

Asan Symposium 2022

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

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This year marks the 140th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Korea and the United States. One hundred and forty years ago, on May 22, 1882, the United States and Korea, which was then called the Kingdom of Joseon, signed the *Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce and Navigation* to mark the beginning of diplomatic relations.

It is meaningful that President Yoon Suk Yeol and President Biden held their first summit on May 21, one day before the anniversary. There is a Western proverb, “A man can be known by his friends.” As a country of liberal democracy, it is important for us to know who are the friends of Korea.

From a Korean perspective, the United States is a country located far away on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. But the United States is our close friend with whom we share the values of freedom, democracy, and market economy.

In the 20th century, Korea experienced two great tragedies: the Japanese occupation and the Korean War. It was the United States that ended Japan’s occupation of Korea and fought against the communist invasion during the Korean War. This is why our relationship with the United States is described as a blood-forged alliance.

We also want to become good friends of China and Japan, who are geographically very close and share the Confucian culture. But it remains to be seen whether our hope can be realized.

While Japan is a liberal democracy, we have an unfortunate history with them. Japan has given us two historic ordeals. Japanese ruler Toyotomi Hideyoshi invaded the Kingdom of Joseon twice in 1592 and 1597. During the war of seven years, 500,000 civilians were killed and another 400,000 civilians were abducted to Japan.

In the 20th century, Japan occupied Korea for 36 years. During the occupation, 2 million Koreans suffered as forced laborers, 200,000 men were conscripted to fight for Japan, and 200,000 women suffered as comfort women. The painful past has left deep scars in the minds of many Koreans.

China, with whom we established diplomatic relations thirty years ago, is geographically and culturally close to Korea. Buddhism, one of the major religions in South Korea, and Confucianism had come to Korea from China. China is our largest trading partner today. China is a military ally of North Korea, which is threatening us every day with nuclear weapons. Under this situation, we wonder whether China can be our

reliable friend.

In 1945, World War II ended and Korea was liberated from the Japanese colonial rule. At that time, the political situation surrounding the Korean Peninsula was in flux. In 1948, the Republic of Korea was established, and the United Nations recognized the Republic of Korea as the sole lawful government on the Korean Peninsula. When Japan surrendered in August 1945, in China, Mao Zedong's Communist Party and Chiang Kai-Shek's Kuomintang started a civil war. China became a communist country in 1949.

Right after the establishment of a communist regime in China, in January 1950, the United States committed the blunder, announcing "the Acheson line," which excluded South Korea from the US defense perimeter in the Far East. Six months after the announcement, North Korea started the Korean War on June 25th. Within three days of the war, North Korea took over Seoul and within a month most of South Korea, except for the southern port city of Busan, fell under the control of North Korea.

But, under the flag of the United Nations, 16 countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Turkey, Australia, France, New Zealand, and the Philippines dispatched 340,000 troops. This is a very important number. Six countries — Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Italy, and India — provided medical units. The UN forces fought back and turned the tide of war. Thanks to General MacArthur's successful Incheon Landing, the UN could take back Seoul.

The South Korean and UN forces continued to advance north toward the Chinese border. In October 1950, China intervened with one million soldiers. The UN forces fought very hard to stop them at the current Military Demarcation Line. During the Korean War, 34,000 American soldiers and 140,000 South Korean soldiers died. South Korean civilian casualties numbered over a million.

I was born in the city of Busan in 1951 during the Korean War. Had it not been for the intervention of the United States, I would not be here today. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the United States and all countries who helped us a lot. Thank you.

This is a picture of my family taken during the war in Busan. Can you see the small baby in the middle of the picture? That is me, and all my family members taken during the Korean War in Busan. And the next picture, please. This is a picture taken at my father's home around 35 years ago. And you can see how many more people there are. You can tell the difference of atmosphere between the first one in Busan and the second one in Seoul. So, Korea developed a lot.

At the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington DC, the inscription says, "Our Nation honors sons and daughters who answered the call to defend a country they never knew and a people they never met." The United States and South Korea signed the Mutual Defense Treaty in 1953 after the war.

Religion and education have brought Korea and the United States closer. During the Enlightenment Period, as new culture was introduced, the Korean people opened their eyes to a new world and Christianity began to take root in Korea. The United States also introduced a modern education system by establishing so many institutes. For example, Pai Chai University, or Baejae Hakdang in Korean; Ewha Women's University, now the largest women's university in the world; Soongsil University; Baewha Women's University,

Yonsei University; Keimyung University, and 11 seminary schools. The people who studied at these universities have contributed to Korea's development a lot.

The ROK-US alliance has served as the free world's bulwark against the wind of communism from the vast Eurasian continent. In 1951 during the Korean War, British newspaper *The Times* ran a condescending editorial saying that, "it would be more reasonable to expect to find roses growing on a garbage heap than a healthy democracy rising out of the ruins of Korea."

But this prediction of *The Times* was proven very wrong. Thirty-five years after the Korean War, South Korea hosted the Seoul Summer Olympic Games in 1988 and co-hosted the FIFA World Cup Football Tournament with Japan in 2002. In 1953, after the Korean War, the per capita GDP of South Korea was 67 dollars. Today, South Korea is a liberal democracy and the world's 10th largest economy with 35,000 dollars of per capita income.

Now, let me ask a simple question. How good is global politics today? I am afraid today's world is very similar to the world of 140 years ago. South Korea finds itself once again caught in the middle of big power competition between the United States and China.

Today, global concern is that Korea's two big neighbors, China and Russia, are moving toward the system of one-man rule by changing the Communist Party rule and the Russian constitution, respectively. In the process, Chinese and Russian systems seem to become more closed than ever. People are free to choose the political system they like. However, it is a matter of global concern whether their choices contribute to the peace and stability of the world or not. I sincerely hope that China and Russia can be friends of the international community.

While we are concerned about the future of China, my French friend, Guy Sorman, recently wrote an article, "China's Impossible Dream of Order." According to his observation, China is much behind the United States in both hard power and soft power. He claims that China has neither the intention nor the capacity to become the enemy or competitor of the United States. He wrote that "China only demands the place it deserves. This is of the order of negotiation, not of war." If he is correct, I hope the United States and China can work together to solve the global issue of the North Korean nuclear problem.

One hundred and forty years ago, our ancestors shunned themselves from the tide of history and suffered great ordeals. Today, amid the turbulent situation around the Korean Peninsula, we must think hard about who are our friends.

The South Korean government under President Yoon Suk Yeol will develop the ROK-US alliance into a comprehensive strategic alliance based on liberal democracy. Based on this, we will also try to improve our relations with China and Japan.

The German philosopher Nietzsche once said, "He who has a 'why' to live can bear any 'how.'" If we know the why to live, we can overcome any kind of challenge.

Thank you very much, and please remember that we will meet again in 2032 to celebrate 150 years of Korea-US relations.

Thank you very much.