

Asan Plenum 2024

“Future of Asia: Prosperity and Security”

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, friends, Dr Choi Kang, President of the Asan Institute, and other colleagues of Asan.

I am delighted to be here with all of you in Seoul, particularly thanks to my long-time dear friend, Dr Chung Mong-joon who is welcoming us for a timely gathering to survey key dimensions of the Korea-U.S. alliance as well as looking beyond the current status of them.

Thank you, MJ, once again for your tireless efforts to move our two countries' enduring alliance forward through the Asan Institute and other activities you have been leading.

I remember our first meeting in Hawaii, along with Paul Wolfowitz who is also with us today, to talk about the creation of a practical think tank in Seoul and your vision for it.

Following that meeting, the Asan Institute was established in 2008, named after the pen name “Asan” of the Hyundai Group Founder, Chung Ju-yung, MJ's father who left an indelible mark on Korea's economic development—the Korean Economic Miracle.

What a remarkable journey the Asan Institute has been charting since then, MJ, as a world-class think tank that mirrors South Korea's place on the world stage.

Congratulations to you and all of your colleagues.

And as you and I have candidly discussed here in Seoul as well as in Washington over the past years, the Republic of Korea and the United States have accomplished a lot together. Yet as we all know, we can do much more together.

In fact, I think that is precisely why we are here together. I join everyone in this room for appreciating your vision and leadership toward that direction, MJ.

Indeed, a time-tested alliance. Those words really sum up the seven-decade partnership between the United States and the Republic of Korea. Though culturally different, the two nations share the same values. Seoul has demonstrated a trustworthy and capable partner, both in terms of national security and commercial dealings. Yet much more can and should be done.

Our alliance has a track record of supporting mutual interests of the two like-minded nations across the Pacific while overcoming challenges and adapting to ever-changing economic and security environments around other parts of the world.

As the years have passed, these shared values have bound our two nations closer and closer.

This is not to say that relations have never been strained. Yet despite numerous ups and downs—or perhaps thanks to them—Washington today considers the Republic of Korea a model ally.

South Korea's relationship with the U.S. has been underpinned and reinforced by a strong foundation of shared entrepreneurship, enduring people-to-people ties, and close business cooperation led by global companies in both countries.

As all of you would agree, we have so much to learn from each other; so many similar interests; so many opportunities to create more prosperous and free societies for a greater number of people. It's truly rewarding to see our two nations' ever elevating heights of partnership on many key fronts.

Let me close my remarks with the following.

One of the main lessons I have taken from my decades in Washington is that in Washington there are no permanent defeats. But neither are there permanent victories.

There are only permanent battles, particularly battles of ideas. As President of The Heritage Foundation, I always argued, and still believe, that "ideas have consequences."

We need more of good ideas and fewer bad ones!

But where do these ideas come from, and how do they influence the policymakers...and eventually all of us?

Ideas are produced by individuals who elaborate and expand the ideas.

Then, it takes an institution to help popularize and advocate ideas.

What really matters is how to generate, facilitate, and ensure the virtuous cycle of these three Is – ideas, individuals, and institutions. It's a process that requires our commitment to values and principles.

That's why our alliance matters. The ROK-US relationship is a time-tested alliance of ideas, individuals, and institutions.

Needless to say, my dear friend MJ and our great colleagues of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, you are the concrete embodiment of that relationship as an institution and individuals that generate ideas to preserve and advance our highly functioning alliance.

And I believe that through the interplay between innovative thinking and follow-up action by principled individuals, we can keep adding and multiplying a more positive future based on our shared institutions and values for the Republic of Korea and the United States of America.

I look forward to more discussions throughout the conference today.

Onward!

Thank you very much.