

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
CENTER FOR EAST ASIA POLICY STUDIES

**FUTURE OF THE U.S.-ROK-JAPAN
TRILATERAL RELATIONSHIP**

**A CONVERSATION WITH
DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE ANTONY
BLINKEN**

*The Brookings Institution
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[Transcript prepared from an audio recording]

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PROCEEDINGS

MS. MOON: Good morning, everyone. Thank you all for coming. My name is Kathy Moon. I'm the SK Korea Foundation chair and senior scholar in the Center for East Asia Policy Studies here at Brookings. We are very happy to host this morning Deputy Secretary of State, Tony Blinken, to discuss the future of the U.S.-ROK-Japan relationship. Secretary Blinken has been working tirelessly with his counterparts from Japan and Korea to expand areas of trilateral cooperation. Now, I'd like to ask Strobe Talbott, our president, president of Brookings and also a former deputy secretary of state himself, to give introductory remarks and invite Secretary Blinken to the podium. Thank you.

MR. TALBOTT: Thank you very much, Kathy, and welcome to all of you. And welcome back to Brookings, Tony. Tony, as I think you know, has been a friend of this institution and many of us here for a long time. As deputy secretary of state, he has a very robust and truly global portfolio. He has been a key point person for the administration on a range of issues, including combatting violent extremism, including with soft power, as well as hard power, which he spoke about here at Brookings not long ago. He's been the lead on a strategic dialogue with India, and he has recently returned from one of many trips that he's made to Europe to strengthen the ties of the transatlantic community, particularly at a time when there are multiple crises in Europe.

Today, he's going to give it to Asia. As you all know, President Park of Korea and Prime Minister Abe of Japan are here for the Nuclear Security Summit, and that is going to give them a chance to sit down with President Obama at a leaders' level in order to do everything possible to strengthen the security ties among these three countries which are bound in an alliance relationship with the United States as the cornerstone of that. Also, of course, the three countries -- the ROK, Japan, and the United States -- have a broader agenda that includes global health, terrorism, climate, and economic empowerment of women.

After Tony's remarks, he will join my colleague, Richard Bush, who is the Director of the Center for East Asia Policy Studies for a conversation, and then he will take your questions. And tweeting is not only allowed, it is very much supported, and the hashtag is somewhere up there.

So tweet away, and Tony, thank you for being with us. Tony can probably tweet and give a speech at the same time. (Laughter) (Applause)

MR. BLINKEN: Well, thank you all very, very much. Strobe, it is, as always, wonderful to be here and to be with you. Richard, Kathy, thank you so much for having me here today as well. It's particularly a pleasure to be back at Brookings, and I have to tell you, it's beginning to feel a little bit like a second home. Just yesterday, Strobe and I spent some time talking with other colleagues about the future of Europe. Over the last year, as Strobe mentioned, I've spoken with the Brookings community on everything from countering violent extremism to upholding the global order. All in all, it's been a pretty slow and quiet year. But I thank you for the incredible hospitality that you've showed to me and shown to the administration.

I've been in government and in foreign policy now for more than two decades, and I can confidently say that the United States is more deeply engaged in more ways; in more places, than ever before. But this morning what I'd like to focus on is one pillar of that engagement, one pillar of that leadership, and that is our nation's rebalance to the Asia-Pacific and – at the heart of that strategy – an increasingly strong trilateral relationship with two of our greatest allies and closest friends, Japan and the Republic of Korea.

Just before I started at the State Department a little over a year ago after six years at the White House, I asked President Obama what he most wanted me to focus on as I moved over to State, and his answer was immediate – “Asia.” Then, when I got to State, I asked Secretary Kerry the very same question and he gave me the same answer, which is always a very good sign. Asia. Their charge reflected the importance that President Obama has attached to the region since his very first day in office.

Having inherited a nation immersed in the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression, President Obama recognized that America's presence in the Asia-Pacific was not nearly peripheral to our future prosperity and security – it was indispensable. Nowhere in the world were our

economic and strategic opportunities clearer or more compelling than in the Asia-Pacific: home to three of our top ten trading partners, five of the seven of our defense treaty allies, and some of the most wired and innovative people in the world. As America's first Pacific leader, President Obama understood that the rise of Asia, which had already done so much to lift millions out of poverty, would help define this new century. But by which rules, by which means, to what ends – those were the questions that were important to answer.

Over the last seven years, we've rebalanced to Asia by deepening our ties and strengthening a rules-based, norms-based, institutions-based order that is addressing regional and increasingly global challenges. We've deepened our diplomatic ties – investing in a new geometry of bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral relations to encourage cooperation among and between allies and partners. We've reinvested with our core alliances with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Australia. We've reenergized partnerships from India to Indonesia, and we've forged new relationships with Burma and Vietnam as those nations turn the page on the past and chart a new course into the future. And even as we build new partnerships, we've also deepened our commitment to the U.S.-Australia-Japan trilateral strategic dialogue, a model engagement for the region since it was first established in 2002. And defying a downward spiral of rivalry, we have built a relationship with China defined by broader and deeper practical cooperation on global challenges, and at the same time, direct and very frank discussions on areas of real disagreement. We've encouraged China to contribute more – to apply its significant capabilities as a rising economic and political power, to help meet the needs of the international community from peacekeeping to public health. We stood up for our values – for the basic rights and freedoms of individuals throughout the region.

This past year we saw historic elections as the people of Burma chose their leader freely – an almost unthinkable outcome after more than 50 years of military rule. And in January, the people of Taiwan showed the world again what a mature Chinese-speaking democracy looks like.

Under President Obama's leadership, we've also sustained an increased engagement with the

institutions in the region, like the East Asia Summit, APEC, ASEAN – including by sending our first dedicated ambassador to ASEAN. These important forums for promoting collective action and facilitating the peaceful resolution of differences – these organizations advance a regional, economic, political and security architecture in which the United States is a vital and permanent player.

Another pillar of the rebalance is our security ties. And those, too, have been deepened – deploying 60 percent of our Navy in the region by the end of the decade, including some of our most advanced capabilities. We do this in order to reinforce an environment of peace and stability that has enabled seven decades of growth and provided value far greater than its cost. For the first time in nearly two decades, we've updated guidelines for our defense cooperation with Japan so that our forces will have the flexibility to face 21st century challenges. We've also concluded new host nation support agreements with both Japan and the Republic of Korea, reinforcing these alliances and underscoring our shared commitment to a continuing U.S. presence in the region. And, of course, we signed a landmark Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement with the Philippines, to give our forces access to key facilities and allow our militaries to work even more closely together. Our efforts also include engaging in exercises with new partners, like Vietnam and new programs with longstanding allies, like our Rotational Force Program with Australia.

The reason that we are the region's preferred security partner – the reason we're invited in and invited back – is not merely because of the professionalism of our armed forces. It's because, strong as we are, the United States accepts that the same rules apply to us as apply to all. We support the rule of law even when it's not convenient.

A third part of the rebalance, of course, is the economic pillar, and there, too, we've significantly deepened our ties – implementing a free trade agreement with Korea, advancing negotiations on a Bilateral Investment Treaty with China and, of course, securing the landmark Trans-Pacific Partnership that will bring 40 percent of the global economy behind the highest standards for

labor, the environment, and intellectual property rights.

I was actually in Northeast Asia when the agreement was concluded, and I happened to be in Tokyo on that very day. And the excitement that I encountered among my counterparts was almost palpable; I think a reflection of the tremendous effort that had gone into getting us to that day, and also a vindication of Prime Minister Abe's leadership in helping us to arrive at that destination. The next day, coincidentally, I was in Seoul, and there our friends were expressing tremendous enthusiasm and interest about joining, something that we welcomed. And the day after that I found myself in Beijing, and there was a manifest turn from indifference, to genuine curiosity – and even interest. Even a state-affiliated newspaper published an article highlighting the potential benefits of TPP for China.

Finally, as part of this rebalance, we have deepened our people-to-people ties – expanding educational exchange opportunities for scholars and innovators, creating the YSEALI community, now 50,000 strong, to connect dynamic young people throughout ASEAN to the United States and to each other. One of the highlights for the President, for the Secretary, for me as we travel throughout the region, is getting to spend time with some of these young people. I have been incredibly impressed by their sophistication, their ingenuity, their global perspective.

Just one quick example. In Jakarta last year, I visited a progressive Islamic religious school where girls learn next to boys and the curriculum represents Indonesia's proud tradition of faith, tolerance and critical thinking. We had time for questions afterward and I still remember to this day these young men and women, 15 and 16 years old, standing up and asking me about everything from the situation in Egypt to the plight of the Rohingya, to American leadership in the world today. And I was pretty much ready to hand my job over to them. It was quite extraordinary, and this is something we come across time and time again in our engagement with young people throughout the region. So all of these efforts, which have informed the substance and the vitality of the rebalance, would not be possible without the foundation of our core alliances with Japan and the Republic of Korea.

Last fall, the top 12 baseball teams in the world competed in an international baseball tournament in Taiwan and Japan. After all the pitches were thrown and the dust settled over the diamond, three countries emerged on top: Korea, the United States, and Japan. For our nations, the love of baseball is just the beginning of all that we share. We are bound by currents of water and history, by ties of trade and investment, by common interests for our security. And perhaps most important of all, by an agreement on the principles that have enabled the success of our own nations -- democracy, human rights, open markets, and the paramount importance of rule of law.

Whether on the frontier of opportunity or in the shadow of challenge, we look to lead in concert with our two closest allies. Together, we are investing in global health security – bringing the capabilities and technology of Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo to bear on transnational threats like Ebola or Zika. Together, we have built an unprecedented information-sharing arrangement to help us collectively deter and respond to crisis, and together, we're taking steps to counter the spread of violent extremism as members of the global coalition to counter ISIL.

On these priorities and many more, it seems only logical that our three countries would work together cooperatively, but as many of you know, it has never been that easy. At times, the real and very painful legacies of history have created a challenging environment for the robust trilateral partnership that our shared values and aspirations call for.

This past year, 2015, was one of deep reflection on these difficult issues. Last September, we commemorated the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. Last June, Korea and Japan marked the 50th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic ties. And at the end of the year, the governments of the Republic of Korea and Japan – under the leadership of President Park and Prime Minister Abe – forged a historic agreement on the sensitive issue of comfort women. Their courageous statecraft has helped create space for a continued process of healing and reconciliation and opened the door to greater bilateral and trilateral collaboration.

In support of these stronger ties, I've been honored to convene the first-ever trilateral meetings at my level, which have proved productive on a great range of issues, and it's a process that we will continue throughout the remainder of this year. Given the scale and complexity of the global challenges that we face, the growing prominence of our trilateral partnership comes not a moment too soon. When our countries act together, our impact is magnified. When our countries speak together on matters of principle, our message is amplified. When the three countries that represent 30 percent of global GDP insist on expanding economic opportunity for women, the world takes note. When three of the most wired societies emphasize the importance of a free and open internet and advocate for principles of state behavior in cyberspace, the world pays heed. And when three leading donors of humanitarian and development aid insist on standards of sustainability and transparency, the world listens. Simply put, our trilateral partnership is a force multiplier for good.

But it's not enough to merely have the capability for collective action. We have to cultivate a partnership that matters not only to our governments, but the people our governments represent – a partnership that engages business, civil society, and young people, especially. By yielding indispensable benefits to more of these stakeholders in all three of our countries, we create a new generation of advocates for maintaining a strong trilateral partnership even when the winds of the region are blowing in the opposite direction. We have to articulate a vision for a long-term trilateral cooperation that proves its centrality to the defense of our shared interests and the preservation of our shared ideals.

So we're focused on this in three ways. First, we're building a trilateral relationship and partnership that is strategic in its value. Today, we share a common purpose in addressing the region's most acute threat: North Korea. On a recent trip to Northeast Asia, I was honored to share a meal with Korean and American soldiers who serve side by side every day standing sentry along the DMZ - literally the embodiment of our alliance. Together with Japan and the Republic of Korea, we've tried to show North Korea that a different future is possible... if North Korea refrains from actions that threaten global peace and security. If it abandons destabilizing

provocations. If it ceases its deplorable human rights actions. And if it fulfills its denuclearization obligations. Our own unity and determination in the face of the challenge posed by North Korea has played a vital and, indeed, stabilizing role in the region. We will continue to increase the costs on North Korea until it comes into compliance with its international obligations. And we will take every step necessary to protect our people from the threat posed by its nuclear and missile programs. In fact, there's no better indication of the strategic priority of our trilateral relationship than the fact that Strobe alluded to earlier – that President Obama will meet with President Park and Prime Minister Abe just two days from now during the Nuclear Security Summit here in Washington. It's the second trilateral meeting of our leaders in as many years – further evidence of its growing importance and vitality.

Second, as we think about this trilateral partnership, we're building one that is complimentary in nature. We welcome any kind of flexible geometry of collaboration among countries that share important goals, including steps towards greater China-Korea-Japan cooperation and the growing unity of the ASEAN community. It is also why we are shaping an inclusive agenda for our trilateral partnership that helps advance common understanding and regional integration through efforts like coordinating disaster relief plans and arranging overlapping youth exchange programs.

Constructive relationships in Asia, as for that matter - in any part of the world – serve the interests of all of us by shaping a region where the legitimate rights of every state – no matter how big, no matter how small – are honored... where countries come to each other's aid in times of crisis... where borders are respected and countries cooperate to prevent small disputes from growing larger... where disagreements are settled openly, peacefully, and in accordance with the rule of law... and a region where the human rights of each and every person are fully respected.

Third and finally, we are building a trilateral partnership that is global in scope. The environment that we live in is more fluid, more fraught with complexity than ever before as violent extremists inflict carnage from Brussels to Ankara to Lahore... as epidemics cut across borders and hackers

across firewalls... as the health of our oceans deteriorates – draining life from our economies and from the planet. Against these challenges, our success will be determined by our ability to strengthen and update a rules-based global order dedicated to the progress of every nation. Few countries have as much to contribute in upholding the system and in advancing it and reforming it as our three countries – as vibrant democracies deeply invested in the principles and norms of that system, and as economic leaders for sustainable growth and game-changing innovation. That's why the practical agenda for our trilateral relationship includes priorities from fighting climate change, to empowering women and girls, to countering violent extremism. It's why we're working together in the uncharted frontiers of cyberspace and outer space, where the potential for danger and miscalculation is as great as the possibilities for exploration and discovery. We share a common desire to spur opportunity, while also sustaining stability, and the unity of our voices is essential in reinforcing peacetime cyber norms and ensuring the peaceful use of outer space.

It's why our partnership is engaged on the high seas and economic lifeline for all three of our countries. The unity of our actions is essential to enforcing the right of all countries to unimpeded commerce and the freedom of navigation and overflight. It is essential to supporting rules-based frameworks, like Codes of Conduct, and setting clear, predictable, binding rules of the road. It is key to developing ambitious trilateral approaches to counter illegal fishing and address marine pollution.

And together, finally, our partnership is advancing global development – where the unity of our efforts to foster growth and expand opportunity can help the world meet the sustainable development goals and finally eradicate the scourge of extreme poverty. Rooted in our deepest values, our trilateral partnership reflects the great depth of all that we share: a belief in freedom, a respect for the rules, and an unyielding desire to win at baseball. (Laughter)

Today, we are at a pivotal moment in our growth as partners in a trilateral partnership. We could choose to rest on what we've accomplished to date, to stay within bounds of what is comfortable

and what is familiar. But there's really nothing in our history, nothing in our spirits, nothing in our aspirations that suggests that our three nations would settle for such a path. Ours is a major league partnership in a very high stakes season – a pillar of stability and security, a beacon of opportunity, a force for global good. Seven years after President Obama rebalanced our sights on the Asia-Pacific, we are proud leaders of a region increasingly bound by common ideals, shared prosperity, and a collective sense of global responsibility.

I am grateful to all of those in Japan and the Republic Korea, and here in the United States, including many people in this room, for their work to infuse this partnership with energy, with meaning, with strength, and a clear path forward to seize its full potential. Thank you very much.
(Applause)

MR. BUSH: Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for that compelling and eloquent statement of why these three countries are so important to the East Asian region and to the world. It's the best statement I can think of of why it's vital to transcend the past for the sake of the present and the future. I was going to ask a question, but we have a lot of smart people in the room, and so I want to turn to them first, and I'll intervene at a point that I think is appropriate. I'd like to call first on our friend and colleague from Council on Foreign Relations, Sheila Smith.

MS. SMITH: Thank you. Thank you so much. It's a pleasure to be here, and it's a pleasure to see you, Mr. Secretary. I, too, share Richard's praise for your efforts to help the U.S., Korea, and Japan articulate such a brave and comprehensive agenda. I wonder if you could help and share with me your thoughts as you've communicated with your counterparts in Seoul and Tokyo, how do we, together, navigate the anxiety in the region about China's rise. In particular, there are some different sentiments, I think, in Seoul and Tokyo about China and about China's role in the future, and I wonder if you could help us understand the U.S. role in making sure that there are bridges being built with Beijing at the same time that our security is being enhanced. Thank you.

MR. BLINKEN: I think in many ways our own relationship with China reflects what we're trying

to do and what we're trying to achieve with our partners, and I think they have a very similar perspective. And as I said earlier, we're trying to do two things at the same time that may seem to be inconsistent but, in fact, are actually totally consistent and in some ways mutually reinforcing. On the one hand, we are looking to deepen and broaden areas of cooperation with China, and I think we've had, certainly over the past couple of years, significant advances in that area, working together on climate change where China's leadership played a major role in getting us to the Paris Climate Agreement, working together in Afghanistan where we're actually training diplomats, a new generation of Afghans, working together in the P5+1 to resolve the Nuclear Crisis Program with Iran. In these and so many other areas we've demonstrated that, one, we work together, we can advance the common good. At the same time, it's been very important to deal directly with our differences. And the differences are real and in many places significant. We engaged directly on concerns about China's actions in the cyber realm and made real progress in engaging those differences. We, of course, have concerns about China's actions in the South China Sea and the maritime domain more broadly. Those we're engaging directly as well. And, of course, the question of human rights and China's actions at home are cause for concern.

So I think what we're seeing among our partners as well is the same desire that we have to work together and to deepen those areas of cooperation and expand them wherever we can, but also to be very forthright about our differences. But here's what I think it comes down to in large part, and it's something that I alluded to earlier. Our three countries -- the United States, Korea, and Japan -- have a shared stake in the rules-based international order that was forged after World War II, and the United States, of course, played a leadership role in helping to forge that order. And in some ways, it seemed almost illogical because in forging that order and in binding ourselves to rules and grounding some of our actions in institutions and giving others a voice and a vote, it seemed like we were actually restraining our own power. But, in fact, I think what we demonstrated over 70 years was that in building partnerships, in building alliances, in developing credit with other countries precisely because we've given them a voice and a vote and a stake, we were actually able to get much more done in advancing our interests and in advancing the common good. That system is under-challenged in ways that it's never been before, from non-

state actors of one kind or another, super empowered individuals and groups. But it's also under-challenged sometimes from other states that decide which rules to abide by and which to ignore. And at the heart of some of our differences, I think, is exactly that question. So, for example, when it comes to China's actions in the maritime domain, as you know, we take no position on the underlying claims, for example, in the South China Sea. But where we do take a strong position is in the way those claims are prosecuted by any one of the claimants, whether it's China or anyone else. And we insist on the need to preserve freedom of navigation for all, we insist on the need for the peaceful resolution of any disputes, and we insist on the need for disputes to be settled in accordance with rules and norms. And again, I think there's a shared collective interest in that proposition that we see across the region.

So, I think our own presence has been a force for stability and progress in the region. I think it's very reassuring to our partners, but so is our determination to build a cooperative relationship with China. We have made real progress in that direction. We're going to continue to try to do that. We'll encourage our partners to do the same, even as we stand up very clearly for these basic principles.

MR. BUSH: Alan Romberg?

MR. ROMBERG: Thanks. And let me thank -- join in thanking you for a very helpful set of principles and so on. You're not going to be surprised to know there are going to be a lot of questions relating to China from this group. And I want to relate it to North Korea. China, obviously, is going to play a critical role if there's going to be progress in dealing with North Korea, and I think there's every reason to believe China is very serious about its concern about North Korea, both about the nuclear program and about its being fed up basically with the Kim Jong-un regime. At the same time, I wonder if there really is reason to believe that China is prepared to take on the consequences, either of threatening -- I don't mean in an overt sense -- but taking steps that threaten stability -- instability or backlash from North Korea on the one hand, or that could lead, under whatever set of circumstances to unification on the other under

Seoul's Aegis ally to the United States. It seems to me that that latter has been viewed as profoundly strategically disadvantageous to China, and the former has a real risk of war. So I wonder if you could help us think about that.

MR. BLINKEN: Yeah, Alan, thank you very much. We understand, and in many ways share China's concerns about instability in the region. That's a very logical concern to have. I think what China increasingly recognizes is that the greatest source of instability in the region is North Korea and the actions of its regime. And so if it's stake, if its concern is about instability, it has a real interest and incentive to work with us, and indeed, in many ways to play a leadership role in dealing with this threat to stability posed by the regime. So you're right that the question now is whether China is prepared to take the necessary actions. I think we saw a very significant development with China's support for the strongest UN Security Council resolution to date by far on North Korea, and now we have to go ahead and implement that resolution, and China will have to play a lead role in doing that.

But I think it's in China's interest in many ways. First, the ongoing missile tests and nuclear tests that North Korea has engaged in are a profound threat to stability in the region, and China shares the desire with us, with our partners, to see those cease. And it also shares a strong interest and desire to see North Korea get on the path to denuclearization. So it's very clear about that. The question is how to achieve that, and unfortunately, the most effective way to achieve that, because all others seem so far to have failed, is to exert real pressure on North Korea and to force it to make a choice: a choice between continuing these actions or choosing a course that allows it to actually provide for its own people and develop economically. It can't have it both ways as much as it would like to. So I think when China looks at that, it would conclude logically that it makes sense for it to join in these common efforts.

There's another factor. We've been very clear with our partners, but we've also been very clear with Beijing that as long as this persists, as long as North Korea continues to take these actions and to advance its nuclear and missile programs, and as long as that's not stopped and reversed,

we will have to take steps to assure our own security and that of our partners and allies. And none of these steps are directed against China, but it's also no secret that many of these steps are not ones that China is enthusiastic about. But we've been very, very clear that we will have to do it, and the best example of that recently is the conversations begun with the South Koreans about the development of a THAAD missile defense system. Again, not directed at China; it doesn't affect China strategically, but we know that China doesn't like it. But again, it's something that we have to do. So, again, if China is looking to assure that we're not required to take additional steps for our own security and that of our partners and allies that it won't like, the best thing it can do is to continue to engage with us in dealing with North Korea.

China says sometimes that it is – has lost or doesn't have influence with the regime, and it's fair to say that based on the fact that it sent senior envoys to North Korea, only to have the regime turn around the next day and test a missile or nuclear device, there's something to that. But there's a difference between influence and leverage, and even if its influence has diminished, its leverage has not. There is a unique relationship between China and North Korea economically. The Security Council Resolution really puts that front and center on the table, and we hope that the collaboration with China on North Korea will continue.

The last thing I'll say is this, we've made many efforts over the course of this administration, as previous administrations have made, to engage North Korea on denuclearization and to make it very clear that we were not seeking regime change; we were seeking a change in its behavior and seeking for it to meet its international obligations. I think what we've shown over the last year in particular is proof of the proposition that we were dead serious about that. The agreement with Iran on its nuclear program should be powerful evidence to North Korea that we're prepared to engage with countries with whom we have the most profound differences to get to a practical result. But what's so important there is that Iran made a very important choice, a fundamental choice. It agreed that it would freeze, and in some respects, roll back its program to see if we could find the time and space to negotiate a comprehensive agreement. And it did that, and we did that, but that started with a decision made in Tehran. If the DPRK were to make the same

decision, I think the possibilities are very real, very clear, very concrete.

MR. BUSH: The woman on the aisle there?

MS. CHEN: Thank you very much. Very nice, Secretary Blinken and Dr. Bush, to meet you here again. Jennifer Chen, reporter with Shenzhen Media Group. I would like to know in the upcoming U.S.-Japan-South Korea trilateral meeting, what aspects will be discussed regarding to the next steps on sanctions to North Korea, and what the U.S. try to achieve after the trilateral meetings? What will be the target of President Obama in his last year on the new trilateral relations, especially the progress on a triangular military alliance? Is there any treaties, like trilateral intelligence sharing pact being considered right now? Thanks.

MR. BLINKEN: Thank you very much. In the trilateral meeting that President Obama will have with President Park and Prime Minister Abe, I think the question of North Korea will be front and center. And they will focus in particular on implementing the UN Security Council Resolution, but they'll also be discussing any additional measures that we can take, either individually, or collectively, or with other countries, to again, sharpen the choice for the regime in Pyongyang. So that will be, I think, the number one topic of discussion. But at the same time, I suspect that the conversation will also talk about much of what we discussed here this morning. That is, looking at the broad range of areas in which we would benefit as countries, but also where the regional and international community would benefit from our deepening cooperation. So many of the things I discussed this morning I suspect will be on the agenda for the three leaders, looking very practically at how we can advance our cooperation on everything from global development to maritime issues, to the empowerment of women and girls, and climate and so forth. So while North Korea will be probably at the top of the list, this broad cooperative agenda will be its foundation.

One of the things that really strikes me, and I suspect all of you, is that when you look at the evolution of our relationship, both individually with Japan and Korea, and also in a trilateral

partnership, we've seen something quite extraordinary. Of course, we began after the war with a focus on issues between us -- bilateral challenges and problems. And we worked on those for many years. And then gradually, the work that we were doing together expanded to the region and we started to look at what we could do together to address regional challenges and regional opportunities. But right now we're at a moment where increasingly, the partnerships between the United States and Japan, and the United States has probably created bilaterally, but also trilaterally among the three of us, are focused on global challenges. And we bring a certain amount of weight, a certain amount of credibility to engaging these problems. And there's real benefit not only to our own people in doing that, but increasingly to the global community. So I think that will be a focus of the conversation. Thank you.

MR. BUSH: Okay. Mark Tokola and then Ken Lieberthal.

MR. TOKOLA: Yeah, thank you. I'm Mark Tokola of the Korea Economic Institute. Taking advantage of your global perspective, I wonder if I could ask you to speak to the common dilemma the U.S., Japan, and Korea face in trying to gain Russian support for policies in Northeast Asia, while at the same time meaning tough sanctions against Russia over Crimea policy. Is that more likely to bring us together or could it potentially force us apart?

MR. BLINKEN: Thank you. We would welcome being able to pursue with Russia a more cooperative relationship and to work together on common challenges and common interests, and I think that the same could probably be said of our partners. And indeed, in a number of places we are, including right now in Syria. But it won't be business as usual until the situation in Ukraine, and Russia's actions in Ukraine and its support for the separatists in Ukraine come to an end and we fully implement the so-called Minsk agreement. And I think it's important for two reasons, and its importance actually resonates in Asia in a very interesting way. First, there are basic principles at stake that I alluded to earlier, and that is our common interest in a rules-based international order. And unfortunately, Russia's actions in Ukraine have violated those rules and violated the proposition that you can change another country's borders by force; that you can

dictate for that country the choices that should belong to its people, including which alliances to join, which countries to work with. But there's something that's particularly interesting, too in the Asia context. Remember that when Ukraine gained its independence with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there were, in fact, three successor nuclear states -- Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. They inherited nuclear weapons from the former Soviet Union. And one of the great achievements of the early '90s, the Clinton administration, was to get those three countries to give up the nuclear weapons they had inherited. In the case of Ukraine, what was critical to giving it the confidence to do that was the so-called Budapest Memorandum in which the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia agreed that, among other things, Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity would be upheld. So what does it mean if an agreement like that can just be torn up by Russia when we're trying to convince, for example, North Korea to denuclearize? And it legitimately would want to have some assurance that if it were to do that, its basic security would be upheld. These things matter. They make a real difference, and that's why I think you are seeing somewhat solidarity in the international community when it comes to Russia's actions in Ukraine, including in Asia, including in the G7, for example. So I think we have to manage to do both at the same time. At the end of the day, Russia will engage in cooperative activities that advance its interest, as will we, as will presumably Japan and Korea. And I think, again, we're demonstrating that in places like Syria right now. But, we won't get back to business as usual, as I said, until we resolve the challenge posed by Russia and Ukraine.

MR. BUSH: One last quick question. Ken Lieberthal?

MR. LIEBERTHAL: Thank you. If I can come back to your comments about how we're working to limit North Korea's capability to do real damage. Clearly, as you noted, bringing China in on this, cooperating closely with China, it enhances the effort considerably. I just want to focus for a second on the issue of our discussions with South Korea to potentially deploy our THAAD anti-missile system there. As you know, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has indicated they see this as degrading their capabilities. Can you explain to us briefly what are the technical -- I don't mean detailed, but broadly -- how can we assure China that our broad statement that this does not in

any way compromise China's security is accurate beyond simply our saying that it does not compromise? Are there capabilities of this system that really nail that down, and can you lay that out briefly? Thank you.

MR. BLINKEN: Sure. Thanks very much, Ken. Very simply put, the system is designed to defend against short, and to some extent, medium-range missiles, not long-range missiles. So if China is concerned about the viability of its strategic deterrent, for example, with regard to the United States, the system would be incapable of challenging that. It's not only a question of asserting that to China, and I would understand that the Chinese might not take our word for it. We have also proposed to go through the technology, the specifications with them. Again, they'd have to presumably still take our word for it, but we would be prepared to explain to them exactly what the technology does and what it doesn't do. And our hope would be that they would take us up on that proposal to gain greater confidence that this is not directed against China.

But the bottom line remains that as long as North Korea continues in this direction, advancing its missile program, advancing its nuclear program, we are going to have to take these steps to defend ourselves and to defend our partners. And I have to tell you, it's made all the more urgent and important by two things. One is despite our very, very focused efforts over many administrations and very focused efforts in this administration to make it as difficult as possible for North Korea to acquire technology for its programs and also to acquire the resources necessary to fund these programs, we made progress there but clearly it continues nonetheless to advance both its missile and nuclear programs. So it gets closer and closer to the day when it could have a weapon that's miniaturized and placed on top of an ICBM that could actually threaten the continental United States. It already threatens in different ways the region. Combine that with a leader who seems to act arbitrarily, who may not be subject to the rules of deterrence that all of us have grown up with and accept, and that is cause for grave concern, and that's a concern that we've tried to communicate very clearly to Beijing so that it understands why this is so serious and why this is so urgent for the United States. Thank you.

MR. BUSH: Thank you very much. We've run out of time. Please join me in thanking Secretary Blinken for a very rich discussion.

(Applause)

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