

"Korea: Time to Leave the Peninsula?"

Colonel William Drennan

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Colonel Drennan: Good afternoon, and thank you for coming.

I love being introduced to military audiences as having worked at the U.S. Institute of Peace because I always get this look like you've gone over to the dark side.
[Laughter].

Just a few second advertisement on USIP. It is a federally funded, independent agency. The budget comes entirely from appropriations from the U.S. Congress. The Institute's activities are overseen by a Board of Directors, the members of whom are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. It is studiously non-partisan, by law. If it should ever fail to honor that mandate it would quickly become history.

It was a pleasure to work there. They're doing great work. For those of you familiar with the Mall area of Washington, D.C., if you travel west on Constitution Avenue you'll look right and see the Lincoln Memorial, the Vietnam Memorial, and if you look left on the corner of Constitution and 23rd, there's a magnificent new building being constructed, and that is the future home of the U.S. Institute of Peace.

So it's not a left wing organization, as I said, it's studiously non-partisan. I worked there for six years for President Richard Solomon, Ambassador Richard Solomon, who is a noted Korea expert in his own right. That made my job wonderful because he cared about what I do.

Somebody once told me that Korea is a university from which you never graduate. For those of you who have been stationed there and who have gotten the bug like I did when I was assigned to USFK, I ran the J5 Policy and Strategy shop for two years, it put me on an entirely different career path. That was in 1988. Here I am 21 years later, still talking about Korea.

The question before us today, the one that General Dunn asked me to talk about, is whether or not it's time to leave the Peninsula. I think you'll find that my answer is rather predictable, but I'm going to rationalize why I say that.

This is what I'm going to be talking about. You'll have to bear with me. There are some academic, if you will, portions of this. I'll try to keep them at a minimum when we're talking about alliance theory. Why do nations form alliances? Then go into the Republic of Korea strategic choices, what some alternative futures might look like. I've come up with a scheme that satisfies me about in broad strokes, very broad strokes, alternative futures on the Korean Peninsula. Then I will in fact explicitly answer the question about is it time to leave the Peninsula.

Let's get started.

I found this quote years ago. Actually it was in a column written by Charles Krauthammer who's going to appear in the next hour, I guess. I find this very instructive. There's a lesson here for the U.S. when it comes to evaluating alliances. That's in the first bullet.

We don't do this to get gratitude. We shouldn't seek that. And it's counter-productive, I would submit, if we do.

To state the obvious, "States cooperate to further national interests", not international interests. You all know that. Perhaps it's not so obvious, though, that states that are extremely independent on outside support will in fact follow their own interests even at the risk of angering their patrons. Anybody who served in Korea will recognize the applicability of this.

Now you'll hear many times about the balance of power. There's classic balance of power theories. There's been a necessary and I think significant refinement to that. It's got greater explanatory power. That is that nations ally to balance threats. If it were simply to balance power the United States would find itself very lonely at the top arrayed against probably the rest of the world because of our overarching power.

Now until 2000 the U.S. and the ROK agreed on the threat, the threat posed by North Korea. Where we began to drift apart was over the last item, perceived intentions. I'll have more to say about where that led us in the last decade and the problems that we face even today because of that legacy of what I call the lost decade.

Let me get into the academic portion just a little bit here. Anybody who's been to a staff college or a war college probably recognizes the accuracy of this statement, and I've listed a couple of the strategic thinkers who advocate that. But I would point out the sheer size of Eurasia in red. You'll see that it encompasses Europe,

Russia, China, India, Southeast Asia, the Persian Gulf, and of course Northeast Asia.

Our future viability is largely determined by our success or failure in preventing the Eurasian land mass by being dominated by a single power, read hostile power.

This is my list of U.S. vital interests. I didn't make it up. I cobbled it together from a variety of sources. You can make up your own list. We can quibble about the exact terminology. But I think these four pretty much encompass what U.S. vital interests have been, and I would submit that they haven't changed in the history of the United States. Writ large, I think these applied in George Washington's time and I think they apply now.

Again, I talk about the Eurasian land mass one more time, and particularly for Airmen, I think it's important on the geostrategic side to note that we want to maintain the oceans and now the airways as barriers to, and not as avenues of approach for attacks against the United States.

Economic is rather self evident. The ideological really becomes interesting because it becomes a matter of how you are going to service, if you will, that vital interest. What I have in mind here is really the question lately of using force to promote our ideological vital interests, or whether that's something we should use non-military means to do.

Every nation faces a security dilemma. This is a political science term, for those of you who are engineers and did not study international relations, this is a term of art. Our security dilemma is as I've listed here.

Our historic answer to that is in order to survive in an anarchical world, and what I mean by that is, again, to state the obvious. There is no world government. There is no world police force. There is no world military to safeguard the peace. It's left up to sovereign states. So you get above the state level and it's anarchy. And we have to deal with that.

Our answer historically has been, as I've listed on the slide, isolationism and avoiding that famous phrase, entangling alliances. That all changed in the post World War II era, of course, the era that I grew up in, where we led a coalition of free world nations in an effort to contain communism. We in fact consciously created a system of entangling alliances.

The post Cold War world, as I've listed, a work in progress. We'll see.

This list may not be exhaustive. You can, I'm sure if you think about it hard enough, can add some that I haven't put in here. But Pactomania. We were going around in the '40s and '50s and '60s making alliances, forming pacts, very energetically. I've listed some of the key ones here. So this is the Cold War era.

Post Cold War alliances, again, maybe not exhaustive, and of course there's a distinction between formal treaty allies and other types of allies, but for multilateral NATO is the prime example.

I list the five key bilateral alliances in the Asia Pacific region because they form the security architecture for the region. There is no multilateral system. It's a series of bilateral relationships with these five countries that underwrite security in the Asia Pacific region, and I tend to think of it as an ecosystem. Another analogy would be to a spider web. If you tinker with any one of those five, it's going to reverberate throughout the entire region. So when we talk about a time to leave the Peninsula, we can't consider that just in isolation, U.S.-ROK unilaterally.

As far as South Korea is concerned, this is their security dilemma. Again, an anarchical world that they have to survive in, surrounded by larger regional powers, all of whom have fought over and in the Korean Peninsula in the last 115 years, beginning with the first Sino-Russian War in 1894, '95; followed by the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905; Korean War; etc., etc., etc.

Korea, of course, is dominated, its security challenge is dominated by the challenge posed by North Korea -- an unreformed hostile system and regime that's not really all that interested in genuine reconciliation. We've got 10-plus years now of the Sunshine Policy that was based on the assumption that Kim Jong Il was a partner for peace with Kim Dae Jung. I think the verdict is in. He's not. And I'll have more to say on that later.

But in terms of North Korea's attitude -- isolated, prickly, heavily armed. It fears all unification scenarios except the one that is the least likely and that is where they unify the Peninsula by force as they attempted to do in 1950-1953. It does have, of course, weapons of mass destruction programs, and an outside although antiquated conventional military force.

So the South Korean answer to its security dilemma, both in the immediate aftermath of the Korean War, during the Cold War, and since, has been an alliance with the United States. But the ROK does have options and President Kim Dae Jung who served from 1998-2003 is the architect of

the Sunshine Policy and an attempt, and I think far-sighted, statesmanlike attempt, to end the hostilities between North and South and see if they can't transform the strategic landscape on the Peninsula and in the region.

The objective of the Sunshine Policy, of course, was to end the Cold War as I alluded to just a moment ago, by constructing a web of relationships between the two halves of the Korean Peninsula, across the board, fostering genuine reconciliation. And the key members, the key architects of this system were very explicit. They wanted to hook North Korea on capitalism. That would foster not only dependence on the South, but also economic and political reforms, in that order, that would uplift the North economically so that when unification did come about at some undetermined date in the future, the burden for South Korea would be lessened. The economic burden.

Of course the goal ultimately was and is, no matter whose scheme you're talking about, is to reunify the Peninsula, and as the Koreans like to say, rectify history. Because they see this for what it is. It's an artificial division of the Peninsula imposed by outsiders.

So much for theory. In practice, the Sunshine Policy I think was, I'm tempted to say a disaster, but it certainly was counter-productive, I believe, because it morphed into appeasement. The stronger party, South Korea, became the supplicant. Instead of the North becoming hooked on the South economically, the South became hooked on providing unreciprocated, unrestricted aid and trade to the North. And in the face of some egregious provocations by the North over the period of the lost decade.

Kim Dae Jung and his successor, Roh Moo Hyun stuck stubbornly to the Sunshine Policy, I think because at least in the person of Kim Dae Jung, he became his own policy. He was Sunshine, Sunshine was Kim Dae Jung. If Sunshine failed, he failed.

That put the North in the position of mastery in the bilateral relationships and there are a couple of slides that I'm very proud of because they're so alliterative, and you'll see this as one of them, they control the topics, timing, terms, tempo and tenor of the relationship. I'll let you chew on that.

In the process, though, North Korea became resuscitated. That raises an interesting question. In the mid '90s when they had pretty much hit bottom and a couple of million people, depending on who you talk to, starved to death, the threat became or the concern became, in both Seoul and Washington, not so much their nuclear weapons programs because we had had the Agreed Framework signed in

1994, that seemed to have "solved" the nuclear issue. Now the threat from the North was the threat of collapse, and all the hardship and all the difficulties and all the humanitarian challenges that a collapsed state would entail. It's an open question. I find it tantalizing to think here in 2009 how things might be different on the Peninsula today if instead of working very hard to avoid the collapse of North Korea, if we had just pressured them, drove them over the brink, and dealt with the results. I don't know the answer to that, but I do find it amusing to think about it.

The impact of Sunshine has been significant. During the lost decade the nuclear threat was downplayed by the Republic of Korea government. It became, and this is in quotes for a reason, because this is what the South Korean government would say. This is a bilateral issue between the U.S. and the DPRK, as if a nuclear armed North Korea had no affect on the security of the South.

Inter-Korean relations were totally delinked from the nuclear issue. That put the South in the position of being marginalized at the six-party talks. And because of this unreciprocated aid and trade, the North Korean regime was propped up. Exhibit and B -- Mt. Kumgang tourist facility just north of the DMZ is a way, I will be uncharitable here. I will say it's a way to launder money to the North. Yes, South Korean tourists get to go up there, it's very scenic. As long as you don't step outside the designated boundaries and get shot by a North Korean soldier, you probably have a good time.

Kaesong, again, it's a way, when all is said and done, to funnel resources, in this case cold hard cash, to the North Korean regime. North Korea faces no risk at Kumgang other than if it fails, the money obviously dries up. But they are not taking any entrepreneurial risks, any capital risks. South Korean firms employ North Koreans, they make products, and the North Korean regime reaps the benefit of that.

My semi-bottom line is that as a result of Sunshine, South Korea is in fact less secure than it was before Sunshine. They now face the traditional conventional threat, but now North Korea, as everybody in this room knows, has demonstrated a nuclear weapons capability. Well, a nuclear capability. They have not yet weaponized it. We don't think. We haven't seen evidence of that.

As a result of all this during the lost decade U.S.-Korea relations became frayed and the alliance was weakened. There was talk in the Pentagon of the ROK being an unreliable ally, and irresponsible about its own security.

The Bush administration had very little patience for tolerating outbreaks of anti-Americanism in the aftermath of the Pyang Summit, and the anti-Americanism that was on display and quite frankly made the difference in the 2002 Korea presidential campaign. Roh Moo Hyun rode a wave of anti-Americanism to the Blue House.

So when Seoul under Roh Moo Hyun decided to demand significant alterations in the traditional alliance he and his officials found a very receptive audience in Washington and particularly in the Department of Defense. That led to announcement of the drawdown of forces, USFK. First consolidating them, relocating the remaining forces south of the Han River and transferring OpCon from, I still use the old term, CINC CFC to ROK National Command Authorities. That's scheduled to take place on the 17th of April, 2012. It proceeds apace.

There are some lessons to be learned here. Rather obviously, at least to us on this side of the ocean, appeasement doesn't work. It certainly did not work with North Korea. You see my rather flippant remark there that North Korea can be rented, but it cannot be bought.

The left/right split. There are many splits in South Korean society. There are splits based on generations, there are vehement splits based on which region of South Korea you come from. These fault lines in South Korea were exacerbated in the extreme because of the emotion generated over the wisdom and efficacy of the Sunshine Policy. It remains unresolved today.

The title of the real Korea is still up for grabs. What I mean by that is which of the two Koreas represents purity? Is it South Korea that is aligned with a powerful outside partner that has embraced Western market capitalism and is a member of the international community? Or is it North Korea, led by the Kim family who fought against the Japanese in World War II, rather insignificantly, but Kim Il Sung did in fact do that. His counterparts in the south, if they served in the military in the early days fought with the Japanese. Park Chung Hee who ruled from 1961 until his assassination in '79 was a lieutenant in the Imperial Japanese Army.

So which represents the real Korea? The traitors, the sellouts, the people who serve the large outside power? Read foreigners. Or the hermetically sealed, isolated by choice, North Korea. I think an understanding of that goes a long way towards some of this naïve romantic attachment that some otherwise intelligent South Koreans have for the North, this issue of purity.

I'd also like to point out, I've used the term "the lost decade" several times now, but the presidential elections in South Korea in 2007 that the current President won, Lee Myung Bak and the 2008 National Assembly elections which the conservative [Haneradang] or Grand National Party won, did not fix the alliance, did not fix the problems caused by the lost decade. Reversion to the bad old days could be only one election away. There are large numbers, I can't quantify it, but polling shows that many many South Koreans are deeply ambivalent about the alliance and in some cases are hostile to it, and anti-Americanism has been, is and I think for the foreseeable future will be a factor in U.S.-South Korea relations.

Let's turn now to the ROK strategic options. I teased you with that earlier.

I think it's very easy for us here in the States, knowing what we know about North and South Korea and the entire security situation in Northeast Asia, to say that South Korea's choice in handling its security dilemma should be obvious. It's to maintain the alliance with the United States. We are the fourth regional power. China, Russia, Japan. I've already talked about how they've all fought -- South Korea is the strategic prize in the region and they've all fought for it, usually on the Peninsula.

It wasn't until the introduction of the fourth power into the region that things became stable. That's us, of course. And we're attractive because we are safely distant geographically, we have no territorial ambitions, and our presence there -- and this is obvious to anybody who looks at the region -- it keeps this trilateral competition between the three major regional powers in check. But it's not really that simple and it's not that easy because the ROK does have other options, at least theoretically. I'm going to quickly go through these.

The first one is self reliance. There are articulate and educated and passionate believers in South Korea who espouse the correctness of adopting a policy of self reliance. Two variants, you see them here, with or without nuclear weapons. I think if South Korea were to opt for a policy of self reliance it would almost have to be accompanied by going nuclear. Japan is a virtual nuclear power. Of course Russia, China and North Korea all have nuclear capabilities of some extent or another, some quite robust. And the question then becomes, even with a nuclear weapons capability, is the South better off with a self reliance package?

The second choice would be neutrality. If you read the literature coming out of Seoul there's talk about South Korea becoming the "Switzerland of the East" where everybody

honors South Korean neutrality. If I were a South Korean I don't know that I would sleep well at night knowing the neighborhood in which I reside, thinking that these three major regional powers are in fact going to honor my neutrality. But theoretically, it is an option.

We've already talked about balance of power a little bit in terms of the theoretical, but advocates of this in the South extrapolate from the 18th and 19th Century experience of Great Britain where in Europe you had the classical balance of power system.

Now one of the features of that, one of the key characteristics, is that alliances were very fluid. They formed and broke apart and reformed with different combinations of countries all designed to keep any one member of the club, if you will, from achieving overarching power.

The regulatory mechanism for that was war. That's how they kept each other in check. Anybody who knows European history knows that it's a history of continual warfare. It was legitimate and it was often used.

So two questions. Would the neighborhood accept the ROK as the balancer? Moving adroitly in these ever-changing coalitions, combinations of states, and is the South Korean populace, or after unification the populace of the Korean Peninsula, ready and willing to wage war to maintain the balance of power in Northeast Asia? Those are questions that the advocates have not answered.

Another choice is multilateralism. Again, I repeat, there's never been a multilateral security arrangement in Northeast Asia or the Asia Pacific region. It also raises questions, principally who would this multilateral security arrangement be targeted against? Who is the enemy? Is it China? Would this stand if they attempted to create such a thing?

Finally, we're back to alliances. Again, anybody who knows the history of the neighborhood understands that an alliance between South Korea and any of the three major regional powers is unlikely and problematic.

That leaves the choice to us. So we've sort of come full circle here.

It would appear because of that that maintaining an alliance would be relatively easy. But of course it's not. There are things that could upset and break the alliance.

Irreconcilable differences on the nature and even the existence of a North Korean threat. We managed to get

through the lost decade -- this was the crux of the matter. We continued to see a threat. Officially the two administrations during the lost decade denied that there was a threat.

To the extent that they at least once under General Schwartz questioned the CINC's assessment of the security situation, openly challenged. We see the same thing but we don't see a threat. We count the same number of bullets and tanks and soldiers, but we don't see it as a threat. That's obviously destructive of an alliance.

A sever and sustained outbreak of anti-Americanism where it gets really really ugly where there are American casualties. We started to get very close to that about seven years ago. There were attacks on Americans. The first time in my experience. Assaults on GIs. It was getting increasingly ugly because the South Korean people were questioning whether or not they needed [megooks] any longer after Kim Dae Jung had gone to the North and had his summit with Kim Jong Il.

There have been two efforts that I'm aware of, two significant efforts, to withdraw U.S. Forces Korea. The first was advocated by candidate Jimmy Carter, and something that he attempted to promulgate after he won the White House. That effort to withdraw U.S. Forces Korea was scuttled principally in the legislative branch. Congress would not have it. Oh, by the way it was also badly wounded from within the Carter administration. There was basically an underground revolt against this by key members of the executive branch. The combination of those two proved deadly to the idea and this proposal from the executive went nowhere.

In 1990, some of you may remember the Nunn/Warner Amendment to the Defense Appropriations Bill that in essence stopped an effort on the part of several key senators to again remove U.S. Forces Korea because of an adverse reaction to a spike in anti-Americanism there.

I mention these two because the first was an initiative from the executive branch; the second was an initiative from the legislative branch. Defeated by the other branch in each particular case.

If the two branches ever come together on the withdrawal of U.S. forces it's a done deal. And one way that it would be a done deal is if the notion were loose in the land here in the U.S. that the defense of South Korea is more important to us than it is to South Koreans. There were people who were beginning to say that in the Bush administration.

Now I'm going to go through this next set of slides rather quickly. I've already told you that I was going to talk about ways to think about the future. The way I do this is I pose two one-word questions, each of which has two one-word answers. Let's start with current conditions today.

The status on the Korean Peninsula is one of hostile division. So the first question becomes reconciliation? And there are two answers. Yes, or no.

If the answer to the question of reconciliation is no, that leads to the second one-word question which is reunification? Again, two possible answers.

If the answer to reunification is no, you're in a loop and things don't change. Again, that's where we are today. The advocates of the Sunshine Policy and the genuineness of North Korea's desire to reconcile notwithstanding.

But what if the answer to reconciliation remains no, and reunification is yes? Now you get into the reunification box.

There are four outcomes here that I'm going to show you and three of them are bad in terms of alternative futures.

The first scenario under no reconciliation but yes to reunification is reunification through capitulation. Think the GDR. East Germany. Where 19 years ago or so somebody in East Germany picked up the phone and called West Germany and said you win, come and take us over. So that's one scenario. Unlikely under the present system and regime.

A second scenario is collapse. We worked to avoid it. We're sort of working to avoid it now, our best efforts notwithstanding. There are no guarantees that North Korea won't collapse. That would achieve reunification, but one of the three bad scenarios.

The third one is conquest. This is the least likely. Again, we talked about how North Korea attempted to do this in the Korean War.

If there's going to be reunification via military conquest, it's going to be under the auspices of Seoul and it's going to be a heck of a mess and we'll all collectively have to pick up the pieces.

Now I'm going to move to the other side of the reconciliation question and answer it positively. Yes, there's reconciliation. Genuine reconciliation. That leads you to the second question of reunification. If the answer is no, instead of hostile division you have a state of

benign division where the two Koreas no longer treat each other as blood enemies. They establish something resembling normal state-to-state relations, they trade travel back and forth, etc., etc., etc. and the wind goes out of the sails of the threat and we have a brighter future. We can live for a long time with a situation of benign division on the Korean Peninsula. This is a pretty good outcome.

But let's say the answer to reunification is yes. How is that going to come about? Where there's reconciliation and now you've got reunification. Well, that's via diplomatic arrangement, compromise. The two sides sit down, they work out their differences, they agree to unite the Korean Peninsula, power sharing however it turns out, but this is an agreement between North and South and the rest of us will not only live with it but we would welcome it.

Now this is the second alliterative slide that I mentioned. The first was the timing, tempo, topics, etc., etc. I am so proud of my four reunification scenarios, I worked long and hard to come up with labels all of which started with C. You'll notice dashed lines, though, between benign division and hostile division. These are not set in stone. A hostile division could, of course, lead to reunification, but so could benign division. So reunification is a possibility. Again, the problem is the most desirable outcome is probably one of the most least likely, and the others are fraught with peril.

So in my estimation the Korea problem, and by that I mean the state of a divided Peninsula, is likely to end badly. I hope I'm wrong, but nothing that I've studied and nothing that I've learned since enrolling at the Korea University leads me to think that it will end anything but badly. As I've already said, the most desirable alternative future is the least likely.

The alliance remains the heart of the overall multifaceted, comprehensive state to state relationship between the United States and the ROK. But when all else is said and done the economic, diplomatic, etc., it's the alliance that is the bedrock of the relationship. And that alliance is today, as it has been, key to deterrence and defense of the Peninsula. It serves the national interests of both the ROK and the United States, and therefore my answer to the title slide's question is no, it is not time to leave the Korean Peninsula.

I look forward to answering your questions.

Moderator: Let me take the prerogative of the chair to ask the first question.

At the end of the Korean War the manufacturing capital of Korea was in the North. The economy was twice to three times as big. The population was twice as big as the South. The South was an agrarian society and it had literally almost no capability to defend itself.

Today we find the North can't even feed itself. Its manufacturing basis has essentially collapsed. The South has got two, two and a half times as many people. At least they're well fed. And they've got the 11th largest economy in the world.

This is my wife's view. We walked in, I told Colonel Drennan that my wife's view was it's time, and I have a different view. But take that point and give me the arguments that I can give back to my wife -- [Laughter]. Why can't South Korea defend itself?

Colonel Drennan: When General Dunn and I were walking in he was telling me the story about his wife, and I said my bottom line is no, it's not time to leave the Peninsula. Then he described his wife's view. I said, well every other day I agree with your wife. [Laughter].

It is a challenge to refute what you just said. They do have --

Moderator: Let me even add. They've bought F-15Ks, Aegis cruisers, they've got an AWACS built, UAVs.

Colonel Drennan: There are pluses and minuses, costs and benefits to any alliance arrangement. There certainly are in the U.S.-ROK relationship. This is a relationship that somebody said was a marriage of inconvenience. It's a challenge. The four star, whoever he may be, past, present and future, has a real alliance management challenge before him. I think every bit as difficult if not more so than any other alliance, bilateral or multilateral, that the U.S. has with other countries or groups of countries.

I take your point, sir. The South Korean population is more than double. The difference in the sizes of the two economies are orders of magnitude different. The annual increase in the South Korean GDP is greater -- that's the annual increase, is greater than the entire GDP of the North. The North has a large but antiquated, outdated, hungry conventional force. They're expending enormous resources on their weapons of mass destruction programs. The South has a modern military, created in our image. Organized, trained and equipped like us. Intimately involved in this combined operation. We've been there a long, long time.

So the question is, when will South Korea be ready to stand up on its own? They could probably do it today. I think the problem is principally, well some of it is inertia, but there's also a psychological component to it. We like being in charge. Frankly, I think nationalistic feelings notwithstanding, the South Koreans like to have us in charge. They're very comfortable with that. I think that's characteristic of alliances. We do a lot of the heavy lifting. There are some free riding aspects to it. And unless you get all worked up over sovereignty issues and nationalistic feelings, you can buy into this alliance relationship for a long time into the future.

I used to play games with my South Korean counterparts over the years, and I've been doing this since 1988, and say Colonel So and So, when is the ROK going to be ready to stand up on its own and defend the country by itself? I'd always get a long pause and usually a stroking of the chin, and they'd say in about 10 years.

Now it was 10 years in 1988 and it's 10 years in 2009. It may not be 10 years by the time 2012 rolls around and wartime OpCon reverts to the National Command Authorities of South Korea.

I'm not briefed in on the new command arrangements that will obtain after that OpCon transfer. I suspect it's something along the lines of the military relationship we have with Japan where you've got USFJ and the Japanese Self Defense Forces as independent channels, if you will, and we talk and coordinate up at the top. But Japan's different, obviously. It's not a divided country. It doesn't have a hostile neighbor, a hostile Japanese portion of it, if you will. The Korean situation is unique. They've got an enemy cheek to jowl with massive capability to bombard Seoul at any given moment. So it is unique and it's uniquely dangerous. And I think for that reason it gives the South Koreans great pause if they're thinking rationally and strategically.

Having said that, this is not charity work. We are not there out of the goodness of our hearts. Again, this alliance serves us well. It has served us well and it serves us well today and it even served us well during those dark days of the lost decade. If it were otherwise, we wouldn't be there. We're there because it serves U.S. national interests. It gives us a foothold on the Asian mainland and, as I said, it's part of the security architecture of Asia Pacific, a region that is vitally important to the United States and growing more important, at least economically, with each passing day.

So weighing all the pluses and minuses, the cost and benefits, I still submit that the benefits outweigh the

costs to the United States, and I think over the years, regardless of the administration, that's been the U.S. bottom line. I hope that answers your question.

Question: Sir, [inaudible] thinking about the [inaudible] to China. [Inaudible] and yes or no, but [inaudible] going to be the implication to the U.S. [inaudible]?

Colonel Drennan: In terms of the future of the alliance, you mean?

Question: In the [inaudible].

Colonel Drennan: Oh. So you want me to extrapolate from that scenario to Korea. That's a very interesting parallel. Another divided country where they've been blood enemies for a long long time. That seems to be ameliorating. It waxes and wanes of course between Taipei and Beijing depending on particularly who's in power in Taipei.

But I would characterize that division generally as more of a benign division like that last slide that I put up there. Again, as long as everybody keeps their heads about them, we can live with that for a long, long time. Both sides. All three sides. The U.S. can certainly live with it. But I think Taiwan and the Mainland can live with it as well. And that may be a good model for the future of the Korean Peninsula. One nation, two systems. There's been a variety of combinations proposed over the years by both Kim Il Sung and various presidents in Seoul that come awfully close to that and sometimes explicitly state that.

Most recently in my knowledge, the Joint Statement that came out of the 2000 Summit meeting in Pyongyang between President Kim Dei Jung and Chairman Kim Jong Il, that basically buys into that. There are some internal inconsistencies that I think destroy that idea. I don't know how you can have a Stalinist system in one half of the Peninsula and a free market democracy in the other half and have a sharing of power that's going to be sustainable long term, but again, as long as there's no warfare associated with it and the two sides are in fact genuinely reconciled if not officially at peace, we can live with that for a long time.

Question: Can you amplify a little bit on the likelihood [inaudible]?

Colonel Drennan: Of the four scenarios that I posited, there are three of them that are bad. The collapse,

capitulation and conquest. Conquest, fairly unlikely. The other two, who knows?

But I'm pessimistic about at least any time in the near future, the foreseeable future, for the two sides to be able to sit down and genuinely work out their differences and mend this artificial division of the Korean nation.

Short of conquest, I think that compromise solution on the other side, the good side of that unification box, is highly unlikely as far as my crystal ball can see.

So I say if unification is going to come about, my conclusion is it's probably going to be under one of the bad scenarios, if you will.

Question: Experts have rejected the imminent collapse [inaudible] the last [inaudible] years. What conditions do you see potentially that could result in collapse?

Colonel Drennan: I've never been a big believer in the collapse. First of all, we need to define our terms. What is it that collapses? And here I'll extrapolate from the experience of South Korea.

South Korea has experienced, the ROK has experienced revolutions, they've experienced coup d'états, assassination of the head of state. So you've had violent and sometimes not so violent regime change if you will, recently in the last 20 years via free and fair democratic elections. But traumatic regime changes before that. Presidents overthrown and sent into exile, Syngman Rhee. Park Chung Hee's assassinated. Chun Doo Hwan takes over via military coup, etc., etc.

I try to distinguish what's going to collapse. Is it going to be the regime? The Kim Jong Il regime that collapses? Well, South Korean regimes have collapsed and the ROK did not go away.

That raises a separate question of is it to our advantage -- Who's next and is it better or worse for us? Does some Gorbachev-like character take over in the North? Or is it going to be some hard-line general who is going to make damn sure that the DPRK does not deviate from Kim Il Sungism and use military if necessary. So that's the regime change.

You've also got the system. Again, changes in regime in Seoul. The system sometimes has been swept aside because of revolutions, coups, etc. But again, the ROK as a sovereign state remained.

So if you sweep away the Kim Il Sung system, taking with it as a lesser included part the Kim Jong Il regime, the DPRK doesn't go away.

So for me, when I use the word collapse I'm talking about the disappearance of the DPRK. The center does not hold. The DPRK is swept aside and you've got territory and people up there in a state of anarchy. That's going to be a huge challenge for Seoul. Not as huge as conquering the North militarily if the balloon goes up again, and I'm not saying we'd start it, but if either through design or accident the war started again, I think it would end and it should end on our terms with the reunification by conquest.

So I'm not a big believer in the efficacy of collapse. I think the term is used loosely, and unfortunately it has hurt our efforts sometimes. Back in the mid '90s when there were millions of Koreans dying of starvation, the DCI at the time publicly predicted that North Korea would collapse in three years. Well, it hasn't.

Oh, by the way, the Agreed Framework was built on a foundation of the assumption that North Korea would collapse. Okay, we bought this thing, it's not perfect, but we'll never have to implement it fully because the North is going to collapse in a couple of years. So this belief in collapse I think has caused us more problems than it has helped us.

Question: [Inaudible] military personnel on the Peninsula? And if we did not withdraw completely, [inaudible] 75 percent and still have the alliance [inaudible]?

Colonel Drennan: An alliance without presence. Or a very minimal presence. There are 28,500 for good round figures right now, and that's at an all time low. We used to have them in the six figures after the Korean War, and we used to have two divisions, and we've steadily whittled it down. I think we went from 36,000 to 28,500 under the Rumsfeld initiatives.

There are those who have advocated an alliance without presence. That may be the future of the alliance. We would be off-shore, we would be there to reinforce. Let's face it, 28,500 is not a huge number. The ROK military is I think for round figures 650,000 or 670,000. So during the initial phases of any war it's going to be a ROK show in terms of bodies, if you will. Until we can get there and add our own.

Now there is a notion in South Korea that I think has been effectively debunked, but Koreans were prone to say

well, if the war starts again, the United States is going to send 690,000 troops to defend the South. Well, that's not going to happen. We don't have 690,000 troops. The ones that we do have are engaged. Currently employed, if you will.

So what we're going to bring is not a lot of trigger pullers. We're going to bring a lot of air, Navy and logistics, and intel and that sort of thing to the fight. And of course that feeds into why does the U.S. head the alliance when most of the forces are going to be Korean? That's one of the counter-arguments that's used to advocate transfer of wartime OpCon control to a Korean.

Question: Oftentimes [inaudible] exercises [inaudible] war may be the least bad option to folks up North. I guess they were alluding to what happened in places like Romania where they felt that if Kim Jong Il and his family thought their power was threatened imminently that they may take a preemptive strike against the South in an effort to preserve their power, and I guess neutralize their internal enemies. Do you see that being very widely [inaudible] or is that rather remote in the possibilities?

Colonel Drennan: I see three ways in which, three justifications if you will, for the North to attack, again, and reignite the Korean War. One would be a war for unlimited objectives. In other words trying to conquer the South once again. Highly unlikely, as I've already said, and if they did try I think they would lose and they would lose big time.

The other one, the second one would be a war for limited objectives. You probably saw this when you were in country. This idea of smash, grab and negotiate. Flood over the DMZ, seize Seoul, and then sue for peace. I don't know why we would agree to that, but that is at least a theoretical second scenario.

The third one is the one that concerns me and I think it's the heart of your question, and that's a war for no objectives. In other words the regime or elements of the Korean People's Army look to the future and say we're going down. It's over. Game over. They win. We lose. So we are just going to take as many of them with us as we can.

Now is this a far-fetched scenario? Not necessarily if you think back to the Imperial Japanese Army and Japan's stubborn resistance short of us dropping atomic weapons to call it quits in World War II. They knew they were going to lose. It was very obvious for quite some time, yet they continued to fight. They would not give up. The cult of the Emperor and Bushido and all that sort of thing.

I wonder what the mindset is of the true believers in the North. I don't know. I have no insight into that. We have no contact with them. We really can't get a good readout on that. But I've thought often about this scenario, apocalyptic from the North Koreans point of view, that could ignite a war for no real purpose other than to go down fighting.

Question: From talking to people that come back from Korea, [inaudible], it seems to me that [inaudible]. [Inaudible] South Korea doesn't necessarily [inaudible] U.S. What [inaudible]?

Colonel Drennan: There are a variety of ways in which they could come to that, and that was one of the worrisome things about the lost decade, is there was a denial that there was a threat any more. But you're exactly right in describing the generational split. Those who are alive and remember the Korean War are solidly in support of the alliance with the United States. But the vast majority of the population now was born well after the Korean War, and unfortunately for us, the most tragic episode in the history of North/South divide was not in these younger generation's mind, many of them, not all of them, but many of them, was not the Korean War. The biggest tragedy since the division was the Kwangju uprising in 1980 where Chun Doo Hwan's forces shot down the citizens of Kwangju who rose up in protest against his implementation of martial law. It's a very sordid tale, and it bedevils our relationship.

Those of you who don't know what I'm talking about, the Kwangju incident was blamed on the United States, because you've got an American four star sitting in Seoul who commands the Korean military, like MacArthur did. Well, MacArthur didn't command the Korean military and the CINC today. No CINC has ever commanded the military. He employs those forces that are placed under his operational control.

The troops that were used in Kwangju have never been, Special Forces troops have never been part of CFC, have never come under the operational control of the CINC. But this notion that an American is in charge, he's the commander, meant that the United States had to have ordered the killing of those citizens in Kwangju. It unleashed virulent anti-Americanism and the radicalization of the campuses in the 1980s, and there were many veterans of that era who populated the Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun administrations and it really, really created problems for us.

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