

Keynote Speech  
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Distinguished Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad that we are able to meet here today, in spite of the challenges facing Thailand at this time. Let us take a break from the Thai situation, and take our minds to the Korean Peninsula, a region facing many challenges as well.

The Korean War began on 25 June 1950 and is still continuing as we speak. Even though the fighting had stopped back in 1953, with the signing of the Armistice Agreement, there has been no official end to the war, no peace agreement. The Korean Peninsula remains one of the most fragile and dangerous areas of the world, where fighting could resume at anytime.

I have been asked to share with you today some of my personal stories about my interactions with the people from Pyongyang. To understand a people, one must understand how they think. We are quite familiar with the views of the United States. I hope my story will add a little to our understanding of the people, in a country that some have called the “Hermit Kingdom.”

I felt that Thailand was in a unique position to play a constructive role regarding the situation in the Korean Peninsula. Thailand has close relations with the US, as well as with the Republic of Korea. Thailand also has good relations with the DPRK for nearly forty years now, since 1975. That was why I decided to interact with the DPRK back in 2004.

I have been invited to the DPRK three times, the first in 2004, as a representative of a new political party in Thailand. I was invited back to the DPRK in 2005 as Thailand’s foreign minister, the first foreign minister of Thailand to visit the country. I was invited back again in July of last year in my personal capacity.

When I was preparing for my first trip to the DPRK back in 2004, the DPRK ambassador in Bangkok called me several times, to ask about the gifts I would be taking to Pyongyang.

I told the ambassador about my gift for the Dear Leader Kim Jong Il. The ambassador asked me to be sure to bring another gift, a more valuable one, for President Kim Il Sung, the father. This was a rather unusual request, since President Kim Il Sung had passed away in July of 1994, ten years earlier. The ambassador then explained that Kim Il Sung had been given the position of “President for Eternity” and therefore, he remained president and continued to receive gifts, in spite of his death ten years earlier. That is why there would only be one president of the DPRK forever. You would notice that the Supreme Leader today, Kim Jong-un, is not president. His late father, Kim Jong-il, was also not president.

On my arrival in Pyongyang, I was greeted by senior DPRK officials, before stepping off the plane. After a few words of welcome to me, one official asked me if I could give him the gifts right away. He was very pleased, displaying a broad smile, when my assistants gave him the two gifts for his leaders before I got into the waiting car.

We paid our respect to the Eternal President and were invited to enter a large room where all the gifts to DPRK leaders from around the world were on display. Since there were so many gifts from around the world, I was told that if I were to spend a minute looking at a gift, it would take me two and a half years to see all the gifts located throughout the country. I thought to myself that friendships from around the world were important for the DPRK. As we spent the next couple of hours looking at the gifts, I noticed that my two gifts from the airport were already on display.

My meetings with senior DPRK officials were proper and formal. I had a good meeting with the President of the Supreme People’s Assembly, Kim Jong-nam, discussing mostly bilateral issues. Then I met with Choe Thae-bok, Chairman of the Supreme People’s Assembly and Secretary of the Workers’ Party of Korea.

My meeting with Choe Thae-bok started out very formal, until I succeeded in breaking the ice. I noticed in his CV that he had studied in the German Democratic Republic. I could speak some German, since I had spent some teenage years in the Federal Republic of Germany. I spoke to him in German. He responded with a surprised look, a big smile and the meeting became relaxed, right away. I thought to myself, thank goodness for the German language.

I invited Choe Thae-bok to dinner in return for his hosting a dinner for us. His assistants informed my assistants that it was not their tradition to accept a dinner invitation from visitors, and that Choe Thae-bok would be out of town anyway. Words came later though that Choe Thae-bok had enjoyed the meeting with me very much, and that he would break tradition and attend my dinner, but only for half an hour.

We had a good dinner. I mixed in casual conversations with some more serious questions. Here were some of the questions and answers.

(Question) What lessons did the DPRK learn from the US invasion and occupation of Iraq?

(Answer) Iraq was invaded because the US thought Iraq was weak, and had no weapons of mass destruction. Before the invasion, the US had called Iraq an Axis of Evil. The US had also called the DPRK an Axis of Evil. Therefore, the only way to avoid US aggression would be to show the US that the DPRK was strong, and in possession of nuclear weapons.

(Question) There were reports that the US was planning to decrease its military presence in South Korea. Would the DPRK want to see a total withdrawal of US troops from South Korea?

(Answer) A partial US military withdrawal from South Korea would be welcome. However, a total withdrawal of US troops from South Korea would be destabilizing. It would mean that the US was ready to use long-range missiles against the DPRK, without putting its troops in harms way.

During the conversation, I encouraged the DPRK to participate in the Six Party Talks. He said that the DPRK would not attend the Six Party Talks, because the DPRK would insist on holding only bilateral talks with the US. I told him that sometimes, when I could not get an appointment to see someone, I would attend a party with that person attending, and find an opportunity to talk to him alone. He thought about it, smiled and said, “interesting”.

The dinner turned out to be relaxing and Choe Thea-bok stayed for 3 hours. I was pleased to see that the DPRK attended the Six Party Talks soon after my visit, and had an opportunity to talk directly to the US representative.

At the invitation of the then DPRK Foreign Minister Pak Num-chun, I returned to the DPRK in August 2005, when the DPRK had just declared that it would not attend any further Six Party Talks, because of the following reasons.

1. US/Republic of Korea joint military exercise, which was happening at that time.
2. The appointment of Jay Lefkowitz as US Special Envoy on Human Rights in the DPRK.

When I arrived in Pyongyang, I listened to the DPRK Foreign Minister’s explanation on why the DPRK would not attend the Six Party Talks anymore. I was also up to date on the details of the positions of the other five participants. The US Secretary of State and the other foreign ministers of the five participating countries briefed me of their individual positions prior to my trip. I told the DPRK foreign minister why it would

be in the interest of the DPRK to go back to the Six Party Talks, and even sign an agreement to dismantle its nuclear weapons. We had a long and constructive conversation. I was pleased to learn that the DPRK returned to the Six Party Talks 10 days after my departure from Pyongyang. As you will recall, that meeting in September 2005, ended with the signing of the Framework Agreement on Denuclearization.

I asked what it would take to get the DPRK to destroy its nuclear weapons. He answered:

1. The US must end its' "hostile" policy and stop making the DPRK feel insecure. The DPRK would like to see the normalization of its relations with the US, leading to a peace treaty, formally ending the Korean War.
2. The US must stop the practice of name-calling. Stop calling the DPRK an Axis of Evil.
3. The US nuclear umbrella over the Korean Peninsula must end.
4. Allow the DPRK to exercise its sovereign right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy.
5. The DPRK should be treated by the US as an equal sovereign partner.

I was invited back to the DPRK in July of last year. Since my allotted time today is running out fast, let me summarize for you some of the latest DPRK positions conveyed to me.

1. The DPRK had always wanted to replace the Armistice Agreement with a Peace Agreement with the US. The US continues to refuse.

2. According to the DPRK, the US violated the Armistice Agreement by continuing to have troops in South Korea after the departure of the UN Forces. The Armistice Agreement prohibits the stationing of "foreign forces" on the Korean Peninsula. You would notice that this point was different from the point conveyed to me in 2004.

3. According to the DPRK, the presence of US nuclear weapons in the Korean Peninsula, in the Republic of Korea and the surrounding seas, is a violation of the Armistice Agreement.

4. The DPRK is of the opinion that the Armistice Agreement also prohibits foreign military exercise on the Korean Peninsula. US/ROK military exercises are seen as hostile to the DPRK and a violation of the Armistice Agreement. The DPRK sees US/ROK military exercise as final preparation for war and would react in kind. They often said to me, imagine how the US would feel if the DPRK conducts military exercises just off the coast of California.

5. It is noteworthy that, this position was just changed in the last few days. The DPRK now says that in the interest of peace, it would refrain from reacting to the upcoming US/ROK joint military exercise scheduled to begin next month (in February 2014) and last until April 2014.

6. This very recent change of policy was also reflected in the DPRK's acceptance on 24 January 2014 of ROK's proposal to proceed with the reunion of elderly relatives separated by the Korean War, even though it had rejected this proposal on 6 January 2014, citing then, the upcoming US/ROK military exercise as an obstacle.

7. The DPRK would emphasize that under the US – DPRK Agreed Framework of 1994 which established the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), the US agreed to help set up light water reactors in the DPRK, but failed to live up to the agreement.

8. The DPRK often explained that the US had made the DPRK a target state for nuclear attack, which led to the DPRK's decision to build nuclear weapons in self-defense. The NPT requires that nuclear weapon states must not threaten non-nuclear weapon states with nuclear destruction.

9. Economic development is the number one priority for the DPRK, but now, in the light of increased UN sanctions against the DPRK in 2013, and the continued US/ROK joint military exercises on the Korean Peninsula, the DPRK could no longer consider giving up its nuclear weapons, since those weapons are needed to safeguard the DPRK from US and South Korean attacks.

10. The launching of DPRK satellites for peaceful purposes is a sovereign right of the DPRK. US initiatives in 2013 to increase UN Security Council sanctions against the DPRK were seen as hostile acts against the DPRK.

11. In the light of these recent developments, the DPRK would only get rid of its nuclear weapons at the same time as all other nuclear weapon states in the world. This was a new position in 2013.

12. Even though the DPRK is now saying that it would not dismantle its nuclear weapons until the US and all other nuclear weapon states have done so, it has left a window open. The DPRK is also saying that it would be willing to get rid of its nuclear weapons, if all nuclear weapons are removed from the Korean Peninsula, as a first step toward a world without nuclear weapons. This means that US nuclear submarines would be barred from the Korean Peninsula as well.

13. The DPRK is convinced that the US is now interested in placing more weapons and troops in East Asia to contain Russia and China, but is using the DPRK threat as an excuse.

14. The US has set preconditions for the DPRK to fulfill before going back to the Six Party Talks. The DPRK would only attend future Six Party Talks without preconditions.

15. Regarding the sentencing of Kenneth Bae to 15 years in labor camp, it was noted that in the past, the DPRK would release US citizens when senior personalities from the US would travel to the DPRK to ask for their release, such as Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. This would not be the case for Kenneth Bae since he entered the DPRK illegally and was spying for a US agency. He is expected to serve out his sentence.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These were some of the positions and thoughts conveyed to me by the DPRK throughout the years. We know that the US perceptions and positions are quite different. It is clear that many DPRK actions have been based on different assumptions and different world-views than what we were used to. It is important to know how the other side thinks. There are psychological elements in all of this.

All in all, there is a substantial gap of perception between the DPRK and the outside world. The sense of insecurity in the DPRK seems real. The degree of insecurity is a subject for further debates. Some observers may wonder whether the DPRK government really feels insecure, or is it just creating a sense of insecurity in order to consolidate the people behind it? My answer would be yes and yes, a mixture of both.

We are here today to discuss and exchange views on the best ways to bring peace and security to the Korean Peninsula. Let us explore all possible options.

Is there a role for Thailand? Is there a role for ASEAN? Should the ASEAN Regional Forum or the ARF be used more? After so many years in the confidence-building mode, is it time for us to use the ARF as a real and credible preventive diplomacy mechanism? The ARF, after all is the only regional forum where the US, the DPRK and the ROK as well as all members of the Six Party Talks are participants, with a good window for ASEAN to play a constructive role.

Some have proposed that an organization similar to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) should be created for Northeast Asia to help bring peace and security to the Korean Peninsula. I think it is an idea worth discussing.

I would propose further that the ARF should be used as a basis for the building of an OSCE type organization for, not only Northeast Asia, but for the East Asia region at large. An enhanced ARF could then play a similar role to the OSCE in bringing peace and security to the East Asia region at large, including the Korean Peninsula.

We would then have a rather comprehensive set of mechanisms to help us improve the situation in the Korean Peninsula. We would have the bilateral option; the

third party good offices option; the Six Party Talks option, the enhanced ARF option and the United Nations options to pick and choose from.

We have a lot to talk about today. Good luck and thank you very much.