

## Asan Symposium 2022

# “Celebrating Korea-US Relations: 140 Years and Beyond”

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The US-Korean relationship dates back more than a century. But its contemporary strengths and shared vision were acquired through recent tragedies.

First, the peninsula, which had been a single unit for millennia, was split in half in the closing days of World War II. And then, North Korean soldiers, supported by China and the Soviet Union, sought unification by force, which entrenched the division.

Nearly five million died in that conflict. I witnessed Korea in 1951 just when the combat between Chinese and American forces was suspended for a ceasefire. Negotiations began and I had the opportunity to witness the courage and dedication of the Korean people with which they sustained their freedom. As a result, the Republic of Korea and the United States share the objective of preventing expansionism from above the 38th parallel.

South Korea has been determined to secure its sovereignty and independence. The United States has been determined to prevent the domination of East Asia by outside powers. As North Korea tied itself to the Communist world, the United States and South Korea institutionalized the 1953 alliance as part of a group of countries devoted to freedom and free market principles.

In the process, the military of South Korea became one of the strongest in the world and made a great contribution to preventing a repetition of the Korean War. And I remember also, with great appreciation, the participation of Korean forces in America's efforts in Vietnam.

Since then, the constructive capacity of North Korea's nuclear weapons was an important factor in the concerns of Asia and it has become and remains important for the United States to make clear its commitment to the freedom and prosperity of North Korea by its unambiguous dedication to the alliance of our two countries.

Since these wars and conflicts, South Korea has changed dramatically. In 1953, about the time I met it first, South Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world. Today it is the member of G20 with a per capita income surpassing much of Europe and also possessing a high technology sector. The partnership has been multi-dimensional as an edifice of economic, cultural, and political affinities personified in part by the Korean-American community which has flourished in our country.

This is especially true that in questions of high technology, the two countries can lend each other strong support which is reflected by the number of Korean students studying in the United States and by the Korean scientists that cooperate with Americans on research. Dialogue based on shared knowledge and shared values sets guidelines for managing the technology of the future, which will be unsurpassed in both promise and peril.

East Asia has undergone comparable changes over recent decades. China has become a great power. The Soviet Union collapsed and the so-called Asian Tigers produced great wealth. The Republic of Korea has endured throughout and progressed at an extraordinary rate, representing one of the major features among the world's most dynamic countries.

Figures such as my friend MJ Chung who has long been a thoughtful observer of international affairs as well as a successful businessman and public servant provide the opportunity for dynamic conceptual thinking. By founding the Asan Institute in memory of his father, MJ Chung has evened the strategic partnership between Korea and America.

The connection is essential, for the problems facing South Korea and the United States are shared: climate change, pandemics, regional rivalries, the management of high technology, and artificial intelligence. With this in mind, the longtime slogan of the alliance, 'We go together' has rarely been more resonant.

It has therefore been an honor to speak at an event dedicated to this partnership between two major countries and it evokes sentimental recollections in me of the hospitality that I have been accorded on my visits to Korea and of the courage I have seen Korean leaders face their challenges over many decades.

I look forward to the evolution of this set of relationships and I want to thank you for inviting me and giving me an opportunity to express my feelings about the friendship and relationship between Korea and the United States.

Thank you very much.