

Next Chapter in Korea-U.S. Relations

Session: Session 4
Date/Time: April 27, 2016 / 13:30-15:00
Moderator: Alastair Gale, The Wall Street Journal
Speakers: Victor Cha, Center for Strategic and Int'l Studies
Edwin Feulner, The Heritage Foundation
Kim Sung-han, Korea University
Yamaguchi Noboru, Int'l University of Japan

Session Sketch

The moderator of the session, Mr. Alastair Gale, bureau chief for the *Wall Street Journal* in Seoul, opened the session titled “Next Chapter in Korea-U.S. Relations” providing an overview on developments of the bilateral relationship on economic and security spheres. Mr. Gale asked the speakers what should and can be done to develop the relationship further.

Dr. Victor Cha, senior adviser and Korea Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), began by stating two ways of thinking about alliance. One way is transactional, measuring its utility by benefits to security. The other way is to see it as an institution that has halo effects. Hence, the utility of the alliance is measured in non-security aspects. The benefits can be both exclusive like FTA and inclusive like development assistance, Peace Corps operation, and non-proliferation. Dr. Cha argued that the ROK-US alliance should be developed in the latter way. Regarding the next phase of the relationship, Dr. Cha highlighted importance of fostering individuals to function as an organic piece of the relationship and cooperating on new security areas like cyber space in the post 9·11 era. On the implication of elections, though domestic politics are the biggest variable that can change the alliance, Dr. Cha remained optimistic on finding common grounds on DPRK following an example of coordination between the Roh and Bush administrations.

Next, Dr. Edwin Feulner, chairman of the Asian Studies Center at the Heritage Foundation, noted that the two countries have made remarkable achievements in the economic sphere since they signed KORUS FTA. As for the upcoming election in Washington, the congress

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was brought to attention. 46 senates were newly elected for the last 6 years from 2008 to 2014. Compared to those elected in the previous term from 2002 to 2008, they are less aware of international politics as campaign focus has moved to the size of government expenditure for national security right after 9·11. Regarding the presidential election, though contentious claims are being made, Dr. Feulner expects more serious discussion on policies after July.

Prof. Kim Sung-han, professor and director of Ilmin International Relations Institute at Korea University Korea University, stated that the bilateral relationship has been evolving into a strategic alliance broadening its scope. Two schools in Seoul were introduced on the face of increasing regional rivalries with China. One is “concert of Asia,” and the other is “US-led Asia Order.” The Park administration chose the latter putting the highest priority on the ROK-US alliance. Looking beyond reunification of the peninsula, Prof. Kim expected a huge power vacuum in the region with US forces withdrawn. To advance the relationship in the long term, thus, US needs to manage alliance transition to prevent a power transition to China.

Finally, Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Yamaguchi Noboru, professor at the International University of Japan, noted that South Korea should play a more prominent role in the new era for a number of reasons: i) its developed economy, ii) advanced military capabilities, iii) unique international position based on close relationship both with US and China and full support from Japan for peace on the Korean peninsula. Seoul also has higher ground over DPRK with a matured democracy, human rights and freedom of speech. The alliance can play an essential role in the following areas: i) securing peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula, ii) achieving nuclear free peninsula, iii) conducting international operations, iv) preparing for various scenarios of reunification.