

Asan Symposium 2022

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

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Good morning. I want to begin by thanking the Asan Institute for working closely with the US Embassy in Seoul to organize a fantastic program today in honor of 140 years of diplomatic relations between Korea and the United States. I only wish I could be with you all in person.

For nearly seven decades, the alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea has been the linchpin of peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. Forged on the battlefield, our alliance has grown and flourished over the years into a fully-fledged partnership.

On just about every challenge we face, from combatting the climate crisis to building more secure supply chains to investing in advanced technologies, to leading the world in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States and the Republic of Korea are working arm-in-arm to build a safer, more secure, and more equitable future for our two countries, for the Indo-Pacific, and indeed, for the entire world.

The strength of our alliance and of our friendship was on full display just two weeks ago when President Biden visited Seoul on his first trip to Asia since being sworn in last January. I want to take this opportunity to thank President Yoon, his administration, and the Korean people for your hospitality and the warm welcome you offered to President Biden and his delegation, just ten days after President Yoon was sworn in himself.

This visit was a testament to the deep friendship between our two nations. And that friendship was on display in a ‘dynamite’ way earlier this week as well when K-pop superstars BTS met with President Biden at the White House as part of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month.

The relationship between the United States and the Republic of Korea is built on shared values, our commitment to democracy, transparency, and responsive governance, our belief in the importance of protecting human rights, our shared vision of maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region, strengthening and upholding the rules-based international order, and advancing peace and prosperity for our nations and for people everywhere.

Today, many of those values are being challenged by authoritarian leaders who seek to undermine and reshape the rules-based international order for their own purposes. That is why it is crucial that the United States, the Republic of Korea, and our allies and partners around the world stand together and work

together not only to address the challenges we face but show how strong democracies like ours deliver for people.

We are doing just that as we work together to respond to Russian President Vladimir Putin's premeditated, unprovoked, unjustified, and utterly horrific attack on Ukraine. Since Putin launched his war in February, the Republic of Korea has coordinated sanctions and export controls alongside the United States and our allies and partners and offered significant economic and humanitarian support for the government and the people of Ukraine.

And that's the key because while Kyiv may be thousands of miles from Seoul, we know that a threat to the rules-based international order anywhere risks undermining it everywhere. No country has the right to dictate another country's political choices or to choose another country's alliances for them, and when autocrats like Putin believe that they can act with impunity and violate these rules and principles, that makes all of us less secure.

The United States and the Republic of Korea are also working to align our respective approaches to promote our shared vision for the Indo-Pacific region. That includes basic principles like preventing barriers to lawful commerce and respecting international law governing the freedom of navigation and overflight, and it includes preserving peace and stability everywhere, including in the Taiwan Strait.

Finally, I want to say a few words about the DPRK. As you all know, the DPRK has significantly increased the pace and scale of its ballistic missile launches since last September. These provocative launches are violations of multiple UN Security Council Resolutions and of international law. And they threaten the peace and security of the Indo-Pacific region and of the entire international community. That is why Secretary Blinken, along with ROK Foreign Minister Park and the Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi recently issued a joint statement condemning the DPRK's recent ballistic missile launches and calling on the DPRK to abandon its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles programs and engage in diplomacy.

Make no mistake. Our commitment to upholding our security commitments remains ironclad. We remain absolutely focused on defending the United States, the Republic of Korea, Japan, and other allies and partners in the region from security threats.

The United States and the Republic of Korea remain in full alignment on our approach to the DPRK. Our goal remains the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We continue to believe we can find a peaceful and diplomatic resolution with the DPRK. The United States harbors no hostile intent toward the DPRK and the path to dialogue remains open. We urge the DPRK to take that path to commit to serious and sustained diplomacy and to refrain from further destabilizing activities.

We are also gravely concerned by the serious outbreak of COVID-19 in the DPRK and how it may affect the health and well-being of the North Korean people. We continue to support humanitarian assistance and the provision of COVID-19 vaccines to the DPRK. We see this humanitarian crisis as separate from making progress on the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and we do not and will not link the two.

I look forward to returning to Seoul soon to build on the important discussions President Biden had on his recent trip and to continue deepening the alliance, partnership, and friendship between the United States and the Republic of Korea.

Thank you again for having me. I look forward to hearing from colleagues about the outcomes of today's sessions. Thank you.