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Barack Obama

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Thank you very much.

To President Park, faculty, staff and students, thank you so much for this very warm welcome. It is a great honor to be here at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. I want to thank Dr. Park for, a few moments ago, making me an honorary alumni of the university.

I know that this school has one of the world's finest foreign language programs -- which means that your English is much better than my Korean. All I can say is, kamsa hamnida.

Now, this is my third visit to the Republic of Korea as President. I've now been to Seoul more times than any other capital -- except for Washington, D.C., of course. This reflects the extraordinary bonds between our two countries and our commitment to each other. I'm pleased that we're joined by so many leaders here today, Koreans and Americans, who help keep us free and strong and prosperous every day. That includes our first Korean-American ambassador to the Republic of Korea -- Ambassador Sung Kim.



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I've seen the deep connections between our peoples in my own life -- among friends, colleagues. I've seen it so many patriotic Korean Americans, including a man born in this city of Seoul, who came to America and has dedicated his life to lifting up the poor and sick of the world. And last week I was proud to nominate him to lead the World Bank -- Dr. Jim Yong Kim.

I've also seen the bonds in our men and women in uniform, like the American and Korean troops I visited yesterday along the DMZ -- Freedom's Frontier. And we salute their service and are very grateful for them. We honor all those who have given their lives in our defense, including the 46 brave souls who perished aboard the Cheonan two years ago today. And in their memory we reaffirm the enduring promise at the core of our alliance -- we stand together, and the commitment of the United States to the defense and the security of the Republic of Korea will never waver.

Most of all, I see the strength of our alliance in all of you. For decades, this school has produced leaders -- public servants, diplomats, businesspeople -- who've helped propel the modern miracle that is Korea-- transforming it from crushing poverty to one of the world's most dynamic economies; from authoritarianism to a thriving democracy; from a country focused inward to a leader for security and prosperity not only in this region but also around the world -- a truly "Global Korea."

So to all the students here today, this is the Korea your generation will inherit. And I believe there's no limits to what our two nations can achieve together. For like your parents and grandparents before you, you know that the future is what we make of it. And you know that in our digital age, we can connect and innovate across borders like never before -- with your smart phones and Twitter and Me2Day and Kakao Talk. It's no wonder so many people around the world have caught the Korean Wave, Hallyu.

Or consider this: In advance of my visit, our embassy invited Koreans to send us your questions using social media. Some of you may have sent questions. And they called it, "Ask President Obama." Now, one of you -- maybe it was you, maybe it was somebody else -- this is true -- asked this question: "Have you posted, yourself, a supportive opinion on a website under a disguised name, pretending you are one of the supporters of President Obama?" I hadn't thought of this. But the truth is I have not done this. Maybe my daughters have. But I haven't done that myself.



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So our shared future -- and the unprecedented opportunity to meet shared challenges together -- is what brings me to Seoul. Over the next two days, under President Lee's leadership, we'll move ahead with the urgent work of preventing nuclear terrorism by securing the world's nuclear materials. This is an important part of the broader, comprehensive agenda that I want to talk with you about today -- our vision of a world without nuclear weapons.

Three years ago, I traveled to Prague and I declared America's commitment to stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and to seeking a world without them. I said I knew that this goal would not be reached quickly, perhaps not in my lifetime, but I knew we had to begin, with concrete steps. And in your generation, I see the spirit we need in this endeavor -- an optimism that beats in the hearts of so many young people around the world. It's that refusal to accept the world as it is, the imagination to see the world as it ought to be, and the courage to turn that vision into reality. So today, with you, I want to take stock of our journey and chart our next steps.

Here in Seoul, more than 50 nations will mark our progress toward the goal we set at the summit I hosted two years ago in Washington -- securing the world's vulnerable nuclear materials in four years so that they never fall into the hands of terrorists. And since then, nations -- including the United States -- have boosted security at nuclear facilities.

South Korea, Japan, Pakistan and others are building new centers to improve nuclear security and training. Nations like Kazakhstan have moved nuclear materials to more secure locations. Mexico, and just yesterday Ukraine, have joined the ranks of nations that have removed all the highly enriched uranium from their territory. All told, thousands of pounds of nuclear material have been removed from vulnerable sites around the world. This was deadly material that is now secure and can now never be used against a city like Seoul.

We're also using every tool at our disposal to break up black markets and nuclear material. Countries like Georgia and Moldova have seized highly enriched uranium from smugglers. And countries like Jordan are building their own counter-smuggling teams, and we're tying them together in a global network of intelligence and law enforcement. Nearly 20 nations have now ratified the treaties and international partnerships that are at the center of our efforts.



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And I should add that with the death of Osama bin Laden and the major blows that we've struck against al Qaeda, a terrorist organization that has actively sought nuclear weapons is now on the path to defeat.

So in short, the international community has made it harder than ever for terrorists to acquire nuclear weapons, and that has made us all safer. We're building an international architecture that can ensure nuclear safety. But we're under no illusions. We know that nuclear material, enough for many weapons, is still being stored without adequate protection. And we know that terrorists and criminal gangs are still trying to get their hands on it -- as well as radioactive material for a dirty bomb. We know that just the smallest amount of plutonium -- about the size of an apple -- could kill hundreds of thousands and spark a global crisis. The danger of nuclear terrorism remains one of the greatest threats to global security.

And that's why here in Seoul, we need to keep at it. And I believe we will. We're expecting dozens of nations to announce over the next several days that they've fulfilled the promises they made two years ago. And we're now expecting more commitments -- tangible, concrete action -- to secure nuclear materials and, in some cases, remove them completely. This is the serious, sustained global effort that we need, and it's an example of more nations bearing the responsibility and the costs of meeting global challenges. This is how the international community should work in the 21st century. And Korea is one of the key leaders in this process.

The United States will continue to do our part -- securing our own material and helping others protect theirs. We're moving forward with Russia to eliminate enough plutonium for about 17,000 nuclear weapons and turn it instead into electricity. I can announce today a new agreement by the United States and several European partners toward sustaining the supply of medical isotopes that are used to treat cancer and heart disease without the use of highly enriched uranium. And we will work with industry and hospitals and research centers in the United States and around the world, to recover thousands of unneeded radiological materials so that they can never do us harm.

Now, American leadership has been essential to progress in a second area -- taking concrete steps towards a world without nuclear weapons. As a party to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, this is our obligation, and it's one that I take very seriously. But I believe the United States has a unique responsibility to act -- indeed, we have a moral obligation.



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I say this as President of the only nation ever to use nuclear weapons. I say it as a Commander-in-Chief who knows that our nuclear codes are never far from my side. Most of all, I say it as a father, who wants my two young daughters to grow up in a world where everything they know and love can't be instantly wiped out.

Over the past three years, we've made important progress. With Russia, we're now reducing our arsenal under the New START Treaty -- the most comprehensive arms control agreement in nearly 20 years. And when we're done, we will have cut American and Russian deployed nuclear warheads to their lowest levels since the 1950s.

As President, I changed our nuclear posture to reduce the number and role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy. I made it clear that the United States will not develop new nuclear warheads. And we will not pursue new military missions for nuclear weapons. We've narrowed the range of contingencies under which we would ever use or threaten to use nuclear weapons. At the same time, I've made it clear that so long as nuclear weapons exist, we'll work with our Congress to maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal that guarantees the defense not only of the United States but also our allies -- including South Korea and Japan.

My administration's nuclear posture recognizes that the massive nuclear arsenal we inherited from the Cold War is poorly suited to today's threats, including nuclear terrorism. So last summer, I directed my national security team to conduct a comprehensive study of our nuclear forces. That study is still underway. But even as we have more work to do, we can already say with confidence that we have more nuclear weapons than we need. Even after New START, the United States will still have more than 1,500 deployed nuclear weapons, and some 5,000 warheads.

I firmly believe that we can ensure the security of the United States and our allies, maintain a strong deterrent against any threat, and still pursue further reductions in our nuclear arsenal.

Going forward, we'll continue to seek discussions with Russia on a step we have never taken before -- reducing not only our strategic nuclear warheads, but also tactical weapons and warheads in reserve. I look forward to discussing this agenda with President Putin when we will meet in May. Missile defense will be on the agenda, but I believe this should be an area of cooperation, not tension.



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And I'm confident that, working together, we can continue to make progress and reduce our nuclear stockpiles. Of course, we'll consult closely with our allies every step of the way, because the security and defense of our allies, both in Europe and Asia, is not negotiable.

Here in Asia, we've urged China -- with its growing nuclear arsenal -- to join us in a dialogue on nuclear issues. That offer remains open. And more broadly, my administration will continue to pursue ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. And after years of delay, it's time to find a path forward on a new treaty that verifiably ends the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons -- ends it once and for all.

By working to meet our responsibilities as a nuclear power, we've made progress in a third area -- strengthening the global regime that prevents the spread of nuclear weapons. When I came into office, the cornerstone of the world's effort -- which is the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty -- was fraying. Iran had started spinning thousands of centrifuges. North Korea conducted another nuclear test. And the international community was largely divided on how to respond.

Over the past three years, we have begun to reverse that dynamic. Working with others, we've enhanced the global partnership that prevent proliferation. The International Atomic Energy Agency is now conducting the strongest inspections ever. And we've upheld the basic bargain of the NPT: Countries with nuclear weapons, like the United States and Russia, will move towards disarmament; countries without nuclear weapons will not acquire them; and all countries can have access to peaceful nuclear energy.

Because of these efforts, the international community is more united and nations that attempt to flout their obligations are more isolated. Of course, that includes North Korea.

Here in Korea, I want to speak directly to the leaders in Pyongyang. The United States has no hostile intent toward your country. We are committed to peace. And we are prepared to take steps to improve relations, which is why we have offered nutritional aid to North Korean mothers and children.



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But by now it should be clear, your provocations and pursuit of nuclear weapons have not achieved the security you seek; they have undermined it. Instead of the dignity you desire, you're more isolated. Instead of earning the respect of the world, you've been met with strong sanctions and condemnation. You can continue down the road you are on, but we know where that leads. It leads to more of the same -- more broken dreams, more isolation, ever more distance between the people of North Korea and the dignity and the opportunity that they deserve.

And know this: There will be no rewards for provocations. Those days are over. To the leaders of Pyongyang I say, this is the choice before you. This is the decision that you must make. Today we say, Pyongyang, have the courage to pursue peace and give a better life to the people of North Korea.

This same principle applies with respect to Iran. Under the NPT, Iran has the right to peaceful nuclear energy. In fact, time and again the international community -- including the United States -- has offered to help Iran develop nuclear energy peacefully. But time and again Iran has refused, instead taking the path of denial, deceit and deception. And that is why Iran also stands alone, as the only member of the NPT unable to convince the international community that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes -- the only member. That's why the world has imposed unprecedented sanctions, slowing Iran's nuclear program.

The international community is now poised to enter talks with Iran's leaders. Once again, there is the possibility of a diplomatic resolution that gives Iran access to peaceful nuclear energy while addressing the concerns of the international community. Today, I'll meet with the leaders of Russia and China as we work to achieve a resolution in which Iran fulfills its obligations.

There is time to solve this diplomatically. It is always my preference to solve these issues diplomatically. But time is short. Iran's leaders must understand they, too, face a choice. Iran must act with the seriousness and sense of urgency that this moment demands. Iran must meet its obligations.



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For the global response to Iran and North Korea's intransigence, a new international norm is emerging: Treaties are binding; rules will be enforced; and violations will have consequences. We refuse to consign ourselves to a future where more and more regimes possess the world's most deadly weapons.

And this brings me to the final area where we've made progress -- a renewed commitment to harnessing the power of the atom not for war, but for peaceful purposes. After the tragedy at Fukushima, it was right and appropriate that nations moved to improve the safety and security of nuclear facilities. We're doing so in the United States. It's taking place all across the world.

As we do, let's never forget the astonishing benefits that nuclear technology has brought to our lives. Nuclear technology helps make our food safe. It prevents disease in the developing world. It's the high-tech medicine that treats cancer and finds new cures. And, of course, it's the energy -- the clean energy that helps cut the carbon pollution that contributes to climate change. Here in South Korea, as you know, as a leader in nuclear energy, you've shown the progress and prosperity that can be achieved when nations embrace peaceful nuclear energy and reject the development of nuclear arms.

And with rising oil prices and a warming climate, nuclear energy will only become more important. That's why, in the United States, we've restarted our nuclear industry as part of a comprehensive strategy to develop every energy source. We supported the first new nuclear power plant in three decades. We're investing in innovative technologies so we can build the next generation of safe, clean nuclear power plants. And we're training the next generation of scientists and engineers who are going to unlock new technologies to carry us forward.

One of the great challenges they'll face and that your generation will face is the fuel cycle itself in producing nuclear energy. We all know the problem: The very process that gives us nuclear energy can also put nations and terrorists within the reach of nuclear weapons. We simply can't go on accumulating huge amounts of the very material, like separated plutonium, that we're trying to keep away from terrorists.



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And that's why we're creating new fuel banks, to help countries realize the energy they seek without increasing the nuclear dangers that we fear. That's why I've called for a new framework for civil nuclear cooperation. We need an international commitment to unlocking the fuel cycle of the future. In the United States we're investing in the research and development of new fuel cycles so that dangerous materials can't be stolen or diverted. And today I urge nations to join us in seeking a future where we harness the awesome power of the atom to build and not to destroy.

In this sense, we see how the efforts I've described today reinforce each other. When we enhance nuclear security, we're in a stronger position to harness safe, clean nuclear energy. When we develop new, safer approaches to nuclear energy, we reduce the risk of nuclear terrorism and proliferation. When nations, including my own, fulfill our responsibilities, it strengthens our ability to ensure that other nations fulfill their responsibilities. And step by step, we come closer to the security and peace of a world without nuclear weapons.

I know that there are those who deride our vision. There are those who say ours is an impossible goal that will be forever out of reach. But to anyone who doubts the great progress that is possible, I tell them, come to Korea. Come to this country, which rose from the ashes of war -- a country that rose from the ashes of war, turning rubble into gleaming cities. Stand where I stood yesterday, along a border that is the world's clearest contrast between a country committed to progress, a country committed to its people, and a country that leaves its own citizens to starve.

Come to this great university, where a new generation is taking its place in the world -- helping to create opportunities that your parents and grandparents could only imagine. Come and see some of the courageous individuals who join us today -- men and women, young and old, born in the North, but who left all they knew behind and risked their lives to find freedom and opportunity here in the South. In your life stories we see the truth -- Koreans are one people. And if just given the chance, if given their freedom, Koreans in the North are capable of great progress as well.

Looking out across the DMZ yesterday, but also looking into your eyes today, I'm reminded of another country's experience that speaks to the change that is possible in our world. After a terrible war, a proud people was divided. Across a fortified border, armies massed, ready for war.



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For decades, it was hard to imagine a different future. But the forces of history and hopes of man could not be denied. And today, the people of Germany are whole again -- united and free.

No two places follow the same path, but this much is true: The currents of history cannot be held back forever. The deep longing for freedom and dignity will not go away. So, too, on this divided peninsula. The day all Koreans yearn for will not come easily or without great sacrifice. But make no mistake, it will come. And when it does, change will unfold that once seemed impossible. And checkpoints will open and watchtowers will stand empty, and families long separated will finally be reunited. And the Korean people, at long last, will be whole and free.

Like our vision of a world without nuclear weapons, our vision of a Korea that stands as one may not be reached quickly. But from this day until then, and all the days that follow, we take comfort in knowing that the security we seek, the peace we want, is closer at hand because of the great alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea; and because we stand for the dignity and freedom of all Koreans. And no matter the test, no matter the trial, we stand together. We work together. We go together.

Katchi kapshida!

Thank you very much.