

U.S. Security Posture in Northeast Asia: Issues and Outlook

Prepared Remarks by

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Thank you Dr. Kim and the Institute for Corean American Studies for having me here today. I look forward to discussing the U.S. security posture in Northeast Asia with you today. I will try to focus my remarks on a few key issues surrounding that topic. Then I would be glad to open things up and use the remainder of the time responding to your questions.

Coming from the Defense Department, I like to look at things from the traditional strategic approach of ends, ways and means. The 2006 U.S. National Security Strategy states that the goal of American statecraft “is to help create a world of democratic, well-governed states that can meet the needs of their citizens and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system.” The National Security Strategy sets forth several tasks toward achieving this goal such as: championing human dignity; defeating global terrorism; defusing regional conflicts; preventing threats to ourselves our allies and our friends from weapons of mass destruction; expanding global economic growth through free markets and free trade; expanding development and building conditions for democracy.

In East Asia, the United States has pursued these and similar objectives consistently, and in many cases successfully, over the last several decades, and we continue to do so today through several important initiatives, such as the Korea-U.S. Free

Trade Agreement, the Strategic Economic Dialogue with China, the Six-Party Talks on denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and the proliferation security initiative.

At the Defense Department, we are also focused on several initiatives in East Asia that support our National Security Strategy. These initiatives reflect the continued U.S. commitment to peace, security and stability in the region – the very conditions that have underwritten the unprecedented economic growth and democratization that has transformed much of the region since the end of the Korean War. These initiatives include our military-to-military engagement with China through which we work to increase understanding, dispel misperceptions and avoid miscalculations. They include our third neighbor support for Mongolia in its democratic development and defense reform efforts, through which it is transforming its forces by training and equipping them to support international peacekeeping missions. Most significantly, these initiatives include the ongoing work with our Korean and Japanese allies to transform those two alliances in ways that will strengthen their foundational roles in assuring the peace and security of the region, while we simultaneously work together to develop new ways in which these alliances can contribute beyond the region.

The East Asia region is at once a region that is pulled together by the tremendous capabilities and capacities of its peoples, while simultaneously it is kept apart by historic rivalries, political differences, nationalism, and in some cases, deep and abiding mistrust. These convergent and divergent tendencies are at work constantly. In just the past month, we have seen the warm and successful visits of Korean President Lee Myung-bak and Chinese President Hu Jintao to Japan. The leadership in all three countries seems

determined to look past the various historical issues that have divided their peoples and instead build on their economic, cultural and social interconnections toward more stable and productive political relationships. Nevertheless, we also know that recent history has provided many examples of how ties in these relationships can quickly become strained. As Jim Hoagland put it just this past Sunday in the Washington Post, whenever they have needed it, the leaders of China and Japan “have always been able to count on each other to stir nationalist anger and distract their followers from other problems.”

East Asia also juxtaposes tremendous opportunity with tremendous uncertainty. The opportunities inherent to the September 19, 2005 Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks are comprehensive. However, they are also qualified by the uncertainties regarding the choices North Korea will make and the objectives it will pursue. In China, economic transformation has opened up tremendous opportunities for the Chinese people and for the world, but it has also created great uncertainties about social conditions, the environment, and China’s role in shaping the future structure of international systems.

Across the Taiwan Strait, tensions have relaxed significantly since Ma Ying-jeou’s election creating opportunities to improve cross-Strait relations. But the path to a peaceful resolution of differences Beijing and Taipei remains uncharted and uncertain, making the potential for crisis an ever-present concern.

Over the past decade or so, we have also witnessed an unprecedented build-up in China’s military capability, combined with continued uncertainty as to China’s strategic intentions and the role of the People’s Liberation Army in achieving China’s strategic goals. The outside world has limited knowledge of Chinese motivations and decision-

making or of the key capabilities supporting China's military modernization. However, from what we do know, as stated in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, "Of the major and emerging powers, China has the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional U.S. military advantages absent U.S. counter strategies." In this situation, the United States, like many of China's neighbors, hedges. We seek a constructive and cooperative relationship with China. We work hard to develop that relationship, and we have seen positive results in several areas. At the same time, when we watch the continuing military build-up and when we see events like the January 2007 anti-satellite test that go unexplained, we conclude we also must plan for other possibilities and uncertainties.

It is in this context of convergence and divergence, and of opportunity and uncertainty, that I would like to consider the question of U.S. security posture in Northeast Asia and highlight some of the initiatives we are pursuing.

In Korea, we have reduced our force structure by a little less than one-third from 37,000 personnel to about 28,500 personnel, and we recently agreed with President Lee that we will maintain these current levels. We are making good progress in implementing the strategic transition plan under which, beginning in April 2012, Korean national leadership will retain Operational Control over Korean forces during wartime. We are moving down the implementation path of the Land Partnership Plan and the Yongsan Relocation Program under which U.S. forces will consolidate into hubs south of the Han River and the U.S. will return valuable land in Seoul and elsewhere to the

Korean people. These programs are reducing our impact on local communities, strengthening the posture of our forces, improving the quality of life for our personnel assigned to Korea, and providing a more stable basis for an enduring presence and alliance relationship.

Likewise, in Japan, the U.S. is making major changes that will strengthen our presence by introducing new and upgraded capabilities, even as we reduce our overall force levels and consolidate our footprint. This summer, the nuclear-powered USS GEORGE WASHINGTON will take up her new home at Yokosuka, replacing the conventionally powered USS KITTY HAWK, which even now is on her final cruise before decommissioning after 47 years of service. The establishment of a bilateral joint operations coordination center and the co-location of the Air Self-Defense Force's Air Defense Command at Yokota Air Base with the U.S. 5th Air Force and forward elements of the U.S. 13th Air Force are creating new capabilities and capacities for coordinating command and control that U.S. and Japanese forces have lacked. This is particularly crucial in the field of missile defense, where the short timelines and the complex networking of sensors, shooters and other systems present our highest civilian and military decision makers with challenges never before confronted. We are also undertaking an historic effort to relocate approximately 8,000 Marines plus dependents from Okinawa to Guam, in concert with expansions of our Air Force and Naval presence there. In addition to being a hub for information, surveillance, reconnaissance and strike capabilities, Guam will also be an additional location from which our Marines can support needs in the western Pacific with their quick response capabilities. Also, as a

part of this program, we are creating the capacity for a continuous or nearly continuous rotational training presence of Japan Self-Defense Forces on Guam. That presence will increase opportunities to train and operate bilaterally, increase opportunities for training together with third countries, and help cement the linkages between U.S. and Japanese force postures in the Pacific. Truly, these transformations are making Guam a part of the U.S.-Japan alliance.

In our alliances with Korea and Japan, we are looking at ways to update our sharing of roles and missions – both as they pertain to traditional areas of alliance activity associated with defense of Korea and Japan, and with respect to wider arenas of international security. Frankly, this updating of roles and missions creates new challenges for both of our partners. For most of the past several decades, both countries' militaries have largely remained at home. Yes, Korean forces went to Vietnam where they fought and died next to American forces. And yes, both Korea and Japan have deployed forces in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Likewise, both countries have sent their forces on a variety of humanitarian and disaster relief missions, as well as peacekeeping missions, such as the Korean forces currently in Lebanon or deployments in support of Tsunami relief in Indonesia and Earthquake relief in Pakistan. But such deployments have more often been the exception than the rule, and they have often been quite limited in scope. Looking ahead, the question both alliances face is, given our shared security interests, our shared values, and the shared strategic aims we each have, how should the U.S., Japan and Korea, acting separately, bilaterally,

and trilaterally, coordinate our considerable capabilities and capacities to support our strategic ends?

Of course, we have answered such questions in the bilateral context on many occasions. The U.S. and Japan put forward a Joint Security Declaration in 1996. We put forward Common Strategic Objectives in 2005 that continue to frame much of our alliance work today. More recently, during his April visit to the U.S., President Lee said that the alliance between the U.S. and Korea must undergo new changes and transform itself into a 21st century strategic alliance based on freedom and democracy, human rights and the principle of market economics. He said that this topic of a 21st century alliance that will contribute to global peace and security is something the two countries will keep on the bilateral agenda.

On the other hand, we have rarely made much progress in a trilateral context, and we have generally lacked a working trilateral framework for defense policy coordination among the U.S., Japan and Korea. There have been attempts at trilateral defense cooperation in the past, but these have always been unable to overcome the forces of divergence that have historically impeded strategic cooperation among the nations of East Asia.

Now, however, we may once again have an opportunity to explore the potential for trilateral cooperation. Several points bear emphasis when considering trilateral cooperation among Korea, Japan and the U.S.:

First, even though Korea and Japan are not allies, there is, in fact, a fairly regular interchange between the Korean military and the Japan Self-Defense Forces. This

interchange goes on in military and civilian channels and in official and unofficial channels. It has helped maintain stability in the relationship, even while the political atmosphere suffered in recent years.

Second, political winds may shift from time to time, but those shifts don't generally change fundamental realities. And among the fundamental realities of security in Northeast Asia are the interconnections between the security of Korea and the security of Japan. That fact has not changed since the Korean War when U.S. forces staged through Japan on their way to and from the peninsula. In fact, with the proliferation of ballistic missiles, with the interconnected nature of the Korean and Japanese economies today, and with the heavy reliance of the U.S., Japanese and Korean societies on interconnected computer and communications systems that are increasingly vulnerable to kinetic and non-kinetic attacks, the security of Korea and Japan are intertwined today as they never have been before. Moreover, the security interests of Korea and Japan are further intertwined as a result of their respective partnerships with a common ally.

Third, an unavoidable consequence of globalization and the continuing march of technology is the growing ability of organizations of smaller and smaller sizes to possess and control capabilities that produce ever-greater effects across ever-wider expanses. Not only do Japan, Korea and the U.S. share important interests in working together regarding these types of problems, but that interest extends to working with other regional and global partners.

Fourth, the United States has consistently favored trilateral defense cooperation with Korea and Japan. This is not an issue that has been subject to shifts in the U.S.

political winds as administrations have changed. Rather, it has been a constant that stems from a fundamental recognition of the continuing inseparability of America's interests from these two allies.

So for all these reasons, even though I am from the Defense Department where we make our living by planning for the worst while hoping for the best, I am rather optimistic about the opportunities and prospects for trilateral defense cooperation among our three countries in the near-to-medium term. We appear at last to have the political support in all three countries necessary to launch trilateral discussions. We also appear to have a sufficient convergence of regional and global interests among our three countries to form the basis of an agenda that offers the potential for productive discussions.

America's alliances with Japan and Korea are now both well over fifty years old. Both are moving ahead with historic transformations, buoyed by strong popular support in each nation. Now, we have the additional opportunity to use cooperation in the trilateral arena to reinforce and strengthen both of these historic and indispensable alliances as bulwarks for peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. In doing so, we will contribute to the transformation of these alliances to meet the regional and global challenges of the next fifty years.