

## **The Fourth Korea Foundation Global Seminar**

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### ***Globalizing United States-Republic of Korea Relations***

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### **"The Future of the U.S. Alliance System"**

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***A Presentation by Lt. Gen. (Retired) Wallace Gregson***

Alliances form when nations have compelling common interests. These shared interests must be strong enough to justify compromises of certain principles of sovereignty by each party. Alliances sometimes form in pursuit of positive goals, such as the pursuit of economic growth and advantage. Alliances often emerge in the face of a common threat. Many alliances emerge suddenly, without prediction. The formation of a multi-national alliance in Europe among previously warring parties – West Germany and France for just one example - against a former US ally of WW II was a bit of a surprise to an American nation traditionally wary of “foreign entanglements”. The conflict in Korea, coming so soon after we thought peace in Asia was achieved in 1945 forged another alliance.

Alliances crumble, sometimes quickly, often over time. There is nothing permanent about any alliance, or “alliance system”. Victory over a common military threat often is a powerful solvent on the bonds of a military alliance. Without common purpose, common activity,

differences assume greater influence. Military alliances can endure beyond the end of a threat only if the states in alliance form bonds across other aspects of national life, across the political, diplomatic, educational, commercial, scientific, health, and cultural arenas. Only then can an alliance adapt to new conditions.

The first question is about US capabilities and intentions. I put capabilities first for good reason. When the alliance question is posed, often the real question is about US capabilities and conditions.

I was stationed in Japan during the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Many foreign colleagues called to offer condolences, and then quickly ask if we were going home. They asked if we still intended to deploy to their countries for scheduled exercises, and of our local and national intentions. Our friends and allies certainly do not take our commitments for granted. They are always watching conditions in the US for signs that the solvent is working, that our guarantees may be shifting. For the record, the only commitment we cancelled in Japan after 9/11 was a band concert scheduled for the next evening. We had too many band members with families impacted at home to offer a proper performance.

I was overseas last year during what was called the “debt ceiling crisis” in our government. A surprising number of friends asked questions about our intentions and overseas presence in view of our perceived financial and governmental difficulties.

America is challenged at home now, with predictable effects on the perception of our commitments. At best, our economy is recovering only slowly from this latest “great recession”, our political process is paralyzed, and our public spending and taxation dilemma defies resolution. “Sequestration,” the triggering of automatic spending cuts looms in early January. The Secretary of Defense declared that these cuts will be “devastating” to defense if enacted. Given that statement, and others, it’s perfectly logical that our allies and friends question our capabilities and intentions.

So how bad is it? A few generations ago America faced “big change” in the 60s and the 70s. As the war in Vietnam drew to a close we experienced the challenges of racial tension and substance abuse. Anti-military feeling, anti-establishment feelings, inflation, and generational tension were all around. The Soviet Union was on the march. Our president resigned to avoid impeachment. Those of us that survived those days to see the US reemerge in the 80s know that recovery is possible.

America is the most self-correcting power in the world. We’ll get to recovery, and renewal, but in keeping with American tradition, we’ll do that in the most difficult way possible. US manufacturing is growing again. Spurred by stable labor costs and low natural gas prices, we’re slowly gaining momentum. Alone among the world’s developed nations, the US will increase in population from now to 2030. The signs are good for the long term. One Australian commentator said that we are “one budget deal away from dominance”. Maybe, but that deal is sure proving elusive.

U.S. Military budget figures, threatened sequestration, and fiscal projections are only one part of the story. Another way to look at our military is more subjective. We fought 2 wars for more than 10 years, and we're still engaged. Throughout this time we increased the size of the Marine Corps and the Army while maintaining standards. More service members want to re-enlist than we can keep. And these are the combat arms, the components taking the most casualties.

Our alliances reflect some of the tensions we feel. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is changing under political and economic pressure. For years we had the luxury of a focused commitment. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO lost the perfect villain while Europe tried to form a more perfect union.

Since that time, NATO expanded, and adopted new roles, including a commitment to global engagement. Missile defense, with the introduction of the Aegis system at sea and on land, and with X-band radar, is a new defense role. NATO deserves credit for generally fulfilling commitments in Afghanistan. NATO forces will remain there after 2014 in force development roles. NATO completed a successful intervention in Libya.

But the real challenge is the economic situation. This means reduced spending. As a rough measure, NATO Defense budgets as share of GDP average less than a third the US share of GDP provided to defense. Asian defense spending is overtaking Europe.

The US has charged NATO to be a producer of security, not a consumer, as 25% of our forces in Europe prepare to return home. Interoperability may suffer as bi- and multi-lateral training with US forces declines as our forces are reduced.

Acquisition of critical specialized capabilities is another challenge to collective NATO budgets. NATO lacks needed power projection capabilities, like aerial refueling, and the varied capabilities under the functions of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, including targeting. One proposed answer is the assumption of different specialized roles within the collective defense arrangements, with each country providing different, mutually supportive, critical capabilities. This is called "Smart Defense" by its proponents, including Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO's Secretary General.

Challenges to Smart Defense include guaranteeing availability of critical specialized capabilities if one or another country disagrees with an alliance decision. Germany declined to participate in the recent NATO actions in Libya, for example. Another challenge is national protection of certain critical national industries. The challenges to NATO's future, and that of the European Union, await many answers. We may see the alliance shifting from Global NATO to Local NATO.

As NATO and Europe face their challenges, the US looks to Asia. Secretary Clinton provided the most enduring description of our emerging military and security policy there. She said we stand at a "pivot point" as we prepare to withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan, that we have to be smart and systematic about where we invest our time and energy, and that "One of

the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will therefore be to lock in a substantially increased investment -- diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise -- in the Asia-Pacific region.”

“Pivot point” may not have been the best metaphor. The press, no doubt aware of the President’s round ball prowess, immediately shortened this to “pivot”. In basketball, pivoting to something means pivoting away from something else. But it’s hard to see how we can get Asia right without some acceptable degree of stability and security in the Middle East – the source of much of Asia’s energy. In fact, in both our rhetoric and our actions we are maintaining a significant presence in the Gulf, both afloat and ashore. “Rebalancing” is a better description, but it does not have the headline power of pivot”.

Nevertheless Secretary Clinton’s description of our policy, strategy, and intentions was welcomed in the Asia Pacific region. This continued a positive trend that began with an earlier statement at the ASEAN Regional Forum that reconfirmed our support for peaceful settlement of the many territorial disputes in the region. Later she reaffirmed that the Senkaku Islands do indeed fall under Article 5 of the US-Japan treaty. Throughout her tenure, she has provided consistent, and welcome, attention to our allies, particularly Japan, and friends, most recently Burma.

In all of this, we can see an unstated but powerful theme of our Asia and the Pacific policy, that of “friends first”. We have an Asia and the Pacific policy, covering all aspects of national life - business, commerce, economics, energy, education, the environment, health, as well as traditional security. They are all connected and mutually reinforcing.

If there is such a thing as a US “Grand Strategy,” it is the promotion of democracy, and advocacy of human rights. Absent democracy, we favor responsible government that supports the aspiration of their citizens instead of suppressing them. We support the rule of law, free trade, free markets, free navigation, and free, secure access the commons of the sea, air, space and cyberspace in support of the common good. In our political and military activities we seek to promote security, dampen sources of instability, deter conflict, and give substance to our security commitments. We pledged to defend our allies and prevail in conflict if necessary.

The US and our alliances are not a new version of the Cold War. We support China’s continued rise and productive participation in the international system. Containment, as practiced in the Cold War against the USSR was an economic and political strategy. Our broad and deep economic and diplomatic relationship with China shows our commitment to development.

Demographics and economic development drive many trends that deserve the attention of all nations. The demand for ever greater energy to support businesses can threaten stability if it becomes a competition. Similarly, we must preserve agricultural production capabilities, manage the oceans’ resources, and preserve the region’s fresh water systems. Asia’s food depends on healthy fresh and salt water systems.

The region's many territorial issues, most of them at sea, can threaten stability. Growing energy demands bring attention to the potential of seabed resources. Collective resolution of these issues in a way that preserves the environment and assures the continued health of the world's fish populations is essential.

The East and the South China Seas are critical to regional stability and the world's commerce. China's economy, wealth and industry are concentrated along coast, bordering East and South China Sea. In no other place in the world do the important interests of so many states overlap. Peace and stability must be maintained by all as we work through settlement.

In consultation and in cooperation with our allies, we maintain US forces in the region. In the spirit of the "pivot", our rebalancing of our efforts around the world, we will maintain our strength and capabilities in Asia and the Pacific.

A few principles should be stated about our overseas forces.

We deploy forces overseas to operate in support of the policy and strategy of the United States. We do this with the active cooperation and support of our allies and friends.

Military and naval bases overseas are very useful things. They make a profound political statement long before they make a military statement. Any presence of foreign forces in another country requires a compromise of various principles of sovereignty on the part of both countries involved. Any such presence is a strong validation, at some cost, of commitment to common security goals.

Bases are also very useful, and cost-effective, means to develop, train, and maintain forces. Bases can also support alliance training and development. Bases also provide valuable deployment platforms and support for forces operating throughout the region. Whether one fights from these bases in conflict, or from other locations, is a different question driven by a number of factors.

Our forces overseas have an important deterrent role. But if that was all they did, it would be a very expensive and unprofitable undertaking. The role of our forward deployed forces is far broader and more constructive than simply waiting for someone to turn the master-arming-switch on. Broad, active, widely distributed presence throughout the theater dampens sources of instability, deters conflict, gives substance to US security commitments, and ensures continuing American access to the region. The presence and the efforts of our forces helps shape the regional geopolitical climate, and they remain immediately available to respond if needed.

Our bases in Asia and the Pacific are concentrated in Alaska, Hawaii, Korea, and Japan. Guam, after a long period of decline following Vietnam, is again growing. These bases generally are of the type that supports our personnel on long tours, with families. As a result, they have schools, commissaries, exchanges, movie theaters, hospitals, dental clinics, recreational

facilities, and so on. Our concentration in Japan and Korea reflects the enduring, and urgent, threat of North Korea, our historic obligation to Taiwan, and our Cold War history.

Secretary Gates introduced the concept of a “widely distributed, operationally resilient, politically sustainable” presence for our forces. This signals recognition of the importance of South East Asia and the Indian Ocean area. It points to an expansion of the geographic distribution of our forces, and the geographic reach and distribution of our alliances. In all the rhetoric and discussion of our alliance transformation and realignment agreement with Japan, very few observers note the potential for the US to provide for the continuous presence of Japanese forces and their training in Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Compact States – The Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia. This is an expansion of the alliance, and a major strategic step forward to rapidly create increased efficiency and effectiveness of our alliance forces when we are operating together in hi-intensity, modern operations.

It also calls for a more lean, agile, and expeditionary posture. Expeditionary in this sense means self-sustaining, stepping lightly on the local infrastructure, making do with things as they are. It means not building a “Little America” inside a fence.

It signals an increased emphasis on robust, continuous, bi- and multi-national training, accomplished through expansion of the US and Australian synthetic training environments. These systems, already in place, permit combinations of live, virtual, and constructive forces arrayed in an interactive, hyper-realistic simulation system that replicates faithfully the uncertainty, friction, fog and stress of high-intensity air-land-sea-space-cyberspace combat for commanders and their staffs.

The future of our regional alliances is often discussed along with the concepts of Anti Access/ Aerial Denial (A2AD in Pentagon jargon) and Air Sea Battle. Both have formal definitions, but they are still flexible enough to allow for discovery and experimentation. They can be thought of as baskets holding a number of concepts and ideas, all requiring rigorous examination and testing.

Conceptually, and broadly, the collection of matters in these baskets is a method of exploring and assessing continuing technology advancement. We can't predict the future with precise accuracy, but we do need to try and map out the major features, challenge past assumptions, and develop new habits of thinking.

Today we are well into the guided weapons era. Missiles are becoming faster and more accurate at greater range every day. Surveillance and reconnaissance are ubiquitous, pervasive, and stealthy. Imagery that was classified and very carefully controlled a few years ago is available now on Google Earth. Space-based capabilities, broadcasting and position-locating systems to name just two enhance the speed of travel, communications and business. Counter-space capabilities can break these networks quickly. Unmanned aerial, surface, and submerged vehicles – drones – can be fielded by many nations. Last is the fast-developing duopoly of cyber capabilities and cyber warfare.

Chinese military journals talk of reaching our bases in the Pacific with long range weapons, and using cyber capabilities to attack financial networks and other means of national production. Other writings claim that new missile technology will include a maneuverable warhead able to attack aircraft carriers at sea. The combination of surveillance, guided weapons and cyber give rise to the access denial concept, and in turn spur a look for counter capabilities under Air Sea Battle.

This is not a strategy. It's a search for tactics, techniques, and technology. Strategy, specifically the ends, ways, means, resources, sequencing and timing of campaign efforts, is something else indeed.

To summarize: Our deep and enduring alliances across the region are based on much more than pure military matters. The ties between the American people, many from countries in Asia, help to bind us in ways that become national and cultural alliances. The future of our alliances, as well as our friendships across the region lies in our efforts to enhance peace, stability, and prosperity, lifting all to greater levels of security and prosperity. It requires traditional military capability, but also far more. Our alliance activities in the future will include greater diplomatic, economic, educational, medical, and other activities. In this world revolutionary communications capability public-private partnerships across many governments and private enterprises are likely to develop to rapidly lift the standards of living across a wide area. We will not only provide for the common defense, but also work to improve the region's economy, education and health. Our common interests must overwhelm our mutual differences.