

Session: Emerging Security Architecture

Date/Time: April 23, 2025 / 13:10-14:30

Rapporteur: Jennifer Hong Whetsell, Project 2049 Institute

Moderator: Noah Sneider, The Economist

Speakers:

Chen Dongxiao, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies

Lee Shin-wha, Korea University

Sakata Yasuyo, Kenda University of International Studies

Randall Schriver, The Project 2049 Institute

Luis Simon, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Session Sketch:

Plenary Session 2 of the Asan Plenum 2025, titled “Emerging Security Architecture,” was moderated by Mr. Noah Sneider, the East Asia Bureau Chief for the Economist. He opened by referencing the current wave of emerging security architectures in the Indo-Pacific, particularly through minilateral and trilateral arrangements. With the potential transition from President Biden to a second Trump administration, key questions arise: Should the region brace for a possible dismantling of existing security frameworks? Could instability increase, particularly in South Korea, following former President Yoon’s impeachment? And how are these evolving architectures perceived in various capitals?

Prof. Chen Dongxiao, a Senior Research Fellow and President of the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS) observed that we will “continue to see the momentum of increase of U.S.-led military alliance with key partners, to include Australia, Japan, [and] the Philippines.” However, he emphasized that a formalized effort like an “Asian NATO” has a “zero opportunity” of forming, as countries in Southeast, South, and Central Asia are “not interested in choosing sides.” These nations will likely continue to hedge—economically, politically, and socially—between the United States and China. He described the security architecture as evolving and fluid, with multiple layers at play. While military cooperation will remain important, he emphasized ongoing ASEAN-plus mechanisms and added that China will continue expanding its influence in Southeast and South Asia, a trend President Xi has accelerated in recent months.

Prof. Lee Shin-wha, a professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations and Director of the Institute for Interdisciplinary Unification Studies (IIUS) at Korea University, voiced concern over the “disruption without direction” currently affecting the security architecture. She highlighted the “absence of responsibility in global governance” and argued that an “America alone policy will not work.” Such a strategy, she warned, could result in “negative consequences for liberal democracies, hurting those who are like-minded to the

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United States.” She cautioned against the deepening cooperation among China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran. As U.S. soft power wanes due to recent cuts in developmental aid, China is better positioned to exert influence in the Global South. Prof. Lee called for “a purpose-driven framework,” noting that shared norms and vision are currently lacking during this transitional period of power. She also underscored the strategic importance of the Korea-Japan relationship, pointing out that “President Trump probably does not want to echo what Biden did. That is why Korea and Japan have to figure out the strategic value-add” in their relationship with the United States. Given Trump’s likely aversion to norm- and value-based rhetoric, she suggested that a rebranding of the alliance’s messaging would be essential.

Prof. Sakata Yasuyo, a professor of international relations at the Kanda University of International Studies and a research fellow at the Research Institute for Peace and Security in Japan, emphasized “Japan is very steady in trying to continue the trilateral between the ROK-U.S.-Japan for security of Indo-Pacific region.” She argued against calling current efforts as an “Asia NATO,” saying policymakers must recognize that “the strategic landscape is very different between Europe and the Indo-Pacific.” Instead, she suggested focusing on efforts such as defense industrial cooperation. On multilateralism, she affirmed Japan’s ongoing commitment, listing four tools it employs in cooperation with like-minded countries: Reciprocal Access Agreements, Logistics Agreements, GSOMIA, and Defense Industrial Cooperation Agreements. She noted that Korea and Japan currently share only GSOMIA, remarking that “Korea and Japan’s bilateral relationship is still underdeveloped and should be expanded.” On emerging security frameworks, she stressed that alliances are essential, but that “institutionalization of integration and coordination” is key. She added, “Coordination of hubs—coordinating and connecting hubs with other hubs—is important,” calling for deeper Korea-Japan integration.

Mr. Randall Schriver, the Chairman of the Board at The Project 2049 Institute and a partner at Pacific Solutions LLC, offered a more optimistic view, asserting that the “fear of dismantling of security architectures should be in check.” He noted that trilateral arrangements like the ROK-U.S.-Japan partnership predate the Biden administration. Furthermore, he said that the Trump administration had shown respect for these frameworks—citing examples such as hosting a QUAD meeting on Day 1, re-endorsing the AUKUS agreement, Secretary Hegseth’s visits to Guam, Japan, and the Philippines early in his tenure, and the continuation of expanded U.S.-Japan military cooperation. His main concern, however, was the Trump administration’s view on foreign policy. “We have been asking Europe for decades to care about the Indo-Pacific,” Schriver said, “but now Trump is saying, ‘Europe should take care of Europe.’” He said, “we should be all hands on deck, to combat the tyranny of time and distance in the Indo-Pacific.” He also warned that the United States is “ceding information space” to disinformation campaigns, especially while asking allies for more contributions such as ABO. “This is a flawed approach,” he said. “We are imposing significant tariffs on our allies but asking them to follow us into conflict. That is dangerous.” Finally, he noted that U.S. development aid cuts have harmed its global goodwill and warned that “the United States will be a diminished power in the context of the U.S.-China competition” if it continues to lose influence through weakened

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soft power.

Professor Luis Simon, the Director of the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS) at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), emphasized that “the European and Indo-Pacific theaters are inherently interlinked.” The key question, he argued, is not whether they are linked, but how and to what extent they are interconnected. At the core of this linkage lies U.S. extended deterrence, which serves as the foundational element bridging the two regions. Building on this foundation, Prof. Simon challenged two prevailing assumptions. First, the belief that U.S. alliances in Europe and Asia are fundamentally different in structure—Europe as multilateral and Asia as bilateral—is increasingly outdated. With the rise of minilateral and trilateral arrangements in the Indo-Pacific, the region is moving toward a hybrid model marked by overlapping bilateral ties. Second, the notion that U.S. alliances are shaped solely by regionally defined threats and priorities has also been called into question—particularly in light of the Ukraine war. Recent developments suggest a shift toward a more integrated view of global security challenges.

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