

Asan Symposium 2022

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

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Dr. Chung Mong Joon, Founder and Honorary Chairman of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, who has made the Asan Institute as one of the prominent think tanks in East Asia.

Dr. Lee Hong Koo, Former Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea, who is a truly respected statesman in our society, Former Foreign Minister Han Seung-joo and Former Foreign Minister Yoon Young-kwan, and Honorable members of the Korean National Assembly Tae Yong Ho, and also Former member Kim Jong-hoon, and Acting US Ambassador Christopher Del Corso, who was jointly preparing and hosting this important seminar. Dr. Edwin J. Feulner, Founder and Former President of the Heritage Foundation and a great supporter of the ROK-US alliance. And also, Mr. Lee Joon-gyu, Chairman of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies and Former Ambassador to Japan and also to India.

Honorable Hwang Jin-ha, Former member of the Korean National Assembly, Chairman Choi Joong-kyung from Korea-America Association, James Kim, a good friend from AMCHAM, Dr. John Linton, nice to see you again, and Dr. Wolfowitz. And also, Honorable Former member of the National Assembly, Floor Leader Na Kyung Won, who has recently been to the Davos Forum, and many other guests. Honorable Shim Yoon-joe, Dr. Lee Chung Min, Sue Mi Terry from Washington, and also Bruce Klingner, Scott Snyder, and also Karen House.

Distinguished guests and friends and fellow supporters of the ROK-US alliance, it is indeed a great pleasure to be here today in celebration of the Korea-US relations. I would like to extend my appreciation to the Asan Institute and the US Embassy in Seoul for inviting me to this meaningful occasion.

This year marks the 140th anniversary of Korea-US relations and the close ties between our two countries. Our two countries have spent almost half of this time as allies, as we are celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Korea-US alliance next year. An alliance that manages to last for more than half a century testifies to its effectiveness to adapt itself to the changes in the geopolitical environment and meet the demands of the times.

During the recent summit between President Yoon Suk Yeol and President Joe Biden, the relevance of our alliance for the 21st century was well-illustrated again.

This summit came just 11 days after President Yoon’s inauguration, marking the earliest meeting in a Korean President’s term in office with the President of the United States. Despite the limited time

available for preparation, our leaders, once they met, were able to connect with each other and develop a personal chemistry very quickly.

During the three-day visit, the two leaders met every day and spent a total of almost seven hours together. What was more impressive than the amount of time spent together was the richness of discussions ranging from their national agenda and vision of the alliance to their pets and how they both married up.

As Foreign Minister, I had the privilege to accompany the two leaders closely, and one of the words that President Biden mentioned several times during his visit to the Samsung Electronics Pyeongtaek Campus, the largest single semiconductor manufacturing company in the world, and also the summit meeting was “unbelievable.” And at the end of the three-day visit when the two leaders bid farewell, President Biden said to President Yoon, “I trust you.”

So, the presidential visit started with ‘unbelievable’ and ended up with “I trust you.” I think these two words best describe President Biden’s visit to Korea as well as the current state of our bilateral alliance.

At the summit, the two leaders proclaimed their vision to expand our alliance into a global comprehensive strategic partnership, which is global in scope, comprehensive in contents, and moves beyond traditional security to encompass economic security and technological cooperation.

Based on a common appreciation and belief in universal values such as freedom, democracy, rule of law, and human rights, on top of their mutual trust, our Leaders were able to see eye-to-eye in so many forums during the summit. In fact, the two leaders agreed that the coalition of like-minded democratic nations is important to protect and promote democratic values and norms in the world.

I think the summit was significant in three aspects. First, our two leaders reaffirmed their mutual commitment to the defense of the Republic of Korea in the face of the heightened nuclear and ballistic missiles threat posed by North Korea.

For the first time, the US affirmed at the highest level, its extended deterrence using the full range of US defense capabilities, including nuclear, conventional, and missile defense capabilities.

In addition, both Leaders reiterated our common goal of the complete denuclearization of North Korea and agreed to strengthen our airtight coordination to this end. Moreover, the two leaders also emphasized the importance of the ROK-US-Japan trilateral cooperation with regards to North Korea.

At the same time, they made it clear that the door remains open for a dialogue with North Korea and called on Pyongyang to return to negotiations. The result of the recent summit was well demonstrated in our immediate, determined, and coordinated response to North Korea’s launch of three ballistic missiles, including an ICBM, on May 25.

In addition to the very close coordination among our relevant authorities, our two countries had a series of high-level communication in the first few hours of the launch, including my telephone conversation with Secretary of State Tony Blinken, and also with Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa.

Second, our two countries recognized the need to enhance policy communication and coordination on so-called economic security issues, including securing resilient supply chains and protecting critical technology. To this end, the two leaders agreed to launch an economic security dialogue between our National Security Councils and also agreed to further enhance cooperation in areas such as nuclear energy, aerospace, the cyber domain, biotechnology, and defense industry.

Third, this summit provided an opportunity to elevate the standing of our alliance to bolster the regional and international order. President Yoon laid out Korea's goal to serve as a "global pivotal state," what we call GPS, with a focus on promoting freedom, peace, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. And President Biden valued and welcomed this initiative that embraces greater regional and global responsibilities by the Republic of Korea.

Korea has also pledged to play an active role in establishing new norms in the region by joining the IPEF, Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, which just started, and promoting cooperation with the Quad, Quadrilateral Dialogue.

In addition, our two countries will continue to oppose all activities that undermine the rules-based international order, including Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Memorial Day was observed in the United States earlier this week, while we will be observing our own Memorial Day in Korea next Monday.

The ROK-US alliance was forged in blood on the battlefield, and after more than seven decades, the alliance is stronger than ever. We have truly nurtured a model alliance in history. Despite this remarkable achievement, there can be no pause in our efforts to ensure the alliance evolves further to meet the challenges of today and prepare ourselves for the perils of tomorrow.

I feel honored to serve as Foreign Minister of the Republic of Korea at this critical moment and in this transformative chapter in the history of our bilateral relationship. If I may apply what President Biden has said about the United States to our alliance, it is never a good bet to bet against the ROK-US alliance.

Friends and colleagues here today are key players in nurturing our alliance. My deep thanks go to each and every one of you.

The day after Memorial Day in Washington DC, President Biden met with the Korean supergroup BTS at the White House, as you all know. I heard that the White House press briefing room livestream that day attracted more than 310,000 viewers, which is several hundred times more than its average audience.

During the meeting with BTS, President Biden said to the boyband, "People care a lot about what you say. It's not just your good talent. It's the message that you're communicating. It matters."

This is a good example of how powerful cultural messages and people-to-people exchange can be in further strengthening ties between our two countries. I grew up with the music of the Beatles in the '60s

and '70s, aspiring to their music and the message. Now, young people in the world grow up with BTS, which enjoys a global attraction with their music and the message for peace, love, freedom, and humanity. And I think the ROK-US alliance should contribute to these values.

I count on you all for your abiding interest in and support for the Korea-US alliance, the ties between our two countries, and the strong bond between our two peoples.

Thank you very much and congratulations once again.