



Sustaining the U.S. Commitment in Asia by Paul Wolfowitz

The following is an excerpt from Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz's remarks at the IISS "Second Asia Security Conference: The Shangri-La Dialogue" in Singapore on May 31, 2003.) The Pacific region today is truly peaceful - that is to say pacific - for one of the first times in its history. We must work to sustain that achievement as the region undergoes what are likely to be major changes in the first decades of the 21st century.

In the defense area, the issue for my country is how best to sustain the American commitment to this region in the face of the global demands on our defense resources. We are looking first and foremost to our existing allies and partners, to support our efforts both within and outside Asia. But second, we want to take maximum advantage of the remarkable capabilities that new technology affords us to make our military posture more agile, more flexible, and more effective.

We are in the process of taking a fundamental look at our military posture worldwide, including in the United States. We face a very different kind of threat than the one we faced historically. But our forces also have very different kinds of capabilities, dramatically different capabilities, than we've ever had before. It is appropriate to look now at how those forces are postured, how we can get the most effectiveness out of them, while maintaining the same basic commitment to stability and deterrence in this region that we have had all along.

The main drivers for this posture review effort are three-fold. First, we have adopted, evolved, and battle-tested an entirely new range of long-range, high-precision systems which exponentially increase our war fighting capabilities. Secondly, we have learned to organize ourselves, with intelligence collection systems and new approaches to information management, in completely new ways, pioneered, I might say, by the landmark legislation that the Congress passed more than 15 years ago called the Goldwater-Nichols Act. That has promoted jointness in our military, and our ability to integrate forces into joint operations provides another exponential increase in military effectiveness. Third, to adapt to a world in which potential threats have become more unpredictable, we place a great premium on mobility and on the ability to move from existing hubs at great speed and to use temporary basing solutions as needed.

Many studies have been done and many ideas have been presented, but no decisions have yet been made. Before making decisions we need to consult both with our own Congress and with affected allies and friends in the region, and that process is underway.

In Korea, where our alliance has endured and prospered for over 50 years, we have launched a bilateral posture review

effort—a phased process we call the Future of the Alliance study. That initiative was agreed to at our December 2002 Security Consultative Meeting. And we began work in earnest when the Roh Moo-hyun government took office in late February. At their recent summit meeting in Washington, our two presidents pledged to work closely together to modernize the U.S.-Korean alliance, taking advantage of technology to transform both nations' forces and enhance their capabilities to meet emerging threats.

Our agreed goal is to jointly assess our respective transformation plans and determine how best to strengthen the deterrence value of our alliance. Tomorrow I will be going to Seoul for important discussions with South Korean officials. My basic message will be that change is positive, that we are determined to enhance the quality of our alliance with the Republic of Korea and, in so doing, to strengthen deterrence on the Korean Peninsula and stability in Northeast Asia more generally.

Fifty years ago this July the guns went silent on the Korean Peninsula. For the ensuing half century the strong alliance of the U.S. and the Republic of Korea has preserved the peace on the basis of effective deterrence backed up by a strong common defense capability. This formula has worked and allowed South Korea to prosper, both economically and politically, rising from the ashes of a devastating war to become the 11th largest economy in the world and a thriving democracy.

As we discuss in Korea how best to transform our respective forces to ensure the continuing effectiveness of our alliance, we are guided by two principal considerations. First, deterrence remains a key objective of our common defense posture. The changes we make should take advantage of new technology to counter North Korean asymmetric capabilities and to strengthen deterrence. Second, the changes we make should help to sustain a strong alliance over the long run by reducing unnecessary burdens on both sides and ensuring that the alliance will remain relevant into the future.

In Japan, a similar process is underway. While many of the basing and mobility issues that confront us in other nations do not exist in our current relationship in Japan, other issues frame the joint assessment that has recently begun there. Japan is in the process of its own national level evaluation and planning process, driven in part by new threat dynamics, and will make decisions based on its own needs as well as the perceived strength of our relationship.

Australia, long a steadfast ally and partner, has once again demonstrated its seriousness and resolve in the war on terrorism. Australia's central role in Iraq, its support to coalition efforts in Afghanistan, and its commitment to fight terrorism at home proves once again how valuable it is to have

an ally that takes security and its commitments to the common defense seriously.

Other established relationships in Asia are important too. As the Philippines struggles with its own terrorism threat, we have redoubled our commitment to assist that ally to develop its security programs. During the just-completed state visit to Washington by President Arroyo, the Philippines was accorded major non-NATO ally status, in recognition of the close ties which bind our two nations.

We can build on established relationships to maintain an active security posture in Asia and to encourage broader multilateral cooperation. Although multilateral mechanisms of cooperation in Asia - like this conference itself - are relatively new, they hold important promise for enabling countries of the region to resolve problems peacefully.

Nowhere is that challenge greater than in confronting the problem posed by North Korea's nuclear program. North Korea's behavior over the past year, in both its public declarations and actions, threatens regional and global stability. In October in Pyongyang, North Korea declared that it had violated and would continue to violate the Agreed Framework by proceeding with its uranium enrichment program. Earlier this year, they conveyed that they were reactivating their plutonium production program. And just two weeks ago, they declared the crucial 1992 North-South Denuclearization Agreement, "a worthless piece of white paper."

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that we are dealing with a state that has little regard for the commitments it undertakes or for the delicate nature of the northeast Asia security environment. This is not and cannot be a bilateral issue, as Pyongyang would like it, limited to a two-way dialogue between North Korea and the United States. It affects the whole region and requires a multilateral approach.

As Pyongyang proceeds with its uranium enrichment program and moves to reprocess plutonium, it creates a new danger - the capacity to export fissile material and even entire weapons systems. Given North Korea's past record, there can be little basis for confidence that North Korea will restrain itself from selling nuclear materials and technology to the highest bidder. In the face of this real and immediate danger, all responsible countries in the region, indeed in the world, must step up to the challenge. A consensus is beginning to take shape that the only way we will be able to solve this problem peacefully is through a carefully managed multilateral approach to Pyongyang.

Is there a peaceful solution to the North Korean dilemma? I believe there is. If together we accept the challenge posed by Pyongyang's aggressive and anti-social behavior - its missile exports, its drug sales, its disregard for its international commitments - and together confront Korea with a way forward, on verifiable terms acceptable to the countries of the region, we at least have a chance. I believe the U.S. and its allies and partners in northeast Asia can agree on an outcome that serves all of our interests.

On its present course, North Korea is heading down a blind alley. Its pursuit of nuclear weapons will not protect it

from the real threat to its security, which is the threat of an implosion brought on by the total failure of its system.

Indeed, the diversion of scarce resources to nuclear weapons and other military programs only exacerbates the weaknesses of the underlying system. Twenty-five years ago, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China pointed the way for how a failed communist system can undertake a process of reform without collapsing. That is the course North Korea needs to pursue if it is to avoid the kind of collapse that is viewed with apprehension throughout the region.

If North Korea abandons the provocative course on which it is embarked and ends the wasteful diversion of scarce resources to military capabilities that it does not need and cannot afford, it will find the door open to all kinds of fruitful cooperation with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Successful multilateral diplomacy will be necessary to confront North Korea with the fundamental choices that it faces.

To conclude, like most of you in this audience, I share the view that the Pacific is as important, perhaps more important, than any region in this world. And that is not just because my country is a Pacific nation. It is very likely that the most significant source of economic growth in the next 50 years will occur right here, based on the impressive growth we've already seen. One can imagine a bright future ahead if the power generated by this increasing economic growth can be increasingly applied for peaceful rather than military purposes.

Consultation and cooperation, the kind that this dialogue is promoting, through both bilateral relationships and multilateral channels, can help us see with clarity future challenges as well as opportunities so that we can face them decisively and together.

Paul Wolfowitz is deputy U.S. secretary of defense. A complete transcript of his Shangri-La Dialogue speech is available on the IISS web site [www.iiss.org]. A transcript of the Q&A session following his presentation is available on the Department of Defense web site [www.dod.gov]