

(Unofficial translation)

Address by
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17th President of the Republic of Korea

The Korea Society
2008 Annual Dinner

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New York City

Chairman Donald Gregg and President Evans Revere of The Korea Society, H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, ladies and gentlemen,

Whether in the East or the West, there are two rules to define the “best friend.” First, “old friends” are the best friends because with time, people develop common values, interests and visions. Second, the friend that stands by in time of challenge is the true friend.

Over the past half century since its founding in 1957, The Korea Society has been the best friend of Korea, serving as a solid bridge between Korea and the United States, promoting mutual understanding through a wide range of academic, social, and cultural exchange programs.

Tonight, the Korea Society will award the Van Fleet Award to the Peace Corps Korea and Mr. Don Oberdorfer, two of our best friends. They are living examples of those who have done their share in writing a long, rich history of friendship and cooperation between Korea and the United States.

Over nearly two decades, Peace Corps volunteers provided dedicated, selfless service to the development of democratic Korea. Their work has left in the minds

of the Korean people deep, heartfelt trust of the United States and gratitude toward its high-spirited people.

I invite the Peace Corps volunteers to return to Korea to see the transformation of their ally and to hear its people's appreciation of the 2000 plus Peace Corp volunteers who played a critical role in that national transformation.

I am particularly happy to hear that the Honorable Kathleen Stephens, a former Peace Corp volunteer in Buyeo, South Chungcheong Province, will return to Korea as the next U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Korea. She attests to the former Peace Corps volunteers' continued and enduring support for robust Korea-U.S. relations.

As an old Korea hand, Mr. Oberdorfer is one of the best friends of the Korean people too, with a long list of distinguished research and publication on Korea and inter-Korean issues throughout his professional life. His seminal book, *The Two Koreas*, is a must-read among students of the Korean Peninsula and inter-Korean relations.

All of you gathered here tonight are the likes of the Peace Corps volunteers and Mr. Oberdorfer in that you have participated in and provided ardent support for the development of Korea-U.S. relations. You are old friends, true friends, and the best friends of the Korean people, standing by us in times of challenge with the common vision of democracy, development, and peace.

Distinguished guests,

Over the past 60 years since the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948, we witnessed together several changes of the international order. Together we have overcome international challenges and seized opportunities. Through those joint efforts, our bilateral relations have deepened, widened, and matured into a norm-centric, trust-based, and peace-building strategic alliance.

We remember the U.S soldiers who fought side-by-side with us during the Korean War. Were it not for their sacrifice and dedication, the Republic of Korea now would not exist as a sovereign nation of democratic ideals and market principles.

To be sure, there have been some concerns about a possible weakening of the Korea-U.S. alliance in recent years. I assure you that we should and we will move forward. The days

of ideology are over. The politicization of alliance relations shall be behind us. We shall not let ideology and politics blind us from common interests, values and norms.

In the new global environment of the 21st century, Korea and the United States should work out a common strategy for peace and prosperity not only for the Korean Peninsula, but also for Asia and the rest of the world.

That strategic vision should be called the “Korea–U.S. Strategic Alliance.” As its three core principles, I put forward common values, trust, and peace. The strategic alliance is a value-centric, trust-based, and peace-building partnership.

Our two great countries share the values of liberal democracy and market economy. The alliance will continue to grow stronger because the two countries share common values and visions for their future. With Korea’s political democratization, economic growth and liberalization, the two countries are ready to forge a strategic alliance.

On the basis of shared values and common interests, Korea and the United States will seek ways to deepen and widen cooperation in a wide range of issues, from military and politics to economy and society, to culture, thus forging a thick reservoir of good will and mutual trust upon which to make the alliance self-sustainable.

Under the military alliance built on mutual trust, the two countries will join forces to alleviate tensions on the Korean Peninsula and to promote peace in Northeast Asia. At the same time, the allies shall take the initiative in confidence-building in regional security and enhancing military transparency among East Asian countries. In doing so, the Korea–U.S. alliance will serve as a facilitator not only in bringing regional reconciliation but also in laying the ground for East Asia spearheading the development of multilateral security cooperation networks.

The two great countries face a historic moment in economic realms, too. We need to ratify the Korea–U.S. FTA in order to create an engine for prosperity. For Korea, the FTA will assure the expansion of exports markets and the strengthening of its economic fundamentals through deregulation and competition. The KORUS FTA will serve United States’ interests as well, enabling the U.S. service sector to make inroads into the expanding Korean market. Moreover, with the ratification of the KORUS FTA, Korea has the potential to become a strategic bridgehead for the United States to the newly emerging markets of East Asia, one of the most dynamic regions of economic growth.

I believe in liberal values. With the rising exchange of people, the two countries will become more cooperative and trusting toward each other. With this belief in people-to-people exchange, the two countries are working towards Korea's entry into the U.S. Visa Waiver Program which will make transnational networks thicker and wider.

The Korea-U.S. alliance should also contribute to the promotion of international peace on the basis of common strategic interests at both regional and global levels. The two countries should proactively engage countries plagued by terrorism, environmental degradation, diseases, and poverty with the goal of improving human security on the basis of humanitarian ideals.

Distinguished members and guests of the Korea Society,

The most critical challenge facing our two nations is North Korea issues. Only when the North Korea nuclear issue is peacefully resolved and only when we succeed in persuading North Korea of the necessity for change, will it be possible for us to advance the ideals of peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula.

The North also needs to realize that its economic difficulties do not stem from external threats. The international community endeavors to dissuade the North from acquiring nuclear capabilities. The North should not take these efforts of persuasion as an act of hostility.

At the same time, inter-Korean relations are unique, different from the relationship between two sovereign states. The peoples of the two Koreas constitute one people, and should become unified into one nation-state in the future. It is my hope that the international community understands Seoul's special ties with Pyongyang and supports our search for the ways to initiate sincere, substantive dialogue with the North.

We have deep affection for our compatriots in the North, and have no intention of threatening its political system. Our goal is to help the North Korean economy stand on its own feet and assure its people a respectable life. Despite challenges and difficulties, we will persevere in the effort to persuade the North of our sincerity and good will.

The Republic of Korea is committed to working with the international community in peacefully resolving the North Korean nuclear issues and sharing prosperity with the North within the framework of universal values.

Distinguished members and guests of The Korea Society,

You are the agent of robust Korea–U.S. friendship and cooperation. There were moments of challenges and difficulties in the bilateral relations, but you have always striven to strengthen Korea–U.S. cooperation and maintain the healthy balance in alliance relations. Now, thanks to your dedication and commitment to bridging the two countries, the Korea–U.S. alliance is poised to leap forward to become a strategic alliance of the new kind. I earnestly hope that you will take an even greater role in lifting our bilateral ties to the level of strategic alliance.

Over the past 51 years, The Korea Society has demonstrated its commitment to the advancement of Korea–U.S. relations. I deeply appreciate your hard work and wish you even greater success and progress in the coming years.

We are old friends, true friends, and best friends. I ask you to join Korea and its people in our laudable effort to overcome the history of national division in the Korean Peninsula and to forge a new brave chapter of reconciliation and cooperation in the history of East Asia.

God bless you, and thank you.