

# Asan Plenum 2019

## “Korea’s Choice”

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Good morning! Welcome everyone to the Asan Plenum 2019. Thank you all and some of you for making very long trips. You are a sight for sore eyes. This is the eighth iteration and some of you are repeat offenders who keep coming back. Thank you so much for staying with us and continuing this conversation with us.

This year we chose the theme “Korea’s Choice.” Until this time, we had a pretty broad topic like “Illiberal International Order” or “New World Disorder.” But this time we decided to focus on Korea, Korea’s choice. The reason for doing this is because we feel that history, geopolitics, and the recent change in the international order are forcing Korea to make some fundamental choices in terms of values, norms, security architecture, trade regime and policy directions. Being forced to make a choice is not necessarily a good thing. As we try to show in the film, South Korea chose democracy and free market economy. I think that choice has led to this remarkable prosperity and freedom that we enjoy today. I don’t think there’s any doubt. Also, there were limitations. We weren’t perfect in the way we practice democracy or the free market economy. Certainly, there’s much room for improvement and maybe even room for reform.

The direction had already been set right from the very beginning. Whatever improvements, whatever reforms that we want to do, this is to perfect the choice that we made to improve liberal democracy and free market economy. Of course, sustaining liberal democracy and free market economy can’t do it without the liberal international order. It was our alliance with the United States that gave us the kind of confidence in our security, which then enabled us to go headlong into economic development. And that’s probably true with a lot of other countries in this region and the rest of the world. So, it’s really thanks to this open multilateral global trading order that Korea was able to achieve the so-called Miracle on the Han River.

Why are we being forced to make choices? It is because the liberal international order with its openness and independence, multilateralism, is being challenged. The United States, the architect of this global order, and the EU, the best practitioner of this order, are having serious doubts about the very order Opening Ceremony that represent them and they embody. The U.S. is increasingly calling for “America First,” as the principle to guide its security as well as economic policies. The EU seems to be in danger of disintegration. China has been one of the greatest beneficiaries like South Korea of the liberal international order ever since it adopted the open and reform policy in the late 1970s. However, in recent years, China has been displaying what many describe as increasingly revisionist, or even hegemonic tendencies regarding the very global order from which it has benefited. In its own way, China is also calling for a China-first policy. I think North Korea’s Juche ideology is the very antithesis of the liberal international order. Using its nuclear weapons as leverage, it is trying to undermine the very security structure in and

around the Korean Peninsula that has brought all of us in this region, freedom and prosperity, not just for South Korea.

So, it is becoming increasingly difficult for South Korea to make the right policy choice in the face of this breakdown of the liberal international order with an ally that seems to have a different orientation than the one that we are used to. Also, we are suffering from an inability to come up with a domestic consensus on the direction in which we need to go. Increasing rivalry and friction between the United States and China and of course, the complex dynamics surrounding the effort to denuclearize North Korea. Now, we pose the question about Korea's choice. Of course, the answer is obvious right from the beginning. Korea's choice is clear. The moment we abandon the liberal democracy, free market economy, or the liberal international order, our freedom and prosperity will come to an end.

So, our challenge is how we can apply the principles of liberal democracy, free market economy, and the liberal international order to the real concrete policy issues that we confront every day, such as inter-Korean relations, ROK-U.S. relations, ROK-China relations, ROK-Japan relations, and our trade policies. I really hope that the conversation of the next two days will enable us to help us better articulate the choice that we face and really give us a clear sense of the direction in which we need to go in order to continue to secure freedom and prosperity.

As the founder of our Institute and our chairman Dr. Mong Joon Chung always emphasizes the fact that on this very far eastern tip of this great Eurasian continent that there is this liberal democracy and free market economy is a miracle in itself. And how do we sustain that miracle? I think that is the big challenge. So again, we chose this topic because we want all your wisdom and we really want to talk about what it is that we need to choose, what are the choices that we face and what are the fundamental choices we need to make as we go forward.

Now, let me introduce to you our keynote speaker, James Steinberg. Dr. Steinberg was Deputy National Security Adviser to President Clinton. He had an incredible career both in academia and public service in the government. He was vice president and director of Foreign Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution. He was Dean of the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas. He was Deputy Secretary of State from 2009 to 2011 and he served as Dean of the Maxwell School at Syracuse University. Currently, he is the professor of Social Science, International Affairs and Law at Syracuse University. We thought we couldn't find a better person to address this particular topic and help us launch two days of the conference. So please join me in welcoming Dr. James Steinberg.