

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

The President's News Conference With President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea in Seoul, South Korea

November 11, 2010

President Lee. Thank you, members of the press. On behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Korea, I wish to welcome President Obama and his delegation on their second visit to Korea.

As you know, ladies and gentlemen, this year we are commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Korean war. The alliance between Korea and the United States was born out of the trenches of the war. Our brave soldiers fought together side by side against Communist aggression to defend peace and freedom. So I thank President Obama and the people of the United States.

And today is Veterans Day, and we are honored to remember those valiant soldiers and their families who sacrificed so much for their country defending freedom. I've been told that President Obama has personally visited the U.S. Forces Korea here to take part in the ceremony to celebrate the Veterans Day, and I thank President Obama.

President Obama and I agreed that our bilateral relationship is strong in every aspect, and we will continue to work so that we can make it even stronger. In particular, we agreed to carry on the future vision for the alliance that we adopted last June, which states that Korea and the U.S. will work to expand our strategic alliance in all areas. We renewed our pledge and common commitments, and we will make sure to carry them out with an eye toward our common future.

Furthermore, based on our firm security alliance, Korea and the U.S. will maintain a strong defense posture that will deter all provocations and threats, ensuring peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

President Obama and I agreed that the importance and responsibilities of the G-20 as the premier forum for international economic cooperation will continue to grow as it carries out its mandate. We will work together so that its legitimacy and credibility will be enhanced. President Obama recognized the role that Korea has played as chair, and we thank him for his kind remarks.

We both agreed that it's critically important that the G-20 is able to deliver on its promises. The G-20 must implement substantive and specific action plans that will ensure the sustainable and balanced growth of the global economy. This is our collective goal. We must place ourselves on the path to a more sustainable, prosperous future that will have far-reaching benefits for all of us.

Now, with regards to the Korea-U.S. free trade agreement, President Obama and I agreed that we will give my Trade Minister and the U.S. Trade Representative more time so that they can finalize the technical issues. And President Obama and I will continue to work together so that we can have a mutually acceptable agreement at the earliest possible date.

President Obama and I talked about the situation on the Korean Peninsula. We agreed to strengthen our cooperation in dealing with the North Korea nuclear issue. We recognize the close cooperation that was evident during the aftermath of the sinking of the *Cheonan* by

North Korea. We also reaffirm that North Korea must fully and irrevocably give up all its nuclear weapons ambitions and work towards achieving denuclearization of the peninsula. This is an essential requirement if we are to bring about genuine and permanent peace and stability on the peninsula and beyond.

President Obama and I agreed that North Korea must display sincere and genuine intent to give up all its nuclear weapons ambitions and to back this up with action as soon as possible. They must work to fundamentally and comprehensively resolve their nuclear issue.

And for this, ladies and gentlemen, Korea and the U.S. will work with the members of the six-party talks, as well as with the larger international community who are committed to global peace and stability.

President Obama and I agree that North Korea should and must show sincerity towards the Republic of Korea and to assume responsibility for what they did to the *Cheonan*. Such could be the starting point for improving inter-Korean relations. We urge North Korea to make that strategic decision. We will continue our close cooperation on this matter.

And President Obama and I also talked in length about global issues such as nonproliferation, eradicating terrorism, how to tackle climate change, the future of green growth, and attaining stability in Afghanistan and other regional issues. These are important regional and international issues that require continued cooperation.

Ladies and gentlemen, I congratulated our American friends for joining the East Asia summit for the first time in Hanoi last month. Again, welcome. It's great to have the U.S. join us. And I look forward to the U.S. contributing more to peace, stability, and prosperity in East Asia.

And of course, we will continue to work closely for all this and more. Today's meeting has been a chance for us to reaffirm our close alliance and partnership in laying out the map for the future. I'm also pleased that our bilateral relationship has been strengthened and also pleased that President Obama and I have had a chance to foster our friendship.

Thank you.

President Obama. Thank you, President Lee, for your gracious welcome and for what you've done to express how much our alliance has meant to you and the people of this nation. And I can assure you that the sentiment you expressed is shared by the American people, especially by our veterans and servicemembers who've served here and have great affection for South Korea and its people.

It is wonderful to be back in Seoul. We are here for the G-20, and I want to thank President Lee and the people of the Republic of Korea for their hospitality. And I want to congratulate you on becoming the first non-G-8 country to host a G-20 summit. This is another example of what President Lee calls "Global Korea," a Korea that plays an increasingly active and leading role in the world. It is a role that the United States firmly supports and wants to encourage.

Any time we meet, it's an opportunity to reaffirm the unbreakable alliance between our two countries. This, however, is a special occasion. It's the United States' Veterans Day. We celebrate veterans on this day, and this year, as President Lee noted, is also the 60th anniversary of the start of the Korean war. So I just had a wonderful opportunity at Yongsan not only to pay tribute to our American troops serving here, but to pay tribute to our veterans of the Korean war, Americans and Koreans.

Their service, through six decades, is a powerful reminder that security, democracy, and prosperity reinforce each other. As President Lee has said, security has allowed this country to become a great democracy and one of the economic miracles of our time. In turn, prosperity that is broadly shared, within countries and in regions, makes us safer and more secure. Advancing our shared prosperity and security was the focus of our meetings today.

As President Lee just noted, we discussed the need to keep moving forward towards a U.S.-Korea free trade agreement, which would create jobs and prosperity in both our countries. We believe that such an agreement, if done right, can be a win-win for our people. It could be a win for the United States because it would increase the export of American goods by some \$10 billion and billions more in services, supporting more than 70,000 jobs back home.

It could be a win for South Korea, with more access to the American economy, which would support jobs, raise living standards, and offer more choices for Korean consumers. And it could be a win for the overall economic partnership between our two countries by bringing us closer together, allowing us to benefit from each other's innovations, and ensuring strong protections for workers' rights and the environment.

So we have asked our teams to work tirelessly in the coming days and weeks to get this completed, and we are confident that we will do so. And President Lee, in fact, asked his team to come to Washington in the near future to continue these discussions. So I appreciate all the efforts that he's making on this issue.

To advance our shared security, President Lee and I also discussed our ongoing efforts to strengthen and modernize our alliance, including our joint vision for meeting 21st-century challenges. And although I said it at Yongsan, we can never say it enough: The United States will never waver in our commitment to the security of the Republic of Korea.

I reaffirmed our conviction that in the aftermath of the sinking of the *Cheonan*, North Korea must address South Korea's concerns and end its belligerent behavior. Likewise, North Korea needs to fulfill its obligations to eliminate its nuclear weapons program. Only by meeting its responsibilities and not threatening others will North Korea find real security and respect.

And I want to reiterate that along with our South Korean and international partners, the United States is prepared to provide economic assistance to North Korea and help it integrate into the international community, provided that North Korea meets its obligations.

Finally, since this is "Global Korea," we discussed the whole range of issues before us. Heading into the G-20, we discussed the need to create an approach where all of our economies, developed and emerging, can help achieve global growth that is balanced and sustained. We discussed common security challenges, including Afghanistan and Iran. And I told President Lee that we're very much looking forward to South Korea hosting the next nuclear security summit in 2 years, which is yet another example of South Korean leadership and another step toward our goal of securing all vulnerable materials around the world.

So again, I want to thank my good friend, President Lee, for his hospitality and leadership. And as we mark the 60th anniversary of the war that turned us into strong allies, I want to salute President Lee and the people of South Korea for the extraordinary progress that you've made—a strong and prosperous democracy that's an example to others, in this region and around the world.

Mr. President.

Moderator. Now we will be taking questions from the members of the press. First of all, a Korean press reporter will ask a question directed to President Lee.

South Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

Q. A question going out to President Lee Myung-bak. You have just said that you discussed the KORUS FTA issue with President Obama, and we were very hopeful—hoping that a conclusion or an agreement would be reached between the two leaders. What was the obstacle and what kind of effort do you intend to continue to employ in order to get this agreement?

President Lee. The talks will continue. The talks, like I said, will continue between Korea and the United States. And as you know, my Trade Minister as well as the U.S. Trade Representative have been engaged in extensive discussions, but President Obama and I agreed that we need to give them a bit more time so that they can iron out the technical issues between themselves. So once the G-20 summit here in Korea is over, I'm sure that the discussions will continue and the officials from both sides will meet. I expect it won't take too long.

Moderator. A member of the U.S. press will ask a question to President Obama.

President Obama. Patricia Zengerle.

Global Economic Stabilization

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. I'm Patricia Zengerle from Reuters. There's been much criticism of U.S. monetary policy in the run-up to this G-20. And with old G-7 partners like Germany opposing you, does this not make it much harder for the United States to press China for yuan appreciation and persuade other G-20 partners to support your goals if they sense that the U.S. is being isolated at the summit?

President Obama. Well, I think that you will see at this summit a broad-based agreement from all countries, including Germany, that we need to ensure balanced and sustainable growth. And it is my expectation that the communique will begin to put in place mechanisms that help us track and encourage such balanced and sustainable growth.

The most important thing that the United States can do for the world economy is to grow, because we continue to be the world's largest market and a huge engine for all other countries to grow. Countries like Germany that export heavily benefit from our open markets and us buying their goods. That's true for every G-20 member.

And so the point that we have consistently made is that in a prudent, stable way, we want to make sure that we are boosting growth rates at home as well as abroad. It is difficult to do that if we start seeing the huge imbalances redevelop that helped to contribute to the crisis that we just went through. And I don't think this is a controversial proposition. In fact, we set up a framework back in Pittsburgh that discussed this, and this is just a follow-on to the work that we've already done.

Now, as I've said, I think, when I was first asked this in India, it's not our habit to comment on actions by the Federal Reserve. But as President of the United States, I can tell you that my instructions to my team, including Secretary Geithner, is to focus every single day on how we can grow our economy, how we can increase exports, how we can make sure that even as we're buying goods from places like South Korea we're also selling goods to places like South Korea.

That's part of the reason why we think that getting this Korea-U.S. free trade agreement done is so important. And President Lee and I discussed this and our instructions are we're not—we don't want months to pass before we get this done; we want this to be done in a matter of weeks.

So bottom line is, Patricia, I think that when you see the final communique, it will reflect a broad-based consensus about the direction that we need to go. There may be on any given—at any given moment disagreements between countries in terms of particular strategies. That's not surprising because each country has unique problems and finds itself in different positions. Countries like Germany historically are very sensitive to issues like inflation. But I don't think you'll get any objection to their belief that if the U.S. isn't growing, that's not good for the rest of the world.

It also doesn't negate the fact that if we—if individual countries are engaging in practices that are purposely designed to boost their exports at the expense of others, that that can contribute to problems as opposed to solving them.

Q. President Lee, on the same subject? President Lee, do you have any concerns about that U.S. policy might lead to a flood of hot money coming into the Korean economy?

President Lee. I think that kind of question should be asked to me when President Obama is not standing right next to me. [*Laughter*]

No, we get asked a very similar question. And I answer it this way: I tell those who ask me that question that, first and foremost, what's most important for us and for everyone around the world, including the Americans, is for the U.S. economy to be robust, to recover, and to continue to grow. That is critically important for the entire global economy if they wish to get on the path of sustainable and balanced growth.

Now, I know that there have been certain decisions taken by the U.S. Government and the Federal Reserve. And I know that those decisions were made with due consideration for everything else.

And you asked me a question about the influx of hot money into the Korean economy. I don't see any possibility of this happening or such an event becoming destabilizing for the Korean economy. But what I would want to emphasize is that such a measure—decision taken by the U.S. Government, we hope that it will be a positive contribution to the recovery and the revival of the U.S. economy. We know that this has been talked about in Pittsburgh. And that is namely the fact of adopting an indicative guideline or a framework for ensuring strong and sustainable growth.

And we know that these and other topics of interest will be included in the Seoul communique as well. And we know that are making progress on this through cooperation. I'd also emphasize another point, and that is the importance of international cooperation.

Moderator. And now we will have a Korean reporter ask a question to His Excellency, President Obama.

North Korea

Q. I have a question to Mr. President Obama. Let me ask you about the North Korea nuclear threats. The six-party talks were launched in 2003 to resolve the North Korea nuclear issue. But it remains an issue of serious concern. There are even some reports about North

Korea having several nuclear bombs already. So how you evaluate the past talks? Do you have any idea or plan to move the denuclearization process forward?

Thank you.

President Obama. The six-party talks provided a valuable forum to engage North Korea and encourage it to move towards more responsible behavior. And in 2005, we began to see some positive movement, but then there was backsliding. And since that time what we've seen is talk for the sake of talking, instead of talk for the sake of actually implementing changes that would resolve the tensions on the peninsula.

President Lee and I have been moving in complete agreement over the last couple of years in sending a message to the North Koreans that they have a choice available to them. They can continue on a path of belligerence towards their neighbors, an unwillingness to denuclearize, engaging in provocative acts, and that will ensure their continued isolation from the world community. It will prevent them from developing, it will result in hardship for their people, and it will continue to create tensions in the region.

The preferred choice is for North Korea to say, we are going to meet our previous commitments; we are going to engage in a irreversible path towards denuclearization. And as I said in my opening statement, if they are willing to take those steps, then you will see a South Korea, a United States, and an international community that can give them substantial assistance to help develop their country and improve their security over the long term.

Now, President Lee and I have discussed this extensively and our belief is, is that there will be a appropriate time and place to reenter into six-party talks. But we have to see a seriousness of purpose by the North Koreans in order to spend the extraordinary time and energy that's involved in these talks. We're not interested in just going through the motions with the same result. And I think the North Koreans understand that.

So our expectation is, is that we will continue to engage. We will continue to look for signals from the North Koreans that they're serious. At the point where it appears that they are in fact prepared to move forward on the kind of path that all of us want to see, then we're going to be there ready to negotiate with them.

Moderator. As both Presidents have a subsequent meetings, so we will just take the final question, a question from the U.S. reporter.

National Deficit and Debt/South Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

Q. Jonathan Weisman with the Wall Street Journal. The Speaker of the House and several members of your party partially condemned the initial proposals from the Chairman of your Deficit Commission, calling them simply unacceptable. If the—as the Commission nears its final report, what message do you have to your party to keep their powder dry? And are you preparing to make the difficult decisions that you have said are necessary to cut the deficit, even if that means raising the retirement age or cutting back on Medicare?

And if I may, to President Lee, to many Americans who see Hyundais on their roads, LG phones in their pockets, Samsung televisions on their walls, South Korea epitomizes the kind of one-way trade relationship that President Obama discussed in India. What assurances can you give the American people, many of whom whose parents fought and died for your country, that they will finally get the ability to freely and fairly compete for the South Korean consumers with your conglomerates?

And if President Obama wants to weigh in on that, we welcome it. Thank you.

President Obama. I have not seen the final report from the Deficit Commission. I have said very clearly that until I see the final report I'm not going to comment on it because I want them to have the space to do their work. They're still in negotiations. I think Chairmen Bowles and Simpson are trying to round up 14 votes for certain aspects of the recommendations, and I want to make sure that they've got the room and the space to do so.

I set up this Commission precisely because I'm prepared to make some tough decisions. I can't make them alone. I'm going to need Congress to work with me. There was a lot of talk during the course of this campaign season about debt and deficits. And unfortunately, a lot of the talk didn't match up with reality. If we are concerned about debt and deficits, then we're going to have to take actions that are difficult and we're going to have to tell the truth to the American people.

I'm somebody who's big on eliminating earmarks in Congress, but earmarks alone won't balance a budget. I think that we can root out more waste and abuse in Federal spending, but even the most optimistic estimates about the amount of waste and abuse that can be eliminated still leaves a huge deficit and a substantial debt.

So as you said, Jonathan, we're going to have to make some tough choices. The only way to make those tough choices, historically, has been if both parties are willing to move forward together.

And so before anybody starts shooting down proposals, I think we need to listen; we need to gather up all the facts. I think we have to be straight with the American people. If people are, in fact, concerned about spending, debt, deficits and the future of our country, then they're going to need to be armed with the information about the kinds of choices that are going to be involved, and we can't just engage in political rhetoric.

There's one last point I want to make about debt and deficits, and that is that the single most important thing we can do to reduce our debt and our deficits is to grow. We increase our economic growth by 1 percentage point, and over time that could have as much of an impact as completely eliminating the Bush tax cuts. I mean, it makes a huge difference if we are growing an extra 1 percent or an extra 1.5 percent.

And so part of the discussion that we have to have on a bipartisan basis, in addition to getting serious about spending and making sure that the money that's coming in matches up with the money that's going out, is also what steps do we have to take to make sure that we're growing. And I'm not going to be favorably disposed towards recommendations or moves by Congress that don't take into account the needs for us to grow long term.

Just with respect to the free trade agreement, again, I think that President Lee is sincere in wanting to get this done. My goal is reciprocal trade; that is a win-win for both countries. I think that can be achieved.

But obviously, what you're alluding to, Jonathan, is a popular concern in the United States of America, and that's why President Lee and I agreed that we need to make sure that over the next several weeks, we are crossing all the t's, dotting all the i's, being able to make the case to both the Korean people and the United States population that this is good for both countries.

And if we rush something that then can't garner popular support, that's going to be a problem. We think we can make the case, but we want to make sure that that case is airtight.

President Lee. Thank you for the question and I do understand the reason why you are asking that question. I think there's one thing that the U.S. consumers should understand. We know that in the past, the United States and the people of the United States should understand that many countries around the world, when they were developing, they were able to export a lot of their goods and manufactured goods to the United States. And the American consumers did a tremendous job of helping these developing countries develop their economies. And the Korean products that you talked about—the LG, Samsung, Hyundai cars, and some of these products—when you look at a cell phone made by the LG, the core technology and the goods that are used by these LG companies to build one single cell phone, most of them are imported goods or parts. And many of them come from the United States and other countries, so you cannot say that it is 100 percent Korean manufactured.

So the bilateral trade imbalance is about \$8 billion between the U.S. and Korea. That figure has been continuously going down because in that, there's a lot of figures that is hidden, namely the royalty that the Korean companies have to pay the United States that they pay every year.

So one thing that I wish to point out is that—to the American consumers is that there is really no trade imbalance when you—when the U.S. talks about its trade relationship with the United—Republic of Korea.

Now, I know that it will be beneficial for everyone if we can create good jobs in the United States. And I said it before that that will be helpful not only to the American consumers, but to the Republic of Korea as well.

I believe that this can be a win-win agreement, this free-trade agreement between the Korea and the United States. And that is the basic principle and the understanding that we've been working on. And I'm hopeful that we can reach an agreement on this.

And I just wanted to make sure that you understand this issue between—the trade imbalance between the two countries.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:13 p.m. at the Blue House. In his remarks, he referred to Erskine B. Bowles and Alan K. Simpson, cochairmen, Deficit Reduction Commission. President Lee referred to Trade Minister Kim Jong-hoon of South Korea. President Lee and a reporter spoke in Korean, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

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