Korea is doing very well. Their economy is doing very well, and I think our trade deal has helped that process.

So we're sitting on two great countries right now, and we're leading two great countries. And we think that—I can speak for myself, and I think I can speak for President Moon: We think that North Korea has tremendous potential and, really, potential under the leadership of Kim Jong Un. Let's see how it all works out.

North Korea

Q. Mr. President, have you communicated with Kim Jong Un in the last few weeks since you told us——

President Trump. I don't want to comment on that. But we have a very good relationship.

Investigation Into Russia's Interference in 2016 Presidential Election

Q. Mr. President, on the Mueller report, are you concerned that Barr said that he's not going to redact that report to protect your reputation?

President Trump. No, I'm not concerned about anything, because frankly, there was no collusion, and there was no obstruction.

And we never did anything wrong. The people that did something wrong were the other side, the dirty cops. And a lot of the problems that were caused, it's a disgrace what happened. And again, it should never happen to a President again. You're just lucky I happen to be the President, because a lot of other Presidents would have reacted much differently than I reacted. You're very lucky I was the President during this scam, during the Russian hoax, as I call it.

So no, I'm not concerned at all. The bottom line: The result is no collusion, no obstruction. And that's the way it is. And I know a lot of people were very disappointed, but they knew the real answer.

You know, when the Democrats go behind the scenes and they go into a room backstage and they sit and they talk, they laugh, because they know it's all a big scam, a big hoax.

And that's called politics, but this is dirty politics and this is actually treason. This is a very bad thing that people have done. And I just hope that law enforcement takes it up. Because if they don't take it up, they're doing a great disservice to our country.

Yes, go ahead, please.

South Korea-U.S. Defense Cooperation

Q. Yes. Shared defense cost with South Korea, are you thinking a long-term agreement instead of year by year?

President Trump. No, we're talking about long term, and we always talk about long term. We want to have long term. Our relationship with South Korea is extraordinary, and we only think in terms of long term with South Korea. Okay?

Q. Mr. President——

President Trump. Yes, sir. Go ahead.

South Korea-North Korea Trade

Q. Will you discuss—did you discuss about resume of—[inaudible]—industrial complex and—[inaudible]?

President Trump. Explain that to me, please. What?

[A second reporter rephrased the question for the President as follows.]

Q. How much do you support President—my President's push for economic concessions, which include the resumption of the joint inter-Korean industrial complex and perhaps even the—[inaudible]?

President Trump. Well, at the right time, I would have great support. This isn't the right time. But at the right time, I'd have great support with North Korea. Great support. I think that South Korea, and I think Japan, and I think that the U.S.—I think a lot of countries will be helping. China, I really believe, will help. I think that Russia will help. I think a lot of countries will help.

When the right deal is made, and when the nuclear weapons are gone, I just think that North Korea has potential as great as anything I've ever seen in terms of potential. They have an unbelievable location, surrounded by sea on two sides and on the other side, Russia, China, and over here, South Korea. You just can't do better than that. And they have magnificent land. It has tremendous potential.

Q. Is your position still——

North Korea

Q. So the question was, if North Korea actually submits a roadmap regarding complete denuclearization, are you two—are the two Presidents—will you be discussing this issue at the summit meeting today?

President Trump. Yes, we will. We will be discussing it, certainly. That's a very prime topic for our meeting today. And we hope that's going to happen.

Yes.

North Korea/U.S. Sanctions

Q. Is your position still that sanctions should stay in place on North Korea until there is denuclearization? Or are you willing to consider easing sanctions to keep the talks going?

President Trump. No, we want sanctions to remain in place. And frankly, I had the option of significantly increasing them. I didn't want to do that because of my relationship with Kim Jong Un. I did not want to do that. I didn't think it was necessary. As you know, a couple of weeks ago, I held it back. But I think that sanctions are, right now, at a level that's a fair level. And I really believe something very significant is going to happen. We could always increase them, but I didn't want to do that at this time.

North Korea

Q. Mr. President, would you accept a smaller deal to "keep the process going," as President Moon called it?

President Trump. I'd have to see what the deal is. There are various smaller deals that maybe could happen. Things could happen. You can work out, step by step, pieces. But, at this moment, we're talking about the big deal. The big deal is we have to get rid of the nuclear weapons.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

Golf

Q. Sir, a golf question: Who do you like in the Masters? Who do you think will win the Masters?

President Trump. You know, there are 15 players capable of winning. And I guess you could say there are a lot more than that. They're great players. I don't think a field for the Masters has ever been this deep. I was watching late last night, and they were going over the different players. I think the field has never been so deep.

But always Phil and Tiger and Dustin—I mean, you have so many great players. But they were just saying they're younger, they're stronger, they've never hit the ball this long. They've never hit the ball this accurately. They've never putt'd better than they do now.

You know, the whole thing is pretty incredible. But the field is very, very deep. I think it's going to be a great Masters. I hope so.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:19 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Kim Jung-sook, wife of President Moon; Julian P. Assange, founder, WikiLeaks, who was arrested by British authorities at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, United Kingdom, on April 11; Department of Justice Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller III; and golfers Phil Mickelson, Tiger Woods, and Dustin Johnson. A reporter referred to Department of Justice Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller III. President Moon and a reporter spoke in Korean, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

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