

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

*March 25, 2012*

*President Lee.* I apologize for running a little late, ladies and gentlemen.

Mr. President, distinguished members of the press, it's good to see my good friend again. The last time we met was 4 months ago. Welcome to Korea, Mr. President.

And I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for taking time to visit the DMZ early this morning, soon after your arrival in Seoul. Mr. President, I'm sure it was a chance to witness firsthand the reality of division that has been a part of Korea for such a long time. And I gather you had a good time meeting with the members of the armed forces from both Korea and the United States. And thank you for the encouragement that you gave these men and women in uniform.

Today, ladies and gentlemen, we had a very useful and constructive discussion on a wide array of issues, from North Korea's nuclear and missile development and including other security issues, and also how to promote bilateral trade between our two countries, and of course, other topics of mutual interest.

And we talked about the security situation in the region and the situation on the Korean Peninsula and agreed to continue working closely together in implementing our North Korea policy. Both countries agreed that North Korea's announcement to test-fire its long-range missile is a violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions, not to mention the latest agreement between the U.S. and North Korea. Therefore, President Obama and I both agreed that North Korea must immediately repeal its decision and abide by its international obligations.

President Obama and I agreed that we will continue to enhance and strengthen our combined defense capabilities and, at the same time, firmly respond to any threats or provocations from the North. If North Korea gives up its pursuit of nuclear weapons and missile development and instead chooses a path towards peace and cooperation, our two countries will work together, along with the international community, to help improve the lives of the people in North Korea and provide necessary assistance that will help North Korea open up a new era.

And we reaffirmed the value and importance of our enduring alliance and discussed a future vision of our partnership. Following the adoption of the future vision of the alliance, which was adopted in June 2009, our alliance is evolving into a truly global partnership where we are working shoulder to shoulder to resolve global challenges.

Furthermore, we reviewed the progress being made in our alliance, such as the transfer of OPCON two-plus-two security consultations, and agree that we will strengthen our deterrence capabilities through enhanced policy coordination and strive towards a future-oriented alliance.

Ladies and gentlemen, we will also work together so that the KORUS FTA that came into effect last March 15 will fulfill its goal. That is creating jobs for our workers, expand trade and investments, and overall improve the lives of our peoples. And accordingly, in order to ensure the faithful implementation of the KORUS FTA, we will establish a ministerial-level joint committee, as previously agreed, and check upon the progress.

President Obama and I also exchanged views on the state of the global economy and shared our concern regarding the uncertainties that still remain. In particular, we share the concern that rising oil prices is an obstacle to speedy recovery of the global economy and agree that international cooperation needed to be further strengthened to bring about stability in the world oil market.

And of course, we also talked about regional issues—issues in the Middle East, Afghanistan, and other issues, including Iran—and how we can strengthen international cooperation to bring about a resolution to these issues.

I welcome President Obama once again on his visit. The Nuclear Security Summit was President Obama's initiative, born out of his vision to leave behind a safer, more prosperous world for the future generation. And we will continue to strive together to achieve a world without nuclear weapons. I thank him and his team for all the help in ensuring a successful Nuclear Security Summit meeting.

Thank you.

*President Obama.* Well, good evening, everyone. Thank you to my good friend and partner, President Lee, for your very kind words. And thank you, to the people of Korea, for your gracious welcome. This is my third visit to the Republic of Korea as President. It is wonderful to be back. And once again, I'm grateful for the hospitality.

This visit reflects the extraordinary friendship between our two people. My wife and I were proud to help strengthen those ties when we had the honor of hosting President Lee and First Lady Kim for a state visit at the White House last fall. And during that visit I learned a Korean word that I believe captures the deep affection between our people: *jeong*. And I feel that spirit again today.

My visits to Korea reflect the leadership role that South Korea is playing in this region and around the world: a global Korea. I was last here for the G-20, which was a success under President Lee's leadership. Now we're back, along with more than 50 world leaders, for the second Nuclear Security Summit.

In fact, just today we saw another important step forward. We learned that Ukraine completed the removal of highly enriched uranium from its territory. This fulfills a commitment Ukraine made at our last Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, and I believe it's a preview of the kind of progress we're going to see over the next 2 days in confronting one of the most urgent challenges of global security: securing the world's nuclear weapons and preventing nuclear terrorism.

My visit to Korea also reflects the enduring strength of our alliance. My last visit to Seoul came as we marked both the 60th anniversary of the Korean war and Veterans Day. And today I traveled, as President Lee mentioned, to the DMZ to thank our men and women in uniform, American and Korean, who serve shoulder to shoulder. They're the reason that we can stand here free today and prosperous here today. And we salute them all.

My visit to Korea reflects the fact that the United States is leading again in the Asia-Pacific, a region that will affect American security and prosperity in the 21st century like no other. As I declared in Australia last year, the United States as a Pacific nation will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future. And the cornerstone of our efforts is our strong alliances, including our alliance with the Republic of Korea.

This is the context for our meeting today. And as President Lee indicated, we had a very good discussion on a wide range of issues. We reviewed our ongoing efforts to modernize our security alliance. We agreed to have our foreign and defense ministers meet in June to discuss concrete measures we can take to continue strengthening that alliance. We're on track for South Korea to assume operational control for the alliance in 2015.

I reaffirmed, as I said in Australia, that reductions in U.S. defense spending will not come at the expense of the Asia-Pacific, and that includes South Korea. America's Armed Forces are going to stay ready for the full range of contingencies and threats. And the alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea remains unshakable.

We reviewed our great progress in bringing our economies even closer. During my last visit to Seoul, we pledged to get our landmark trade agreement done. On President Lee's visit to Washington, it passed our Congress. On this visit, we can say that our trade agreement is now in force. We got it done. This is a win for both of our countries: more jobs and opportunities for our workers and businesses on both sides of the Pacific. That includes supporting some 70,000 American jobs and keeping us on track to meet my goal of doubling American exports.

We discussed regional security, and that obviously includes the issue of North Korea. Last month, North Korea agreed to a series of steps, including a moratorium on long-range missile launches. This month, North Korea announced its intention to conduct a missile launch. As President Lee mentioned, this would constitute a direct violation of Pyongyang's own commitments and its international obligations. Moreover, it would only deepen North Korea's isolation, damage further its relations with its neighbors, and seriously undermine the prospect of future negotiations.

I'll have more to say in my speech tomorrow about our commitment to security and peace on the Korean Peninsula and the choice Pyongyang must make. Today I'll simply say that North Korea will achieve nothing by threats or by provocations. North Korea knows its obligations, and it must take irreversible steps to meet those obligations. On this, the United States and the Republic of Korea are absolutely united.

Since South Korea is one of our key global partners, we discussed a range of challenges to international security. I again want to thank South Korea for its important contributions to reconstruction in Afghanistan, and I updated the President on our preparations for the NATO summit in Chicago, where we will chart the next phase of the transition to Afghan lead.

And I also thanked the President of South Korea's strong support of sanctions on Iran because its failure to meet its international obligations. I know this decision does not come without costs, both to the Republic of Korea, as well as our own country, but the prospects of an Iran with nuclear weapons would be a threat to the world, and this is one more example of South Korea stepping up and playing a leadership role on the world stage.

Finally, we're deepening the ties between our people. We agreed to expand educational exchanges, which will give more Korean students the opportunity to study in the United States, which benefits both of our countries.

So once again, President Lee, I thank you for your hospitality, for your leadership. Our alliance is strong. Our commitment to the security and prosperity of our people is unwavering. And I'm confident that under South Korea's leadership, the Nuclear Security Summit is going to be a great success.

*President Lee.* Thank you.

We will now take questions from the press. [*Inaudible*]*—*from Korean Broadcasting Service.

### *North Korean Long-Range Missile Test/South Korean Defense Capabilities*

Q. A question going out to President Lee. As predicted, you just explained that you and President Obama discussed the issue of North Korea's impending rocket launch. But despite the international community's warnings, how will you respond if North Korea goes ahead and test-fires its long-range missile? What will Korea do? What kind of sanctions are you planning to impose on North Korea? And could you explain the status of the negotiations regarding extending the missile range of South Korea?

You—in a recent press interview you spoke about the fact that discussions are proceeding between the U.S. and Korea regarding extending the missile range of South Korea. Can you explain or—the status of the negotiations?

*President Lee.* Thank you—[*inaudible*]. You asked about North Korea's impending launch of its long-range missile, and let me just reiterate once again, ladies and gentlemen: If North Korea goes ahead with its plan to test-launch its long-range missile, this is a clear violation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1874. North Korea, if it goes ahead with its plan, will be going straight against its pledges that it made with the international community.

The international community is urging the North Koreans to repeal its announcement to test-fire its long-range missile. Now, your question was, what—how are we going to respond? I just want to answer that question by saying that if North Korea goes ahead with it, North Korea must be the sole country to bear the entire responsibility. As President Obama just mentioned, if it goes ahead with its plan, it will only deepen its isolation and all the consequences North Korea will have to face.

And from the perspective of the people of North Korea, they will understand that its leader is spending hundreds of millions of dollars just to launch a long-range missile. And watching their leader do so, they're not going to feel proud that their country was able to launch a long-range missile, but rather, they will get—truly understand the nature of their leaders and understand why they have to go through such hardships today.

So domestically, I'm sure the North Korean leaders are hoping to achieve some sort of—an objective by test-launching its long-range missile. But they must clearly understand that if they go ahead with the plan, that they will put themselves in a very difficult position. I urge the North Koreans to come out as a responsible member of the international community, and that is the surest way to ensure a better life for the people of North Korea.

In this regard, there is no difference of opinions between the U.S. and South Korea. We'll remain very calm and rational, and we will be wise in dealing with the North Koreans if in fact they do go ahead with their announcement.

You asked about extending the missile range of South Korea. We did not discuss that issue. Of course, working-level officials have been discussing this issue. But you have to look at this from a more holistic framework in that extending the missile range is part of increasing and enhancing our defense capabilities vis-a-vis North Korea.

*President Obama.* Ben Feller [Associated Press].

### *North Korea*

Q. Good evening. President Obama, President Lee, thank you for the question. I'd like to follow up on the North Korean threat on two fronts. The first is to follow up on the question my colleague had. Could you be more specific, from your perspective, what the consequences would be that you would bring to bear on North Korea should there be a rocket launch, in terms of the overall relationship, but also specifics, such as food aid and negotiations?

And also, I'm wondering, sir, if you could give us some insights about whether you've developed an impression of North Korea's new leader, and whether you've been able to yet take a measure of the man.

And to President Lee, good to see you again. I wanted to ask you about the Nuclear Security Summit. Can you explain how it would have any true and lasting credibility when the two major antagonists of North Korea and Iran are on the sidelines?

*President Obama.* Well, first of all, with respect to the consequences should there be a launch by the North Koreans, as President Lee indicated, North Korea is already under an extraordinary battery of sanctions. They are the most isolated country in the world. They are cut off from basic commerce and exchanges beyond their borders that every other country—almost every other country—takes for granted.

Their people are extraordinarily impoverished. The contrast between living standards in the North and living standards in the South could not be greater and couldn't be a greater testimony to the benefits of living in a free society.

And so the real consequence, should they go forward with a launch, is they will have missed an opportunity, because what we presented to them, and what we've consistently presented to them, is an opportunity for them to take a different path than the one they've been taking, which is resulting in not simply hardship for their people, but a state that is decades behind their counterparts in the region in terms of development, in terms of economic strength, in terms of influence in world affairs.

And so immediate, concrete, tangible effects: We had offered them the possibility, as part of a series of confidence-building measures to move forward with a nutritional aid package, for example. We've indicated to them very directly—because this was part of discussions that had taken place among negotiators—that it would be difficult to move forward with that package if they show themselves unable to make commitments that they've made even a month earlier. Because part of the challenge for any nutrition aid package, for example, is that you make sure it actually gets to the people who need it, and it doesn't go to serve elites in that country or their military. That requires monitors. It's very difficult to have monitors at a period of tension and friction. And it is difficult to provide aid if you don't think that it's going to get to the people who actually need it. So that's just one example of the kinds of consequence that will take place.

I'll also note that every time North Korea has violated international resolution—the Security Council resolution, it's resulted in further isolation, tightening of sanctions, stronger enforcement, greater support on part of the international community for stronger enforcement. I suspect that will happen this time as well.

So they need to understand that bad behavior will not be rewarded. There'd been a pattern, I think, for decades, in which North Korea thought that if they acted provocatively then somehow they would be bribed into ceasing and desisting acting provocatively. And President Lee and I have agreed from the start of our relationship that we're going to break

that pattern. And I suspect that it will ultimately end up having the impact intended, but in the meantime, it's the people of North Korea that are most likely to suffer.

I do want to comment on the issue you raised with respect to the Nuclear Security Summit. Understand that the concept of the Nuclear Security Summit that we set up was not directed at the specific issue of Iran or North Korea, but was directed at one leg of a multilegged stool when it comes to our nuclear security. Specifically, if you've got a lot of loose nuclear material, if countries, either historically because of old nuclear programs or currently in terms of how they operate their nuclear energy facilities, are leaving a bunch of material out there that could potentially fall in the hands of terrorists, that poses an extraordinary threat to the United States, to South Korea, and to countries all around the world.

And so our goal with this Nuclear Security Summit has always been to be very specific, concrete, around a set of issues that if we act with some deliberateness, can actually enhance everybody's security and should not be controversial. And it's a testament, I think, to that well-defined agenda that 2 years later we're seeing all these deliverables take place that are taking a whole bunch of nuclear material out of vulnerable positions that could fall into the wrong hands.

It doesn't solve every problem; it doesn't address every issue that I raised in my Prague speech 3½ years ago. We still have issues of how can we reduce nuclear weapons among those countries that currently have nuclear weapons, consistent with the long-term obligations of the NPT.

We still have outliers like Iran and North Korea that are potentially pursuing nuclear weapons and that pose a significant danger and are engaging in potential nonproliferation activities. But that doesn't diminish in any way the concrete work that's gotten done here. That is significantly reducing the risk that an Al Qaida or a terrorist organization could get a dirty bomb and explode it in Seoul or New York City. And that's always been the objective of the Nuclear Security Summit, and I think that because of the fine leadership that's been shown by President Lee and his delegation, we're going to see a whole bunch of concrete stuff get done over the next 2 days.

#### *North Korean Leadership/Nuclear Security Summit*

Q. Kim Jong Un?

*President Obama.* Oh. I think it's hard to have an impression of Kim Jong Un, in part, because the situation in North Korea still appears unsettled. It's not clear exactly who's calling the shots and what their long-term objectives are. But regardless of the North Korean leadership, what is clear is that they have not yet made that strategic pivot where they say to themselves, what we're doing isn't working. It's leading our country and our people down a dead end.

And, Ben, you were there at the DMZ, and it's like you're in a time warp. It's like you're looking across 50 years into a country that has missed 40 years or 50 years of progress. And if a country can't feed its people effectively, if it can't make anything of any use to anybody, if it has no exports other than weapons, and even those aren't ones that in any way would be considered state of the art, if it can't deliver on any indicators of well-being for its people, then you'd think you'd want to try something different.

I don't get a sense that they've made that decision yet. But my suspicion is, is that, at some point, that's what the North Korean people are going to be looking for. And they do have that

opportunity. And when they make that decision, I know I speak for President Lee, no one will welcome it more than we do, because it is in our interests to see every country provide opportunity and prosperity for its people. But there are certain things that just don't work, and what they're doing doesn't work.

*President Lee.* Regarding the Nuclear Security Summit, President Obama just explained what kind of objectives that we want to achieve by holding this second Nuclear Security Summit. So I just want to add to what President Obama said and say that during the Seoul summit, which begins tomorrow, first of all, we're going to review the kind of progress that we made back in Washington, DC, and then what we're going to do is we're going to make more pledges to reduce and eliminate nuclear materials. We are going to set up more concrete benchmarks, and as a result of the Seoul summit, we will be able to reduce and eliminate about 20,000 nuclear weapons. We still have about 100,000 nuclear weapons left. This is a tremendous amount of nuclear weapons, but I have hope that as we continue to engage in—with this problem that we will be able to achieve and attain our goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

And another important point that President Obama also mentioned is that 50-plus leaders gathered here in Seoul are going to be discussing how we can prevent nuclear materials and weapons from falling into the wrong hands. We are going to discuss how we can share intelligence and information so that we can prevent individuals and organizations from acquiring nuclear weapons.

You can just only imagine the kind of work that will go into coming up with an agreement between 50-plus states, but nonetheless, we share a common vision and a commitment. And I'm confident that following the meeting in Washington, DC, the meeting that will start tomorrow will contribute to enhancing our safety and security.

Mr. Choi from—[inaudible]—from Chosun Daily.

*North Korea/ South Korean Defense Capabilities*

*Q.* A question going out to President Obama. Mr. President, you just visited the DMZ, the Panmunjom, this morning, and today the North Koreans are commemorating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Kim Il Sung, and so they were having this big parade in North Korea, also celebrating the new leadership of Kim Jung Un. If you can share with us your thoughts in visiting the DMZ and what you think about the leaders in North Korea.

And second question has to do with extending the missile range of South Korea. The South Korean Government's position is that since North Korea has a capability of more than 3,000 kilometers in its missile range, that is one reason why you hope to extend the missile range of—here in South Korea. What are your thoughts on this? And what are some of the preconditions in order to resume the six-party talks?

The last question was also going out to both President Obama and President Lee.

*President Lee.* You just asked three questions. [Laughter]

*President Obama.* It's hard to remember them. [Laughter] Well, the first question I think I basically answered: my impressions with respect to the DMZ and the North Korean leadership.

With respect to the issue of extending missile ranges, I think President Lee got it exactly right. We have this incredibly powerful alliance that is multidimensional and involves a whole

range of coordination, training activities, making sure that there's interoperability with respect to various weapon systems and our defensive capabilities. And so all these issues are being discussed as we move forward to implementing the 2015 plan.

And so there are no specific preconditions around—or specific obstacles around the missile range issue. Rather, it's a broader question of what are the needs in order for us to fulfill our enduring goals around the alliance. And a lot of that is technical. A lot of it takes place not at the Presidential level, but rather at the military level. And we will continue to instruct our teams that they work closely together to ensure what is the ultimate outcome, which is not any particular weapon system or any particular missile range, but rather, can we protect our people, can we make sure that the objectives of the alliance are achieved.

With respect to the six-party talks, look, we've been very clear about this again and again. It's not that complicated. If the North Koreans are serious about entering into six-party talks, they have to show that they are operating in good faith. At minimum, that requires them suspending activities that right now clearly are contrary to previous obligations that they've made and international law. And when they do that, then we'll be able to sit down and resolve, hopefully, some of these longer term issues.

In the absence of that, it's hard to figure out how these discussions would be productive. And frankly, President Lee and I both have a lot of things to do, and so we try not to have our team sit around tables talking in circles without actually getting anything done. And my hope is, is that at some point the North Koreans make the decision that it is in their interests to try to figure out how to feed their people and improve their economy rather than have big parades where they show off weapons.

Mark Landler [New York Times]. You can use them both, Mark. [*Laughter*]

*China-North Korea Relations/North Korean Leadership*

Q. Exactly. Thank you both. A question first for President Obama. Mr. President, in the past you've been, particularly when frustrated with China on the issue of North Korea, not shy about telling President Hu that the U.S. will do what's necessary to protect its national security interest. As you're meeting President Hu tomorrow, I wonder what message will you give him regarding North Korea. Are you satisfied with the pressure that China has brought to bear on North Korea? Is there more they could be doing? And is it realistic to think that if they pushed hard enough they might persuade the North Koreans not to go ahead with the satellite launch?

And a question for President Lee. As long as my colleague asked President Obama for his views on Kim Jong Un, I'd like to ask you your views. You live here. You've paid attention to North Korea for longer than our President has, I daresay. And I just wonder whether you think he is, as the President suggested, still in a very tenuous situation, or whether you see him as really establishing quite some control.

*President Obama.* Well, first of all, I look forward to my meeting with President Hu tomorrow. Obviously, the issue of North Korea will be one among a number of topics that we discuss.

My communications with the Chinese have been very consistent on this issue. It is my firm belief that it is in none of our interests to see either tension and instability on the Peninsula, and it's not in anybody's interest to see a nuclearized Peninsula. The Chinese say they agree with that. The question then is, given that they have more influence and closer diplomatic relations with North Korea than any other country on Earth, what are they doing to



help guide or encourage North Korea to take a more constructive approach? And that certainly will be a topic of conversation.

Now, I am sympathetic to the fact that they share a border with North Korea; they are deeply concerned about potential instability in that country and what ramifications it might have on China. And it is important to recognize that they have a broad range of equities when it comes to how they operate with North Korea, given that they're neighbors. But what I've said to them consistently is rewarding bad behavior, turning a blind eye to deliberate provocations, trying to paper over these not just provocative words, but extraordinarily provocative acts that violate international norms, that that's not obviously working.

So in the same way that North Korea needs to do something new if it actually wants to do right by its people, my suggestion to China is, is that how they communicate their concerns to North Korea should probably reflect the fact that the approach they've taken over the last several decades hasn't led to a fundamental shift in North Korea's behavior.

And the irony of course is, is that during the last 20 years, China has leapt into the 21st century, in part by abandoning some of the practices that North Korea still clings to. You couldn't ask for a better model of the difference, at least on the economic front, that different policies have made.

And again, I believe China is very sincere that it does not want to see North Korea with a nuclear weapon. But it is going to have to act on that interest in a sustained way. And if it does, I think together, between the South Koreans, the Japanese, the Russians, the Chinese, and ourselves, I think we can have a real impact.

*President Lee.* With regards to your question about Kim Jong Un and my impression on him, it's a difficult question. I think it's safe to say that it's rather premature for anyone to make any initial assessment or analysis of Kim Jong Un or have an accurate impression on Kim Jong Un. And I think it's safe to say that the majority of North Korean people themselves are probably having a difficult time trying to assess their own leader because it hasn't been very long since he assumed the leadership role.

So I don't think any leader around the world is going to give you a definitive impression or an answer to your question. But having said that, I initially did have a bit of an expectation that he will take a different path. But his recent announcement was a source of disappointment. Nonetheless, I will wait and see and give you a more definitive answer of my impression on Kim Jong Un, and I think that will be more accurate.

And new leader in North Korea will have to understand that he cannot survive alone in this world. In this day and age, no country or people—or leader, for that matter—cannot stand alone. It's imperative that all leaders and countries work together as a responsible member of the international community. And this is the surest way to ensure a better life for the people of that country. And if they do so, of course, including the Republic of Korea and the United States and many other members of the international community, will help the North Koreans realize a better life for their people.

Thank you very much

*President Obama.* Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 6:44 p.m. at the Blue House. In his remarks, the President referred to Kim Yoon-ok, wife of President Lee; and Supreme Commander Kim

Jong Un of North Korea. President Lee and some reporters spoke in Korean, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

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