

**Session:** Sharp Power

**Date/Time:** April 24, 2018 / 21:00-22:30

**Rapporteur:**

Karl Friedhoff, Chicago Council on Global Affairs

**Moderator:**

Gilbert Rosman, The Asan Forum

**Speakers:**

Choi Kang, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

Hosoya Yuichi, Keio University

John Park, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center

Jane Perlez, *The New York Times*

Christopher Walker, National Endowment for Democracy

**Session Sketch:**

This session explored how sharp power seeks to define how countries disrupt—often in secretive ways—the soft power of other countries and undermine their identities. While the term itself may be new, its practice has already proven to be disruptive to the liberal international order. It has the power to transform perceptions of national identity, sowing the seeds of internal chaos. It stands in contrast to soft power, which seeks to win influence by attracting support rather than sowing confusion and creating division.

The panelists claimed that China has already tried to deploy its sharp power in both South Korea and Australia. In both cases, it has largely backfired. In South Korea, the Chinese response to

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THAAD—which included attempts to cultivate pro-China views among politicians and experts—led to a significant decrease in favorable views of China. In Australia, it has roiled domestic politics, including several scandals involving Chinese political campaign donations. As a result, a rash of legislation has been proposed to limit Chinese influence.

According to the panelists, to counter sharp power, liberal democracies need to follow three steps. First, they must identify cyber vulnerabilities in their democratic processes. Second, there need to be better safeguards for databases and other valuable targets. Finally, local and state actors need to be briefed on activities of those trying to use sharp power to exert influence.

Some argued that while Chinese sharp power attempts have thus far not been overly successful, their efforts will continue. The success of Russia likely means that Chinese sharp power will become less overt, and continue to adapt to new realities. These activities will seek to undermine national identities and cohesion, making them a danger to countries that are targeted.

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