

Asan Plenum 2023

“Alliance of 70 Years and Beyond”

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Honorary Chairman Chung Mong Joon and Chairman Yoon Young-kwan of The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, Former Prime Minister Lee Hong Koo, Former Deputy Prime Minister Jeon Yun-churl, Former Foreign Minister Han Sung-joo, Former Unification Minister Hong Yong Pyo, Former Foreign Minister De Gucht, Ambassador Castillo Fernandez, Ambassador Ahn Ho-Young, Ambassador Bolton, Ambassador Wolfowitz, Ambassador Ichiro, Ambassador Hallgren, Dr. Feulner, Dean Steinberg, General Sharp, Distinguished Speakers and Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, let me start by conveying my appreciation to Honorary Chairman Chung Mong Joon and The Asan Institute for Policy Studies for organizing this enlightening forum every year. It is a great honor and privilege for me to deliver my Congratulatory Remarks here, and, it holds all the more meaning for me since I was part of the Asan Institute as a visiting fellow years ago.

Today’s conference could not have come at a more opportune time. 2023 is a momentous year marking the 70th anniversary of the ROK-US Alliance. And as we speak, President Yoon and First Lady Kim are in the United States on a State Visit.

Today’s theme—“Alliance of 70 Years and Beyond”—allows us to contemplate the pressing challenges before us. Indeed, we are at a turning point where globalization and engagement have given way to geopolitics and disruption. Aggressions and the threat of force are reaching unprecedented levels. Supply chains are at a constant risk, and the competition for critical technologies is intensifying. That is why the term “poly-crisis” has gained widespread adoption. The world is now trying to cope with the various challenges that have ensued. So too should our alliance.

As we navigate through these uncertain times, the ROK-US Alliance has never been more critical. I can say with confidence that our alliance is one of the most successful and stout alliances in all of history. And, it is a clear testimony to the value and strength of the solidarity between the Republic of Korea and the United States. Having started as a military alliance, we have always stood shoulder-to-shoulder with each other against the numerous provocations of North Korea, including its growing nuclear and missile threats. The alliance has now become the linchpin for peace and prosperity not only on the Korean Peninsula, but for the region at large.

The Korea-US relationship has subsequently grown into a very important economic partnership as well, culminating in the KORUS Free Trade Agreement. We are now further expanding the boundaries of our collaboration into the realms of science and cutting-edge technology. Our alliance has stood the test of time, based on the solid foundation of shared values and mutual trust. I note with great satisfaction that our partnership has now evolved into a robust, resilient, and enduring friendship.

Distinguished Guests, I am very proud that our alliance has never stopped evolving even in the face of changing times and challenges. In this vein, our two countries have articulated a vision for a “Global Comprehensive Strategic Alliance.” The alliance would be ‘global’ as its scope will extend from the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia to the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. It would be ‘comprehensive’ as it will encompass security, economic, and technological cooperation, as well as people-to-people exchanges. It would be ‘strategic’ as we have shared goals in safeguarding core values such as freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, that go above and beyond our immediate national interests.

In this process of advancing our partnership to new heights, the Republic of Korea is committed to playing our part. The Yoon Suk Yeol administration’s “Global Pivotal State”—or GPS— vision is an advancement of that commitment. It represents our will to redefine and recalibrate Korea’s role in the world, commensurate with our stature, to uphold universal values and the rules-based international order.

One concrete roadmap for implementing this vision is the “IndoPacific Strategy,” which is an open, reciprocal, and inclusive strategy based on the core values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Korea’s decision to host the Third Summit for Democracy next year in addition to its recent cohosting of the Second Summit is yet another example of our strong commitment. The alliance has more work ahead of us to stay competitive in this era of “poly-crisis.”

President Yoon’s opportune State Visit to the US this week will provide a blueprint for future cooperation which can serve as a guiding light for the next 70 years and beyond. The visit is expected to yield substantive outcomes that will allow the two countries and peoples to truly sense the tangible security, economic and technological benefits our outstanding partnership brings. They will include strengthened extended deterrence measures, a stable business environment, expanded partnerships in new growth engines such as AI, biotechnology, space exploration, and deeper educational cooperation for future talents, among many other positive outcomes.

Also encapsulated in the theme of the State Visit is “Alliance in Action Toward the Future.” Our alliance will make every effort to chart a brighter and more prosperous future not only for our two countries and peoples, but also for the greater region and in turn the entire world.

I believe the discussions here will surely enlighten us in our efforts to prepare for the next 70 years of the alliance and beyond. On this note, I would like to bring my remarks to a close by saying that our alliance is not 70 years old, but 70 years young and strong. Let us grow even stronger together in the years ahead.

Thank you for your kind attention.