



Day 1 Session IV: The Alliance and the Future of East Asia

Moderator: David Rennie, *The Economist*

Speakers: Graham Allison, Harvard University
Richard Bush, The Brookings Institution
Kurt Campbell, The Asia Group, LLC
Hahm Chaibong, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
Joe Lieberman, Former US Senator (I-CT)

Rapporteur: Clare Lynch, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

David Rennie introduced the session by asking the panelists to give a broad overview of the current status of the US-ROK alliance and of the East Asian region as if they were briefing leaders of the countries. He then asked the speakers to expand on things that could go wrong or what might go right in the region.

Former Senator Joe Lieberman began by highlighting the positive trends in the Korea-US alliance and in South Korea's development over the past 60 years. No country, he said, better embodies the changes in Asia from poverty to prosperity and from dictatorship to freedom than South Korea. He continued that the foundation for peace, freedom, and prosperity in the region is the alliance system that the United States built after World War II and sustained with like-minded democratic allies. The values and purpose of the Korea-US alliance, Lieberman continued, have remained steadfast for decades, helping to uphold the liberal international order, safeguard freedom of navigation and free trade, and deter aggression. The United States dependence on its regional allies has only grown stronger, he said, while the evident commitment of South Korea to the alliance has also deepened.

Meanwhile, North Korea symbolizes the ideologies of hatred, repression, and domination by force, Lieberman said. He stated that three major challenges facing the alliance include the imperative for close cooperation to deal with the North Korea regime. The alliance must break out of the old pattern of rewarding Kim for his provocations, Lieberman said, and the allies must also pay closer attention to human rights violations occurring on an unprecedented scale in North Korea. Second, Lieberman said he was troubled by the way China is using its growing power and that the alliance must work together to craft policy toward China. Both countries welcome a strong and prosperous China, Lieberman stressed, but want Beijing to become a responsible international actor that respects large and small neighbors and plays by the rules of the international order. He added that South Korea will play an important role in the future in bridging US-China relations. Finally, Lieberman said that the third challenge to the alliance will be defining the US role in the world. He warned that the US must summon diplomatic and military will to continue playing an active role in East Asia, lest it harm its allies by retrenching into international passivity.

Kurt Campbell echoed Lieberman's concerns on North Korea, stating that North Korea represents not only an intractable set of nuclear proliferation issues, but also a horrific set of

human rights violations that international powers have too often turned a blind eye to in the past. Campbell highlighted the role of high-level diplomacy in Northeast Asia and its use in addressing this and other delicate issues. The informal summit between President Obama and President Xi in California represents an important opportunity in this regard, Campbell continued.

Campbell noted that Xi and other Chinese leaders are no longer shying away from describing China as a “great power.” In terms of what this means for the United States and Korea, he said that leaders should enlist China in a “21st century conversation” about the norms and values, legal frameworks, and peaceful operating systems that have created opportunities for successful development in East Asia. These underlying norms will be particularly important in solving vexing and sensitive territorial disputes, which Campbell sees as the most concerning issues in the period ahead. Finally, Campbell reiterated his support of the more active role South Korea is playing on the international stage, allowing it to transcend the historically paternalistic nature of the Korea-US alliance.

Graham Allison framed his analysis of the future of the alliance through what he described as the biggest geopolitical event of the era, the rise of China. Never before, Allison said, has a nation risen so far or so fast on so many different dimensions. Rather than analyzing this rise in terms of Western aspirations or Western dialogue, Allison turned to Singaporean leader Lee Kuan Yew, who relayed to him this on China. First, Chinese leaders are serious about displacing the United States as the preeminent power in Asia, Allison said, and they have a good chance of succeeding. Next, China is not willing to accept a subservient position in a Western-dominated international order, but expects other countries to be respectful of its growing power. Finally, because China’s rise cannot be halted, the United States and Korea will have to find a way to live with the emergence of a new major power and a new global balance of power in 30 to 40 years.

Richard Bush expressed agreement with Allison that the revival of China as a great power is the most important trend of this generation. The future of Asia will be determined by how countries cope and adjust to China’s rise, he continued. Chinese leaders’ discussion of a “new pattern of great power relations” is a reflection of their attempt to come to grips with this, he said. The United States now has a chance to shape China’s choices and trajectory in a way that is agreeable to Beijing’s end goals, Bush stated, which is reason to be optimistic about the future. Much will depend on the domestic trajectory of the two countries.

The US-ROK alliance will be a major factor in determining the future of East Asia, Bush said. Assuming the two countries can keep their economic houses in order and maintain unity and coherence in the relationship, the alliance, more than any other, can contribute to maintaining a prosperous and peaceful Asian future.

Pulling back, Hahm Chaibong tackled the Korea-US alliance from a historical perspective. For most of its history, Hahm said, the alliance was a defensive measure to hold back the seemingly inevitable march of communism across Eurasia. In this context, the democratization of tiny South Korea should be seen as a miracle, he noted. An important reason to celebrate the alliance is that the values it defended, that South Korea inculcated and institutionalized, have become mainstream enough to allow the United States and Korea to start a rollback, he said.

Hahm noted that North Korea is one glaring exception to this trend of democratization and prosperity. East Asia, with emerging powerhouses including Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, is by far the most economically dynamic region in the world. But if one were to take a satellite photo of the region and draw a circle around Northeast Asia, one finds the epicenter is actually at Pyongyang, Hahm said. With this blockage, he speculated, how much more dynamic might the Northeast Asian region be if North Korea was persuaded to liberalize and open up? Given the Chinese Politburo's track record of economic management, Hahm said that reforms in North Korea should be seen by Beijing as an economic opportunity rather than a potential source of instability.

Lieberman added that now is an opportunity to have a rational conversation with Chinese leaders on North Korea. He said that he would ask President Xi whether he found it easier and more profitable to deal with President Park of South Korea or Kim Jong-un. Campbell stated that the challenge for South Korean diplomacy is to advance the concept that there is only one Korea and one unified Korean people, and to deny this is to deny the people's fundamental and intrinsic rights. Hahm added that although it would be difficult to rationally engage China on regime change in North Korea, now is the time to press this issue.

While North Korea and tensions across the Taiwan Strait will continue to add tension to the region, Campbell said in the immediate future he is most concerned about territorial island disputes. He would like to see Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe focus more on modernizing his economic and security policy and less on historically sensitive territorial claims. Campbell said that as a close friend and ally, the United States will have an important role in communicating its desire for stability.

Allison agreed that territorial disputes by nature are extremely emotional, volatile, and dangerous, and a single rogue actor, sunken ship, or downed plane might create a potentially catastrophic situation. The United States must balance its interest in the region with the perception gap between it and Asian powers such as China, who look askance on the longstanding US role as arbiter of security in the Western Pacific.

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