

## **A Bold Deal is the Solution to Trump's Unilateralism**

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U.S. President Donald Trump recently outlined his plan to “Make America Great Again” in a 100-minute speech to a joint session of Congress, titled the “Renewal of the American Dream.” Can this plan really make America great again?

President Trump claimed that South Korea’s average tariff is four times higher than the United States. However, South Korea and the United States have a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), and in 2024, the effective tariff rate South Korea imposed on U.S. imports was only 0.79%.

He wants more employment and investment in the United States. But it is questionable whether he can attract foreign corporate investment while calling for the end of the CHIPS Act and making cuts to similar funding incentives.

He stated that he would revive the U.S. shipbuilding industry by providing special tax incentives, but the reason shipbuilding capacity has significantly declined is due to high labor costs, a shortage of skilled workers, and outdated facilities. Moreover, the Jones Act, which only allows U.S.-built and U.S.-crewed ships to carry cargo between ports in the United States, is also a drag on the country’s shipbuilding industry.

Perhaps President Trump wanted to emphasize that tariffs only favorable to South Korea might weaken the U.S. security commitment to South Korea. However, the ROK-U.S. alliance is not a relationship in which only one side has benefited. South Korea has served as the free world’s bulwark, preventing authoritarian regimes such as Russia and China, which have dominated the vast Eurasian continent, from taking over the Korean Peninsula using

North Korea. As a result, the stability of the Indo-Pacific region and U.S. interests were able to be safeguarded.

During Admiral Samuel Paparo's confirmation hearing at the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee to become the U.S. Indo-Pacific Commander last February, he stated that "the ROK's defense expenditures remain the highest among our allies and partners as a percentage of their GDP." It was precisely in this context that Dr. John Hamre, President of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, emphasized that "the United States Forces Korea (USFK) are not mercenaries who defend South Korea in return for money ... U.S. troops serve the purpose of defending the U.S." All of this should be taken into context.

President Trump seems oblivious to the fact that the U.S.-led international order was the biggest driving force that allowed the United States to become "great" and that the United States is the biggest beneficiary of this order. The free trade system and liberal international order established after the Second World War ensured the prosperity and development of the United States. This created today's world, one that was shaped by the containment of communism and the collapse of the Cold War system. However, if this U.S. model of unilateralism deepens, it will only create an international environment favorable to the authoritarian forces of China, Russia, and North Korea. This does not serve U.S. interests.

If President Trump wants to make America great again, he should open his eyes and ears and listen to and respect different opinions. It is worth recalling that it was admiration, respect, and trust in American values and systems, as well as fear of American power, that upheld the U.S.-led world order and safeguarded U.S. national interests since the 20th century. Rather than being intimidated by and acquiescent to President Trump's unilateralism, South Korea should seek cooperation with the United States by boldly making deals when it can and correcting the record when it must.

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