



## **Challenges to Building Stability on the Korean Peninsula**

**~co-presented with the Japan Society~**

**with**

**Ambassador Glyn Davies**

Special Representative of the Secretary of State for North Korea Policy

### **AMBASSADOR DAVIES:**

Well, thank you very much. I'm quite honored to be sharing the stage tonight with Charles Armstrong, whose work on Korea is renowned. I recently saw posted on a website his book, *The Origins and Future Demise of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*. I'm intrigued by the title and am going to check that out at some point in the future.

In addition to thanking Professor Armstrong and President Sakurai, I'd like to thank both the Japan Society and The Korea Society for having arranged and co-organized this event, and for bringing all of you here tonight. Both societies play the indispensable role of educating the American public about issues that affect East Asia and help contribute to the national conversation on some of the most challenging and urgent foreign policy issues confronting the United States today. It's on the issue of North Korea—arguably one of the more challenging and vexing—that I'd like to focus tonight.

Now, I think everybody in this room knows that North Korea has another formal name and that's the Democratic People's Republic of Korea or DPRK for short. It's true that North Korea has been capturing the headlines of late, and quite dramatically. A few weeks ago, North Korea was issuing bellicose threats against the United States and the Republic of Korea on an almost daily basis. Its "threat of the day" strategy triggered a kind of strange migration. In fact, a flux of U.S. and other Western journalists converged on South Korea's capital city of Seoul as if they expected a war to break out at any moment.

The media was a bit baffled when they arrived in Seoul and found South Koreans going about their daily lives as they always do. Ordinary citizens in Seoul said they were aware, of course, of North Korea's threats and bluster; but that given the numbing repetition of threats from the Pyongyang regime over the years, they were not paying them much mind. In fact, one commentator even joked when asked whether there were signs of North Korean military preparations. He said, "The only thing that's massing on the Korean Peninsula is Western journalists." I think that was very much the case at the time.

But this is not really a laughing matter. We shouldn't make light of it. It has been a quite sustained and almost unprecedented threatening display from Pyongyang. Let's consider just a partial list of what North

Korea, in recent weeks, has said and what they have done.

The regime claimed (not for the first time) that the 1953 armistice was dead. It warned repeatedly and graphically of the growing prospects of nuclear war. It reiterated threats of strategic strikes on the territories of the United States and the Republic of Korea; even resorting to YouTube to make its point. It unveiled, at its Workers' Party plenum, plans to develop nuclear weapons. Somehow, at the same time, the regime announced its plans to pursue economic development through its Supreme People's Assembly and asserted its status as a "full-fledged nuclear weapons state." It announced its intent to restart and repurpose its Yongbyon nuclear complex; and, most recently as we all know, it suspended operations at the Kaesŏng Industrial Complex which provided employment to over 50,000 North Korean workers at 123 South Korean-run companies.

Now these threats and actions occurred in the aftermath of the most provocative and dangerous of all of North Korea's recent steps—its explosive test on February 12 of a nuclear device. In this century, only one nation on earth has exploded nuclear weapons, and that is the nation of North Korea. As a result of that test, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted a tougher resolution condemning North Korea's action.

Of course, all of us who follow or are experts on North Korea have been here before with the DPRK. That February test (North Korea's third) defied existing UN Security Council prohibitions and brought down upon Pyongyang additional tough international sanctions. And of course, we need only look back to December of last year to find another of the North's "big bangs" with its launch of a satellite using ballistic missile technology; an action that was also in violation of Security Council resolutions and earned North Korea unanimous censure by that same sixteen-nation United Nations body.

As the DPRK has shirked its international responsibilities and commitments, and ratcheted up its rhetoric, the international community has not remained idle. The international community has stood up forging a remarkable consensus against North Korea's dangerous, destabilizing actions. Over eighty countries and international organizations issued statements criticizing North Korea's nuclear test—a remarkable chorus of condemnation.

The world is wise to the increasing threat North Korea poses to regional and global peace and stability, and to international norms of behavior on everything from arms proliferation to human rights—indeed to the very vision advanced by President Obama in his Prague speech and embraced by so many to move toward a world without nuclear weapons. The truly sad thing about all of this is it didn't have to be this way. It didn't have to happen like this. North Korea's two missile launches and nuclear tests over the last thirteen months (and its recent serial threats) unraveled what had been a nearly year-long United States diplomatic effort to engage the DPRK.

Before discussing, in greater depth, the recent events I've just described, I'd like to back up a bit to a more promising period and talk about the series of US-North Korea engagements that started in the summer of 2011 and eventually culminated in the so-called US-DPRK "Leap Day" understanding of February 29, 2012. I'll then talk briefly about the aftermath of North Korea's April 2012 launch—a launch that scuttled the "Leap Day" arrangement—and then turn to the fallout from its nuclear test. I'll then conclude with some thoughts on diplomatic prospects for the months ahead, after which I hope we can engage in a little bit of a conversation about these issues.

I think everyone in this room knows that President Obama, when he came into office in 2009, directed his

administration to engage North Korea if Pyongyang demonstrated a willingness to fulfill its denuclearization commitments and address other concerns. In the months that followed, however, the DPRK responded with a series of provocations. It launched a long-range missile. It declared it would reverse its disablement steps at its nuclear complex. It kicked out monitors from the International Atomic Energy Agency and U.S. experts. It announced its withdrawal from the Six-Party Talks and in May 2009 it tested, for the second time, a nuclear explosive device.

At the same time, in March 2009, the North suspended a United States food assistance program which was to provide one-half million metric tons of nutritional assistance for needy North Koreans. U.S. and international personnel were expelled from the country after just one-third of that one-half million metric tons had been distributed. And then, if at all possible, the situation got even worse.

The year 2010 deepened the sense of crisis. North Korea sank an ROK Navy vessel, the Cheonan. It shelled and killed South Korean civilians and soldiers on Yeongpyeong Island. It finally, to top it off, revealed to the world a uranium enrichment program. All of this made diplomatic engagement with North Korea, at the time, exceedingly difficult. Nonetheless, the United States, after an interval, engaged the DPRK with three rounds of talks in three cities over the course of ten months. The purpose of this effort was to explore a possible resumption of the Six-Party Talks by concluding a bilateral understanding between the United States and North Korea.

The first round took place in New York in July 2011, the second in Geneva in October 2011, and the third and final in Beijing in late February 2012; just a few short months after Kim Jong Il's death the preceding December. Now, I was parachuted into this diplomatic process in time for the second round of negotiations in Geneva. I was to replace, as Professor Armstrong has pointed out, the legendary Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, who had done a terrific job of getting us through several tough years on North Korea—the years I've just described—particularly the events of 2010. Steve was the one who launched us on the more positive diplomatic trajectory and I inherited the reins from Steve on December 1, 2011. It wasn't formally announced for another month, but they sent me to work, as often happens in the State Department, one month ahead of time. I then did what somebody in my job should do—within five days I was off to Seoul, Tokyo and Beijing to talk to those governments. Then I came back and days after my return, North Korea announced that Kim Jong Il had died on December 17.

Now this timing is important, because we had been scheduled to meet with the North Koreans in Beijing the week before Christmas 2011 for the third and last meeting before we expected to have a deal to announce. That meeting, however, was put on hold because of Kim Jong Il's death and the funeral that followed. After several months, Pyongyang signaled to us that they were again ready to pick up our talks. We met, as I said, for the third round in Beijing in late February of last year. The Beijing talks resulted in the so-called February 29 understanding or "Leap Day" deal, as it's known.

The deal was quite modest. It was meant to establish confidence-building measures and pave the way for the resumption of the Six-Party Talks. It was not meant to cover everything; but instead, to test each side's sincerity. North Korea committed to a moratorium on nuclear tests, on long-range missile launches, and on its uranium-enrichment activity. It also promised to allow international inspectors to return to Yongbyon to monitor North Korean compliance with its pledge. The United States, for our part, pledged security guarantees.

In a dramatic twist, just two weeks later in mid-March, North Korea scuttled the "Leap Day" deal. It announced its intent to launch a satellite to mark the 100-year anniversary of Kim Il Sung's birth on April

15. Within hours of that announcement, all five of the other six-party states (the Republic of Korea, Japan, China, Russia and the United States) had denounced the DPRK's announcement; and in the days that followed, dozens of other nations and groups of nations had taken up the call. There then followed a four-week period, that was somewhat dramatic, of intensive public and private calls on North Korea not to proceed with the launch; including strong efforts from the People's Republic of China. Pyongyang, on April 13, went ahead and attempted the launch.

The launch was quite destructive. It did more than put an end to almost a year's worth of diplomatic efforts. It also, sadly, ended humanitarian efforts we had been working on from the United States side for quite some time. We had hoped to restart the process of providing nutritional assistance to vulnerable North Koreans, essentially the very young and very old who no longer received adequate food from the state. This was not because we linked humanitarian and diplomatic efforts. We did not and we do not. It was because we could not trust Pyongyang to live up to its end of the nutritional assistance deal.

At the international level, the launch triggered unanimous censure, as I said, from the United Nations. With unprecedented speed the Council (essentially over the course of a weekend, which is quite rare in United Nations practice) adopted a strong presidential statement condemning the launch as a "serious violation" of UN resolutions. The Council also expanded existing UN sanctions which the United States, of course, continues to implement fully.

By reneging on its commitments announced on February 29, North Korea not only spurned an improved relationship with the United States and a path back to negotiations, but it also made its priorities crystal clear. It was choosing confrontation over diplomatic collaboration and isolation over engagement. And we have seen this with increasing clarity throughout the last year. North Korea's stream of bellicose rhetoric and flagrant ongoing violations of UN Security Council resolutions with the December 12 rocket launch and February 12 nuclear test all dug the DPRK deeper into its international hole.

In the wake of North Korea's provocative actions and threats, National Security Advisor Tom Donilon outlined, in his March 11 speech at the Asia Society, the four key principles on which US policy toward North Korea rests. First, close and expanded cooperation with Japan and South Korea as well as with China. Second, we have made clear our openness to authentic and credible negotiations with North Korea. In return, of course, we've only seen provocations and extreme rhetoric. We've said (and Tom Donilon made it clear in the speech) that we refuse to reward bad North Korean behavior. Third, the United States is committed to the defense of our homeland and our allies. Fourth, we will continue to encourage North Korea to choose a better path. As he has said many times, President Obama is willing to offer his hand to those who would unclench their fist.

Needless to say, North Korea was at the top of the agenda during Secretary Kerry's first trip to Asia from April 11 through April 15. In Seoul, Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se adopted a Joint Statement in which the United States and the ROK agreed on the importance of the peaceful denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. In Tokyo, Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Kishida agreed that North Korea must stop its provocative speech and behavior and show it is taking specific steps towards denuclearization. In Beijing, Secretary Kerry and his Chinese hosts (including President Xi Jinping and other top leaders) underscored the joint US-China commitment to denuclearization. Secretary Kerry and State Councilor Yang Jiechi agreed that resolving the nuclear issue is critically important for the stability of the region and the world, and announced further US-China discussions on how to accomplish our shared goals.

Two weeks ago, following up on Secretary Kerry's meetings in Beijing, I had a productive set of meetings with China's Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Affairs Ambassador Wu Dawei. We reaffirmed our shared determination to achieve the peaceful denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We also re-extended the invitation for North Korea to join the international community and called on Pyongyang to invest in and improve the conditions of its citizens to respect their basic human rights.

We continue our active engagement with our Japanese allies in equal measure. I met with Japanese Director-General for Asian Affairs Sasae Kenichiro when he was in Washington in mid-April. Secretary Kerry, in addition to meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Abe and Foreign Minister Kishida during his visit to Tokyo, also met with family members of abductees on April 15. The United States remains committed to supporting the government of Japan and seeking the transparent resolution of the abductions issue. We will never forget, in the United States, the suffering of the abductees or the pain that their families feel in their absence.

The strength of our policy toward North Korea is based on close coordination with our South Korean and Japanese allies. US-Japan and US-ROK bilateral cooperation (as well as close trilateral coordination) has been essential; not only in responding to provocations and threats, but also in addressing such issues as human rights (particularly within multilateral fora, as all three countries currently serve on the United Nations Human Rights Council). Our three countries share democratic values, a commitment to international peace and stability in Northeast Asia, and a dedication to international cooperation and the rule of law—shared values that are essential to address all aspects of the challenge presented by North Korea. It is crucial that the United States, Japan and the ROK work together, along with our Chinese and Russian partners, to prevent North Korea from exploiting any perceived differences in our unified position. That is why I will travel to the region next week—to continue consultations on the way forward with my counterparts in Seoul, Tokyo and Beijing.

Now in my final few minutes, I'd like to talk briefly about the future of North Korea. Until recently (and this was certainly true at the beginning of last year) there had been much talk and perhaps quite a bit of hope that change was occurring in North Korea under their new leader Kim Jong Un (who, at the age of twenty-eight or twenty-nine, is the youngest leader on earth). Despite his fresh image and promising rhetoric of a better future for North Korea's people, Kim Jong Un's changes proved to be stylistic; not substantive. He has rooted his vision for his country firmly in the past. A small and privileged elite continues to lavish resources on long-range missile and nuclear projects, as well as luxuries for their own gratification at the expense of his long-suffering subjects. While Pyongyang may have received a facelift, and a few members of the elite have been profiting, the vast majority of North Korea's 25 million people live in poverty without even permission to visit their gleaming capital.

We remain gravely concerned about the grievous human rights situation in the DPRK and about the well-being of North Korea's people. Reports suggest that the regime has locked away between 100,000 to 200,000 citizens in a vast network of political prisons where inmates are subjected to forced labor and to inhumane conditions. The decision to sentence them is done with no pretense of due process. Promoting human rights, therefore, is a key component of our North Korea policy. Likewise, we have urged North Korean authorities to grant detained US citizen Kenneth Bae amnesty on humanitarian grounds and requested his immediate release. There is no greater priority for us in the United States government than the welfare and safety of US citizens abroad.

While we have not yet seen North Korea take action to improve conditions for its citizens, we have seen the international community take strong measures to increase pressure on Pyongyang to improve its

human rights record. Acting by consensus, the UN Human Rights Council recently established an independent Commission of Inquiry to investigate North Korea's widespread systemic human rights violations. This resolution was introduced by Japan and the European Union with the co-sponsorship of the United States, South Korea and a number of other nations. This step by the United Nations is meant to sharpen the choices facing the North Korean regime, and it must be said that we would welcome meaningful measures (economic or otherwise) that would improve the lives of the people of North Korea. Quite frankly, one way for Pyongyang to do this would be to undertake good faith efforts to denuclearize—something that would offer tangible benefits to all parties involved.

We, in the United States government, have been consistent on this score. We've long made clear that we are open to improved relations with North Korea if it is willing to take concrete steps to live up to its international obligations and commitments; though, given the events of the past year, the bar for a resumption of meaningful engagement is certainly now much higher. President Obama put it best during a major speech he gave in November of last year in Burma. In a passage directed precisely at Pyongyang he said, "Let go of your nuclear weapons and choose the path of peace and progress. If you do, you will find an extended hand from the United States of America."

Just two days ago, in his joint press conference with President Park in Washington, the President came back to this theme. He exhorted Pyongyang to, "take notice of events in countries like Burma which, as it reforms, is seeing more trade, investment and diplomatic ties with the world." Furthermore, if North Korea ultimately wants to take steps to join the international community, it needs to refrain from actions that threaten the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia, and comply with its commitments in the September 2005 Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks and its obligations under relevant UN Security Council resolutions to abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs.

Finally, we have also long emphasized that without sustained improvement in inter-Korean relations, the US-DPRK ties cannot fundamentally improve. Pyongyang must understand this, and this is a point that I have made directly to North Korean negotiators.

To sum up, the ball is in North Korea's court and its choice is clear. Concrete steps toward denuclearization can lead to a path of peace, prosperity, and improved ties with the world including, of course, with the United States. But if Pyongyang, instead, elects to ignore its commitments to denuclearize and continues to engage in destabilizing provocations; it will face only further international isolation.

We hope Pyongyang will make the right choice—the choice to build stability and usher in promising prospects for a durable peace on the Korean Peninsula. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much. I look forward to your comments and your questions. [Applause]