
Address by Ronald Reagan President of the United States of America

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
SEOUL, KOREA
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1983

Speaker Chae, Vice Speaker Yun, Vice Speaker Ko, distinguished members of the National Assembly, and honored guests:

I am privileged to be among such friends. I stand in your Assembly as Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson have stood before me. And I reaffirm, as they did, America's support and friendship for the Republic of Korea and its people.

Not long after the war on this peninsula, your President paid a visit to Washington. In his remarks at the state dinner, President Eisenhower spoke of the Korean people's courage, stamina and self-sacrifice. He spoke of America's pride in joining with the Korean people to prevent their enslavement by the North. In response, your first President expressed his country's deep, deep appreciation for what America had done. He concluded by saying, "I tell you, my friends... if I live hundreds of years, we will never be able to do enough to pay our debt of gratitude to you."

Well, I have come today to tell the people of this great nation: your debt has long been repaid. Your loyalty, your friendship, your progress, your determination to build something better for your people, has proven many times over the depth of your gratitude. In these days of turmoil and testing, the American people are very thankful for such a constant and devoted ally. Today, America is grateful to you.

And we have long been friends. Over a hundred years ago, when American ships first approached Korea, our people knew almost nothing of each other. Yet the first words from the Kingdom of Chosun to the emissaries from America were words of welcome and hope. I would like to read part of that greeting to the Americans, because it tells much of the Korean people's character.

"Of what country are you?... Are you well after your journey of ten thousand li through winds and waves? Is it your plan to barter merchandise... or do you rather wish to pass by to other places and so return to your native land? All under heaven are of one original nature, clothes and hats are very different and language is not the same, yet they can treat each other with mutual friendship. What your wish is, please make known..."

The journey from America is now swift; the winds and waves no longer endanger our way. But the rules of conduct which assist travellers are the same today as they were over a century ago, or even in ancient times. The weary are restored, the sick healed, the lost sheltered and returned safely to their way. This is so on all continents among civilized nations.

Our world is sadder today because these ancient and honorable practices could not protect the lives of some recent travellers. Instead of offering assistance to a lost civilian airliner, the Soviet Union attacked. Instead of offering condolences, it issued denials. Instead of offering reassurances, it repeated its threats. Even in the search for our dead, the Soviet Union barred the way. This behavior chilled the entire world. The people of Korea and the United States shared a special grief and anger. My nation's prayers went out to the Korean families who lost loved ones, even as we prayed for our own. May I ask you today to pause for a moment of silence for those who perished. Please join me in this tribute in which the spirit of our two peoples will be as one.

In recent weeks our grief deepened. The despicable North Korean attack in Rangoon deprived us of trusted advisers and friends. So many of those who died had won admirers in America as they studied with us or guided us with their counsel. I personally recall the wisdom and composure of Foreign Minister Lee, with whom I met in Washington just a few short months ago. To the families and countrymen of all those who were lost, America expresses its deep sorrow. We also pledge to work with your government and others in the international community to censure North Korea for its uncivilized behavior. Let every aggressor hear our words because Americans and Koreans speak with one voice: people who are free will not be slaves and freedom will not be lost in the Republic of Korea.

We in the United States have suffered a similar savage act of terrorism in recent weeks. Our Marines in Lebanon were murdered by madmen who cannot comprehend words like reason or decency. They seek to destroy not only peace, but those who search for peace. We bear the pain of our losses just as you bear the pain of yours. As we share friendship, we also share grief.

I know citizens of both our countries, as well as those of other nations, do not understand the meaning of such tragedies. They wonder why there must be such hate. Of course, regrettably there is no easy answer. We can place greater value on our true friends and allies. We can stand more firmly by those principles that give us strength and guide us. And we can remember that some attack us because we symbolize what they do not -- hope, promise, the future. Nothing exemplifies this better than the progress of Korea. Korea is proof that people's lives can be better. And I want my presence today to draw attention to a great contrast: I am talking about the contrast between your economic miracle in the South and their economic failure in the North.

In the early years following World War II, the future of Korea -- and all of Asia -- was very much in doubt. Against the hopes of Korea and other new nations for prosperity and freedom stood the legacies of war, poverty and colonial rule.

In the background of this struggle, the great ideological issues of our era were heard: Would the future of the region be democratic or totalitarian? Communism, at that time, seemed to offer rapid industrialization. The notion that the people of the region should govern their own lives seemed to some an impractical and undue luxury. But Americans and the people of Korea shared a different vision of the future.

Then North Korea burst across the border intent on destroying this country. We were a world weary of war, but we did not hesitate. The United States, as well as other nations of the world, came to your aid against the aggression. And more than 54,000 Americans gave their lives in defense of freedom.

As heavy as this price was, the Korean people paid an even heavier one. Civilian deaths mounted to the hundreds of thousands. President Johnson said before this very Assembly, "Who will ever know how many children starved? How many refugees lie in unmarked graves along the roads south? There is hardly a Korean family which did not lose a loved one in the assault from the North."

In 1951, in the midst of the war, General Douglas MacArthur addressed a joint session of our Congress. He spoke of you saying, "The magnificence of the courage and fortitude of the Korean people defies description." As he spoke those words, our Congress interrupted him with applause for you and your people.

After the war, Koreans displayed that same fortitude. Korea faced every conceivable difficulty. Cities were in ruins; millions were homeless and without jobs; factories were idle or destroyed; hunger was widespread; the transportation system was dismembered; and the economy was devastated as a result of all these plagues.

And what did the Korean people do? You rebuilt your lives, your families, your homes, your towns, your businesses, your country. And today the world speaks of the Korean economic miracle. The progress of the Korean economy is virtually without precedent. With few natural resources other than the intelligence and energy of your people, in one generation you have transformed this country from the devastation of war to the threshold of full development. Per capita income has risen from about \$80 in 1961 to \$1,700 today. Korea has become an industrial power, a major trading nation, and an economic model for developing nations throughout the world.

And you have earned the growing respect of the international community. This is recognized in your expanding role as host to numerous international events -- including the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Olympics.

Now, as the years have passed, we know our vision was the proper one. North Korea is one of the most repressive societies on Earth. It does not prosper; it arms. The rapid progress of your economy -- and the stagnation of the north -- has demonstrated perhaps more clearly here than anywhere else, the value of a free economic system. Let the world look long and hard at both sides of the 38th parallel, and then ask: Which side enjoys a better life?

The other side claims to be the wave of the future. Well, if that is true, why do they need barriers, troops and bullets to keep their people in? The tide of history is a freedom tide and communism cannot and will not hold it back.

The United States knows what you have accomplished here. In the 25 years following the war, America provided almost \$5-1/2 billion in economic aid. Today that amounts to less than 6 months trade between us -- trade that is virtually in balance. We are at once Korea's largest market and largest source of supplies. We are a leading source of the investment and technology needed to fuel further development. Korea is our ninth largest trading partner and our trade is growing.

Korea's rapid development benefitted greatly from the free flow of trade which characterized the 1960s and 70s. Today in many countries the call for protectionism is raised. I ask

Korea to join with the United States in rejecting those protectionist pressures to ensure that the growth you have enjoyed is not endangered by a maze of restrictive practices.

And just as we work together toward prosperity, we work toward security. Let me make one thing very plain: you are not alone, people of Korea. America is your friend and we are with you. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of Korea. The preamble to that treaty affirms the determination of our two countries to oppose aggression and to strengthen peace in the Pacific. We remain firmly committed to that treaty. We seek peace on the peninsula.

That is why U.S. soldiers serve side by side with Korean soldiers along your Demilitarized Zone. They symbolize the United States' commitment to your security and the security of the region. The United States will stand resolutely by you, just as we stand with our allies in Europe and around the world. In Korea, especially, we have learned the painful consequences of weakness.

I am fully aware of the threat you face only a few miles from here. North Korea is waging a campaign of intimidation. Their country is on a war footing, with some 50 divisions and brigades and 750 combat aircraft. The North has dug tunnels under the DMZ in their preparations for war. They are perched and primed for conflict. They attacked you in Rangoon; yet in spite of such constant threats from the North, you have progressed.

Our most heartfelt wish is that one day the vigil will no longer be needed. America shares your belief that confrontation between North and South is not inevitable. Even as we stand with you to resist aggression from the North, we will work with you to strengthen the peace on this peninsula.

Korea today remains the most firmly divided of the states whose division stemmed from World War II. Austrian unity was reestablished peacefully 10 years after the war. Germany remains divided, but some of the pain of that division has been eased by the inner-German agreement of a decade ago. I know the Korean people also long for reconciliation. We believe that it must be for the people of this peninsula to work toward that reconciliation, and we applaud the efforts you've made to begin a dialogue. For our part, we would, as we've often stressed, be willing to participate in discussions with North Korea in any forum in which the Republic of Korea was equally represented. The essential way forward is through direct discussions between South and North.

~~~~~

Americans have watched with a mixture of sadness and joy your campaign to reunite families separated by war. We have followed the stories of sisters torn apart at the moment of their parents' deaths; of small children swept away in the tides of war; of people who have grown old not knowing whether their families live or have perished.

I've heard about the program that uses television to reunite families that have been torn apart. Today I urge North Korea: it is time to participate in this TV reunification program, and to allow your people to appear. Whatever your political differences with the South, what harm can be done by letting the innocent families from North and South know of their loved ones' health and welfare? Full reunification of families and peoples is a most basic human right.

Until that day arrives, the United States, like the Republic of Korea, accepts the existing reality of two Korean states and supports steps leading to improved relations among those states and their allies.

We have also joined with you over the past 2 years in proposing measures which, if accepted, would reduce the risk of miscalculation and the likelihood of violence on the peninsula. The proposals we have made, such as mutual notification and observation of military exercises, are similar to ones negotiated in Europe, and observed by NATO and the Warsaw Pact. These proposals are not intended to address fundamental political issues, but simply to make this heavily armed peninsula a safer place. For we must not forget that on the peninsula today there are several times more men under arms and vastly more firepower than in June of 1950. We will continue to support efforts to reduce tensions and the risks of war.

I have spoken of the need for vigilance and strength to deter aggression and preserve peace and economic progress. But there is another source of strength and it is well represented in this Assembly. The development of democratic political institutions is the surest means to build the national consensus that is the foundation of true security.

The United States realizes how difficult political development is when, even as we speak, a shell from the North could destroy this Assembly. My nation realizes the complexities of keeping a peace so that the economic miracle can continue to increase the standard of living of your people. The U.S. welcomes the goals you have set for political development and increased respect for human rights. We welcome President Chun's farsighted plans for a constitutional transfer

~~~~~

of power in 1988. Other measures for further development of Korean political life will be equally important and will have our warm support.

This will not be a simple process because of the ever-present threat from the North. But I wish to assure you once again of America's unwavering support and the high regard of democratic peoples everywhere as you take the bold and necessary steps toward political development.

Over one hundred years ago you asked earlier American travellers to make their wishes known. I come to you today with our answer: Our wish is for peace and prosperity and freedom for an old and valued ally.

In Washington several weeks ago, a memorial service was held for those who had perished on Flight 007. During that service, a prayer was read. I would like to read you that prayer because it is a prayer for all mankind.

"O God...

Look with compassion on the whole human family;

Take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts;

Break down the walls that separate us;

Unite us in bonds of love;

And work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth;

That, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony..."

That, too, is our wish and our prayer. Thank you and God bless you. [on young he kay ship shee yo] (Stay in peace.)