



# LEE HONG-KOO

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I served as Prime Minister exactly 20 years ago, so I have a tendency to talk about some of the things that happened in the past and not so much about the future. We had great morning sessions and let me say a few things related to the issues brought up in the morning sessions. Someone already mentioned the fact that next year, 2015, will mark the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. However, to Koreans, it is the 70th anniversary of the division of Korea. Korea has been divided for the last 70 years, and this may be one of the longest artificial divisions of a people and a community. This artificial division was engineered by the great powers.

We also have to remember that it will be the 70th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. In 1945, we thought that the age of imperialism had come to an end. In fact, so many former colonies gained independence in the following years, and we too thought that we would again become an independent state on the Korean Peninsula. However, we found out that because of the wartime agreement among the Allied powers, Korea was to be divided into two halves.

I do not want to go through all of this, but in recent months, rather ominous remarks seem to have been made by a number of politicians and journalists. Maybe the age of imperialism is over, but the age of big power politics in the world scene has not gone away. If anything, we are returning to another period of big power politics, which will shape the global order or disorder. Earlier, Mr. de Montbrial mentioned in his remarks the fact that we should avoid a return to the politics of the sphere of influence. Some people will argue that we should not return to old style geo politics either.

If there are limitations or problems emanating from the old style geo politics and big power international politics, Korea has certainly experienced them all. Korea has been victimised by these settings, perhaps more than most other countries. This is partly because of our geo political setting. We are a relatively small peninsula attached to the Eurasian continent and we have only three immediate neighbours.

Earlier, many speakers mentioned the fact that there is a tremendous difference between Germany and Korea when it comes to the problem of division and unification. One of the big differences is that, while Korea has only three neighbours, Germany is situated in the middle of Europe, and I do not know exactly how many neighbours it has, probably 10 or 12 who either share common borders or located just across the sea.

All three of the neighbours that Korea has are much bigger than we are. In fact, in the case of China and Russia, they are not just bigger but overwhelmingly bigger than Korea. And across the Strait, we have Japan. Therefore, in some sense, in the age of geo politics, we are destined to be in trouble, one way or another. Or to put it in somewhat colloquial words, we have to live in a very rough neighbourhood. It is a wonder that Korea has survived for thousands of years in such a rough neighbourhood.

For example, in the excitement surrounding the end of the World War II in 1945, we thought freedom from the colonial rule would automatically launch into a new period of peace and national independence. However, that hope or dream was dashed by the great power agreements. We found ourselves right in the middle of the early stages of the Cold War. In 1948, two governments and two states were born in the Korean Peninsula. The Republic of Korea is a product of the decision of the United Nations. In short, the UN was the midwife for the birth of the Republic.

In 1947, the General Assembly adopted the resolution to form a UN mission to Korea which would supervise elections. North Korea and Soviet Union refused to accept the operation of the commission in the North; therefore, the election of 1948 took place only in the South, of the 38th parallel. With a newly elected Korean Government, the Republic of



Korea was duly proclaimed on 15 August 1948. Just three weeks later, on 9 September, the North Korea or DPRK was established. As you know, the Korean War took place two years later. So much for the historical background.

As the feeling spreads around the world now that another period of big power politics is coming back, what sort of position or strategy should Korea adopt? In this situation the Republic of Korea, I would say, is now pursuing a double edged foreign policy. By double-edged, I mean the following. On one hand, we have to adhere to certain requirements of big power politics to ensure our survival in that setting or neighbourhood. We have to do it by necessity. On the other hand, we would like to maintain our dreams and hopes, and we would like to pursue these objectives diligently. You may call the first objective a realistic approach, and the second idealistic.

We are a small nation in relative terms. Actually, Korea is not that small. If we put North and South Korea together, we have 75 million people. If we were in Europe, only Germany is bigger than we are. However, big and small are relative terms. We have 75 million people. However, the closest Chinese province, just across the yellow sea from Inchon, Shandong Province alone has more than 80 million people. Small nations could not survive by pursuing only realistic policies. We must have dreams and ideas, and self-confidence in our capacity to survive in this rough world. We must try to mobilise whatever resources we have to the best of our abilities, and that is what we are trying to do.

Speaking of the realistic policy among the big powers, we have one paramount objective at this moment. We do not want to see a serious clash between the United States and China. Others may have different views, but we know instinctively without too much analysis that if there is big trouble between the US and China, Korea is in immediate jeopardy, one way or another. Therefore we have been trying our best to promote a constructive, cooperative and friendly relationship between the United States and China.

There is a rationale for our position. In some sense, both China and the United States were born as natural big powers. They have not gained the position of hegemonic powers by force, but they were born into hegemonic positions. From the beginning, the US was a continental power, with the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans as two wings. Until the middle of the 20th century, even Americans themselves considered their nation, the United States, to be an Atlantic nation. However, the situation changed in the second half of the 20th century, as you remember. California became a biggest state replacing New York. Hawaii and Alaska became the 49th and 50th states of the United States. The US found itself operating in two oceans, the Atlantic and the Pacific, and this had its implications.

From the beginning, unlike some of the European countries, the United States was a big power, which fashioned itself as the land of the free and volunteered to carry the torch for freedom as a universal virtue. China is likewise situated right in the middle of the Eurasian continent and it was the middle kingdom right from the beginning. The Chinese believe that peace and harmony under the heaven are what the Chinese nation is pursuing for. In some sense, China and the United States are two great powers which share common characteristics.

That is not all. In my judgment, American and Chinese cultures share remarkable common characteristics. If you look at the behaviour of American and Chinese people, they are extremely pragmatic people, certainly compared to most of Asians, Europeans and people of the Middle East. They do not care that much about abstract ideologies; instead they always pursue pragmatic gains and like to have concrete results.

Furthermore, as we look back to the age of imperialism which lasted until 1945, the United States and China in comparative terms, were less interested in territorial expansion than most other powers. Consequently they did not have to carry the kind of burden of history that other nations had to carry in the age of imperialism. All in all, if we put the emphasis on the points I just mentioned, there are sufficient grounds for a hope for these two great nations to be good partners. That is what we Koreans like to promote.

Earlier, our President, Madame Park Geung Hye, gave a very good speech. She is really good at giving speeches and I am always impressed whenever I listen to her. This morning, however, an important point came into my mind as I listened to her. She is perhaps the only head of state who enjoys great trust from both President Obama and President Xi Jinping. I can see that they both like her, and they believe in her. That is why I think our President now occupies a very special role in promoting good communication and cooperation between these two leaders, and through it, between these two peoples.



That is not all. We are trying to mobilise whatever resources and talents we have in order to promote tangible advancements for peace in the international community. When we had the elections back in 1948 under the supervision of the United Nations commission, we never thought that our Foreign Minister would become the Secretary General of the United Nations; but Ban Ki moon is there since 2007. I am told that he is doing a good job and we are very proud of him.

There are others. For example, Professor Sang Hyun Song of Seoul National University is now serving as the President of the International Criminal Court in The Hague. He and others are international servants, but I think they are trying to promote a world in which bigger and smaller countries and different people from different religions and continents can live together peacefully. This is what we are dreaming for.

Dr Sung Joo Han earlier mentioned the fact that Korea was the only country in Asia which was colonised by an Asian neighbour. The only similar example in Europe is Cyprus, according to Dr Han. When they had trouble in Cyprus, the United Nations peacekeeping force was in operation, and one of our generals, General Hwang Jin Ha, served as the Commander of those UN forces there. He is now the Chairman of the Defence Committee in our National Assembly. I mention all these names with pride, because we have made some strides in promoting our dreams and hopes.

You may remember the Seoul Olympics in 1988. After two divided Olympics, one in Moscow and the other in Los Angeles, the Olympic movement was in trouble, but we were fortunate to host the 1988 Olympics. I am proud of the fact that Japan and Korea co hosted the 2002 World Cup. I think it was the first time any two countries co hosted World Cup games. I was the chairman of the bidding committee on the Korean side, and I remember that we and Japanese colleagues agreed that there was no better way to start the 21st century than to co host the World Cup games together. It was a great tournament, not to mention that the Korean team unbelievably made the semi finals. I do not think I will see any better World Cup games in my lifetime.

Three weeks ago, the annual Korea India Forum was held in this hotel. One of the recommendations made by that group is that the Korean wave of music and dance and the Indian Bollywood style would together lead to a very special experiment creating a new global wave of arts movements. We have to wait and see.

Finally allow me to add one more good news from Asia. When we compile the list of troubles around the world, you cannot help but become pessimistic. For a change, we have some good news from Asia. India had elections last April and elected Prime Minister Modi. The fact that some 810 million people went to polls is amazing. For 120 million people, it was the first time they went to the polls. India is both democratic and trying to achieve fast growth and rapid economic development. Indonesia, the largest Muslim country, elected President Widodo in a very orderly fashion. What a big task he has, to govern 30,000 big and small islands. However, they are moving along. In Asia, all these big countries including China and Japan are operating well. We have every reason to believe that if we can work together, we can achieve a great deal.

I would like to take just one and a half minutes more. We had a very good session on the task of Korean unification. Let me say this: when German unification came in 1990, we had a similar period of thaw, with increasingly good relations between the two Koreas. In 1991, we signed what we called the basic agreements for North South cooperation. In 1992, we made joint declarations to keep the Korean Peninsula nuclear free. We have all these agreements.

What changed the situation? There are many reasons, but it is partly because we did not have a global backing, with an international guarantee for all these agreements. Today, there are many good ideas about how we should proceed. Still the most crucial requirement is to bring the major powers together to guarantee the peaceful coexistence of two Korea working together towards an eventual unification. There is a good chance of achieving unification.

Speaking for myself, I am not in a hurry. I was a unification minister some 26 years ago and at that time, I thought I might be able to see unification within 10 years or so. Now, quite frankly, I am not sure if I will see it in my lifetime. However, we have been divided for 70 years and I can wait another 17 years, maybe 27 years, or even 30 years. It will take time, but with our firm resolution and with the help of our friends, I think we can achieve it.