



SESSION SKETCHES

Asan Plenum 2013: "New World Disorder"
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Challenges for the ROK-US Alliance

Panel: Session 3 (Regency Room)

Date/Time: Tuesday, April 30, 2013 / 15:30-16:45

Speakers: Scott Snyder, Council on Foreign Relations
Doug Bandow, Cato Institute
Victor Cha, CSIS
Kim Tae-hyo, Sungkyunkwan University
Shen Dingli, Fudan University

Rapporteur: Chip Bishop, George Mason University

This year commemorates the 60th anniversary of the ROK-US alliance. As moderator, Scott Snyder, senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, began by citing that over the past 200 years two-country alliances have experienced an average duration of a little over a decade. Based on the anomalous nature of the ROK-US alliance, it is important to understand why it has been particularly durable. To guide the discussion, he outlined five key areas of the alliance to focus on: its sustainability, its scope, the common purpose that holds it together, potential limits due to diverging domestic interests, and limits due to China's rise.

Doug Bandow, senior fellow at the Cato Institute, noted that South Korea's emergence as a global economic player leads policymakers to consider the balance of power, especially since South Korea can arguably afford to defend themselves and since development has also brought a generational shift in domestic culture and values. US policy interests may no longer be fully aligned with South Korea and it can no longer afford to expend resources abroad while it experiences domestic economic hardship. The alliance has provided a shield that has fostered Korean development and growth. However, we are now at a new stage.

Victor Cha, senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, outlined the remarkable evolution of the alliance. For the first 40 years, the US and the ROK had little in common but were united by mutual security concerns. This changed after the Cold War, as the nations became aligned on mutual values, evidenced by the trading

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relationship between the two countries. However, as the countries have grown closer together economically, they have grown further apart in their domestic politics. The silver lining is that North Korea will unlikely be an area of division, and may in fact prove to be the mutual interest that continues to hold the alliance together.

Kim Tae-hyo, professor of political science at Sungkyunkwan University, argued that the ROK has grown tremendously on the global stage, especially recently, and that such momentum should be used to rethink and reshape the nature of the alliance. First, it needs to reinforce military preparedness against an attack by North Korea. Second, it should tighten international coordination, developing flexibility to adapt to changes. And third, it should encourage changes in North Korea – both official and unofficial.

Shen Dingli, professor at Fudan University, provided a Chinese perspective on the issue. He explained that as China has developed into a greater economic power it necessarily revised its ideology to accommodate capitalism and desire regional stability. Though China has official treaties with North Korea, it is hesitant to act on the North’s behalf. China is now rich enough to defend itself and has less need for its alliance with Pyongyang. However, China also does not want to forfeit its leverage by becoming too entangled with the US or South Korea, causing North Korea to turn against it.

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