Speech at the seminar commemorating the publication of the English edition of Peacemaker (Stanford University, 18 May 2012)

Good afternoon. I want to thank you all for coming.

I am happy to be here at Stanford today with my old and not-so-old friends. Stanford is the alma mater for two of my three sons, and they are both here today to volunteer as an interpreter and a facilitator for this event, free of charge. I think it’s the least they can do given what I had to pay for their education.

This is my third time visiting Stanford. My first visit was 28 years ago, back in June 1984, when I brought my family here for a campus tour after my eldest son had been accepted to this great university. My second visit was 13 years ago, in the summer of 1999, to pay a visit to Dr. William Perry, then North Korea Policy Review (NKPR) coordinator. It is my great pleasure to see him again here today. Personally, I am grateful to Dr. Perry, who wrote a kind and gracious foreword to my book. I have fond memories of those previous visits, and I have great expectations for this third visit.

I am very pleased that my book, Peacemaker, with the subtitle, 20 years of inter-Korean Relations and the North Korean Nuclear Issue has been published in English at a time when the issue of the Korean Peninsula remains unresolved and many people are still concerned about it. With this English edition, I am honored that I will have an opportunity to share my views and experience with you and other ‘English-reading’ audiences.

Before I discuss the book, I would like to express my appreciation to those who made this publication possible. The publication of this English edition benefited enormously from the generosity of the Stanford Korean Studies Program (SKP) at the Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center. I am indebted to its director Professor Gi-Wook Shin, who initiated the project of this edition, and Mr. David Straub, Associate Director of the Korean Studies Program and an old Korea hand, for his support. I also thank Professor Tong Kim for translating the Korean version into English, and Stanford Publication Manager George Krompacky and Dr. Yoon-Seong Choi for editing the manuscript.

As a soldier and a diplomat during the Cold War, my mission was to deter war; I am proud of what I was able to accomplish as a peacekeeper. In the past two decades of the post-Cold War era, I worked as policymaker, a negotiator, and policy implementer to improve inter-Korean relations and end the legacy of the Cold War on the Korean Peninsula. Fulfilling my role as a “peacemaker” on the Peninsula was an honorable mission, and I thank the Lord for blessing me with this privilege.

The twenty years following the end of the Cold War were a turbulent period of transformation for the Korean Peninsula. This memoir is a record of the history of the bold attempts and hard efforts by the Korean people for two decades from 1988, which
aimed to end the Cold War on the peninsula and establish a new relationship of reconciliation and cooperation. However, the path to these goals was not easy. It was a long and winding road between accomplishment and frustration, progress and retreat, and stability and crisis.

This book details the two most significant events of the period. The first one was the inter-Korean High-Level Talks in the early 1990’s, which produced a landmark document called the North-South Basic Agreement. The second one was the historic inter-Korean summit of June 2000, for the first time in the history of the divided Korea. As a result from this summit, we were able to undertake a process of reconciliation and cooperation on the peninsula.

During this period, the administrations of Roh Tae-woo, Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun adopted a gradual peaceful unification approach, as they sought gradual change in North Korea. To this end, they pursued an engagement policy for reconciliation and cooperation. They maintained their parallel efforts to make progress in denuclearization and improvement of inter-Korean relations. These efforts resulted in an improvement of relations between the North and the South: For the first time in a half-century, people were able to travel and goods were shipped through “a peace corridor” between the North and the South. Frequent inter-Korean traffic helped to reduce tensions, mitigate hostile attitudes, promote economic cooperation (with the Kaesong Industrial Complex being the most prominent example), and contribute to confidence building. In addition, they were able to promote a peace process through close coordination with the United States. My book is about a record of the history of inter-Korean relations during this period.

In addition, this book describes the process of resolving the North Korean nuclear issue and removing the hostile relationship between North Korea and the United States. During this period, there were two conflicting approaches in U.S. policy to the resolution of the Korean peninsula issue. In my book, I had to discuss the stark contrast between President Clinton and President George W. Bush in terms of their policy toward North Korea.

During the Clinton administration, “the United States and North Korea have decided to take steps to fundamentally improve their bilateral relations,” and issued a joint communiqué in October 2000, saying, “neither government would have hostile intent toward the other... to build a new relationship free from past enmity.” President Clinton positively considered a visit to Pyongyang that year. In short, he undertook a peace process in Korea through cooperation with South Korea and Japan to improve its relations with North Korea.

Peacemaker highlights the Kim Dae-jung and Clinton summit in Washington (June 1998) as well as the peace process for the peninsula, known as the Perry Process. I vividly remember the Kim-Clinton summit and the close policy coordination between the two administrations. At the summit in June 1998, President Clinton agreed with President Kim on his approach to North Korea and said, “In view of your stature and experience, I would like you to lead on the issue of the Korean Peninsula. You take the
driver’s seat and I’ll take the seat beside to help you.” I was deeply touched. President Clinton kept his word until his last day in office.

Five years later, former President Clinton told former President Kim Dae-jung in person in Seoul, “If I had had one more year in office, the fate of the Korean Peninsula would have been different.”

President Bush was different, to say the least. He designated North Korea as a member of ‘the axis of evil.’ He sought a regime change by preemption; he employed the so-called ‘bold approach’ to pressure and force the North to surrender. Bush’s ABC (Anything But Clinton) policy ended in destroying the peace process that had been put in place by the hard work of the Clinton administration.

When President Bush came to Seoul in February 2002, he said, “We have no intention of attacking or invading North Korea.” He said that he would seek a resolution of the North Korean issue through dialogue. He also said that he would continue providing food aid to the North Korean people.

But, soon Bush’s words turned out to be empty rhetoric. He supported the hardliners in his administration. President Bush abrogated the Agreement Framework that had been implemented for eight years. Although President Bush did not attack or invade North Korea, his policy toward North Korea was interpreted as being hostile enough by North Koreans to derail the peace process. North Korea restarted their nuclear development activities. Belatedly at the end of its second term, President Bush attempted to turn around his North Korea policy; but he did so only after the nuclear test by North Korea. For this reason, some critics said the North Korean nuclear bomb was “Bush’s bomb.” Bush’s policy of pressure and sanctions failed to prevent the North Korean from continuing their nuclear development. It simply made the problem worse. As Morton Abramowitiz and Stephen Bosworth quipped in their book, Chasing the Sun, it played out like “a remake of a bad movie.”

In the September 19, 2005 Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks, the US, China, Russia, Japan, and the two Koreas reaffirmed that the resolution of the nuclear issue and the normalization of relations of the United States and Japan with North Korea should be promoted in parallel in a phased and reciprocal fashion. Through the joint statement, the participants also agreed to hold peace talks among the parties concerned (US, China and the two Koreas) to build a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. In addition, they agreed to seek a cooperative security arrangement for Northeast Asia. The joint statement set the right direction for the dismantlement of the Cold War structure in the region.

At the beginning of the Obama administration, North Korea recklessly conducted a missile (a satellite rocket) launch and a second underground nuclear test, resulting in the deterioration of relations with the United States and inviting the UN sanctions. It has been three years since the Obama administration started waiting for North Korea’s change under the so-called “strategic patience” and the six-party talks were suspended.
However, the efforts of the concerned parties to restart the process of six party talks have not made any progress so far.

To resolve the nuclear issue, we need to create an environment conducive to denuclearization. We should convince the North Koreans that they would be safer and they can develop their economy, and they can even prosper, when they give up their nuclear weapons. This can be done only when the hostile relationship is ended between North Korea and the United States and only when security is guaranteed for the North.

Now, I want to touch on the issue of peace and unification of Korea.

Through this English edition, I hope the readers gain a better understanding and give support for the ardent desire of the Korean people for peace and unification. Our final goal is clearly to end the national division and achieve unification. Korea is a country that had existed for more than a thousand years as a single unified state. As long as the division continues, it is inevitable for the two sides to compete in a zero-sum game for their claims of legitimacy to the sovereignty of the whole nation. The division causes confrontation, tension, arms race, and risk of war. Under the division, the nation wastes resources that should be used for improving the lives of the people instead. The division of the Korean Peninsula affects peace and stability of the Northeast Asia region.

In the first historical inter-Korean summit of June 2000, the two leaders agreed to pursue a gradual and peaceful unification. They agreed, “Unification is a goal and a process at the same time.” We should work together to prevent the perpetuation of the division. Before achieving the ultimate state of de jure unification, the two sides would first establish de facto unification through exchanges and cooperation in peaceful coexistence. In this unification process, we should build an inter-Korean economic community, realize arms control, and, with support from great powers, replace the Military Armistice Agreement with a unification-oriented peace regime.

I believe this peaceful unification model would be acceptable to the national interests of the relevant countries over the Korean Peninsula. I believe this model is ideal and realistic and it can win support of the United States and the neighboring countries.

Unfortunately, during the four years following the publication of my memoir in Korean in 2008, the peace process came to a standstill. The inter-Korean relations were strained, and no progress was made on the nuclear issue and the U.S.-DPRK relations. On the other hand, North Korea has strengthened its strategic cooperative relationship with China.

After the failure of its “Southern Policy” for improving relations with South Korea, the United States and Japan, which had been pursued for the past two decades, North Korea shifted to “Northern Policy” to reinforce its relations with China and Russia. North Korea’s economic cooperation with China has been going well, as it serves China’s practical interest in developing the economy of its three Northeastern provinces, securing
the new source of underground resources and obtaining access to seaports towards the East Sea. In return, North Korea’s economic situation started improving by China’s supply of strategic goods and a sharp increase in trade between the two allies. With China’s “strategic engagement” since the fall of 2009, North Korea has become closer to China in terms of economic relations as well as foreign affairs and security.

North Korea’s leader Kim Jong Il died in December 2011, and the planned power succession by the young Kim Jong Un, the third son of Kim Jong Il, was carried out in stability. The North Korean constitution declares, “Kim Il Sung is the founding father of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.” It appears that the ruling elites of the North are committed to maintain the succession system and supporting Kim Jong-Un as their leader. And the North Korean people, who have never been exposure to democracy or civil society, are not rejecting the dynastic regime.

It seems that North Korea would be run by a small inner circle, and Kim Jong Un will play the role of the main protagonist as it moves gradually to solidify its their monolithic leadership. This system of leadership has been rooted in the North for more than half a century. Any possible power struggle that might emerge down the road would not target the supreme leader but it would more likely reflect an internal disagreement over the basic policy line and specific policy issues.

Kim Jong Un is facing a daunting task to build a “prosperous economy” following his grandfather Kim Il Song’s “strong political state” of the juche ideology, and his father Kim Jong Il’s “strong military state” of the military first policy. In his first public speech, marking the 100th anniversary of Kim Il Sung’s birth, Kim Jong Un said: “We must raise the flames of the 21st century industrial revolution and embark on a journey to build an economically strong country. We should make improving people’s lives a reality so that they won’t have to tighten their belts.” It appears that North Korea is going to focus more on economic vitalization. To this end, North Korea will strengthen their cooperation with China, while seeking an improved relationship with the United States, which they regard as very important.

In fact, from my several meetings with Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang, I could draw three conclusions about how the North Korean leadership viewed the United States: Kim Jong-il distrusted the United States; he feared the United States; yet he wanted badly to normalize relations with the United States. He had voiced the last point during the 2000 Inter-Korean Summit, stating that based on the North’s strategic judgment, maintaining good relations with the United States was in the interest of the nation, and he therefore wished to normalize relations with the United States. It appeared clear to me that North Korea was keeping weapons of mass destruction and maintaining a strong military force because of their fear and distrust of the United States. It was clear that the North Koreans were using them as negotiation leverage. Through my meeting with Kim Jong-il, I got the strong impression that North Korea would not give up its nuclear weapons development program and weapons of mass destruction until after relations with the United States were normalized.
The past foretells the future. To quote Dr. Perry, we must deal with North Korea as it is, not as we wish it to be. The past two decades of our experience taught us that we could not change North Korea or achieve its denuclearization through containment, coercion, or sanctions. We learned the lesson that the pressure only produced adverse effects. Instead, we need to convince the North Koreans that they can live safely and thrive without nuclear weapons. When people’s lives improve and when information and culture of the outside world is accessible, people’s perception will change, bringing change to their society. When changes accumulate, quantitative change will lead to qualitative change.

The changes of leadership in South Korea and the United States next year may provide a good opportunity to undertake a new version of comprehensive engagement policy that would contribute to bringing about the right environment and condition for change in the North. Such policy could succeed in inducing reform and opening to North Korea. Without efforts to make peace, it would be difficult to keep peace. The peace process for the Korean Peninsula must resume.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, I would like to thank the United States and the American people who helped the Republic of Korea achieve the development and prosperity that it enjoys today. We the Korean people will remember the efforts of President Clinton, North Korea Policy Coordinators, Secretary Perry and Ambassador Wendy Sherman for a long time to come. I also thank so many American friends of ours who supported our efforts to dismantle the Cold War structure and to make peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Thank you for listening.