

Conference Lecture Transcript

Presenter

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Moderator

Chaesung Chun

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Conference Presenters

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The transcript of the ROK-US alliance Transformation Conference is as follows:

Thomas Christensen Lecture

Thank you very much Professor Chun. Thanks to EAI president Dr. Lee and Professor Byung-Kook Kim for inviting me to address this important topic. I also like to thank EAI staff, especially Ms. So-young Lee. I'm so honored to be included in this panel, particularly with Dr. Byung-Kook Kim on the same panel. I have admired and respected him since I first met him in Beijing.

EAI has become a leader in regional security studies and I think this is why McArthur Foundation has recognized EAI and included it as a partner in its East Asian Security Initiative.

I want to also recognize Mayor Song and Ambassador Lee and Hyun who did so much over the years to strengthen U.S.-ROK alliance. Kathy Stephens is our ambassador to Korea

today. She continues that tradition. It was great to see her last night and I can say that I benefited from the same warmth and wisdom she demonstrated last night on a day-to-day basis when we worked in State Department. I'd also like to recognize Victor Cha. Victor Cha is my classmate, a friend, and a colleague. I've known Victor over twenty years. Victor worked tirelessly to strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance from the National Security Council position which he held. He was quite effective in doing so. I had a privilege of working closely with Victor on the Six-Party Talks and Korean denuclearization when we were both in government. Now neither is in the government, so I should say that all of my comments today are stated as an academic analyzing these problems and not as a government official.

What does it mean to build a U.S.-ROK alliance for the 21st century? In my talk today, I'll say that it means two basic, but related things. They're different, but quite related.

The first is to strengthen the alliance through adjustment of key military matters so that we can shore up, reinforce, and bolster the support in both countries for the alliance, here in the Republic of Korea and back home in the United States. The move of US forces from Yongsan in central Seoul to Pyeongtaek will help preserve the domestic support for the alliance in both countries. It is a very important move for that reason. The transfer of the operation control to ROK forces will also serve for the purpose of strengthening the alliance in the long-run for the 21st century.

The second is strengthening the alliance by

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expanding the roles and missions; the types of coordination and collaboration that U.S. and ROK undertake on the international stage. It is to match the challenges we face and that are relevant to the challenges that we face both in the region and around the world in the 21st century.

I think President Lee has been very wise to say that he wants to create a 'Global Korea.' I think ROK-U.S. alliance has to adjust to the same goal and become a global alliance that tackles problems around the world in a collaborative and coordinative fashion.

The first piece that I'm going to emphasize now is the strengthening through the adjustment in various military aspects of the alliance. I should say at the outset that the alliance is strong. It does not need bolstering because it is weak. The alliance is very strong as Ambassador Stephens said last night. It was forged in the history of fighting for South Korea's freedom against totalitarian aggression in the Korean War, and was strengthening in the decades that followed. The two allies have cemented a true strategic partnership here in the region of Asia and beyond, most recently, in places quite far from the region: in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and in the Gulf of Aden.

The alliance is strong, however, for reasons that go far beyond this heroic history. That is, more than ever before, particularly since late 1980's the alliance has been based in strong common values: democracy, civil liberty, freedom of religion, and free market capitalism. I think since the alliance is rooted in these common core values, it should be quite possible to strengthen and sustain it throughout the century. However, it is still a complex undertaking. Like the most complicated relationships, the U.S.-ROK alliance requires maintenance. It would be a mistake to become complacent and say that the alliance will maintain itself. I think we need to avoid certain pitfalls and we need to see certain opportunities in order to sustain the alliance in the 21st century.

In terms of shoring up the alliance, we need to strengthen U.S. military presence in Korea and bolster it for the long term. We can do this in two important ways. One is to

make the alliance and the U.S. presence politically less controversial here in the Republic of Korea. Second, we need to make the U.S. deployment in Korea over the long term, less taxing on U.S. service personnel and their families. Here, I think the Pyeongtaek Initiative is very wise and constructive because it seems well conceived to perform both of these tasks at the same time. By moving U.S. forces out of Yongsan in the center of Seoul, we need to reduce the frictions that are related to U.S. footprint in Korea over the long term. I think too few of my compatriots in the U.S. appreciate and emphasize with the sacrifices made and sensitivities felt by the host country's citizens where our troops are deployed. I think this is an important way to address those sacrifices and sensitivities.

I think the project will also allow for more U.S. service people in Korea to have their families with them while they're deployed abroad. It is what military calls "Accompanied Tours." This is very important because our soldiers are in the U.S., your soldiers are in the ROK, sacrificing great deal for the national security, and so do their families. Particularly for the U.S. at the time when we are fighting two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the military personnel are very frequently deployed to places where it is not safe or convenient to have their families with them. As a result, it is more important than ever for the U.S. and its allies to create conditions in other areas of the world where their families can accompany them when they are deployed abroad. So, this is important for the U.S.'s part of the equation in bolstering the U.S.'s support for the alliance. It is also very important for the ROK because the ROK having sustained "Accompanied Tours" for U.S. forces should improve military effectiveness of the alliance. If you can have as a norm that, with three years of "Accompanied Tours" for US Forces Korea; you will have people who rotate out of Korea less frequently; they will understand the terrain of Korea better; and they will be more effective at the military tasks that the alliance is designed for: combat capabilities. Also, the process of having more comfortable sustained tours, demonstrate the U.S.'s long term commitment to

Korean security.

There are lots of complexities and difficulties. Some of these complexities and difficulties with such an endeavor of moving these forces to Pyeongtaek are predictable. But many of them are unpredictable because it is a very complex enterprise and humans are not particularly good at predicting all the aspects of these challenges. However, all around the world, cooperative allies have to tackle these problems and I think that the U.S. and ROK have the type of relationship that will allow us to tackle these problems. I had a great privilege of meeting Mayor Song last night at the dinner, and it made me more confident than ever that the U.S. and ROK can work as partners to solve the problems attendant to moving of troops to Pyeongtaek.

The second military issue is the transfer of operational control and I will place this at the same category of positive adjustment to shore up the alliance in this new century. The transfer of operational control to ROK commanders by 2012 is a significant and complex endeavor itself. I know that some people in the ROK have worried that it is somehow a smokescreen for the eventual departure of US forces from Korea. I would say as an observer and an analyst that this is very far from the truth. It is much more rooted in the respect of the U.S. has for the ROK as equal partners in the global alliance that actually shows that the U.S. is committed for the strong and equal alliance.

The second set of issues that I want to emphasize is the expanding alliance's roles, the development of global alliance for the U.S. and ROK. One of the best ways to shore up the alliance in both countries is to make the alliance relevant to the challenges we face in the 21st century. For straight-forward strategic reasons and for the domestic political reasons, I think it is very important to enhance global nature of the U.S.-ROK alliance. I studied the history of Korean War fairly carefully, and the history of 1950's and 60's fairly carefully. I'll say that in a sense the ROK-U.S. alliance has been global from its inception. Thus, it would be a mistake to say that it is only global now.

The brutal and misguided attack on the ROK in June 25, 1950, by the DPRK, was not simply a civil war. It was

an international war which pitted the regional communist powers against anti-communist world and the mandate of a young United Nations. So, this was before the alliance was formed. This was the forging relationship that helped create the alliance. The fact that it is global is represented by the fact that so many countries contributed to ROK defense at that time, not just the U.S. as a part of a global effort. Too few of my compatriots would argue the international significance of the very brave struggle that the ROK went through to survive in this period, not just for Korea, but for our own country's security and for the struggle of the free world during the Cold War. The implications of failure would have been monumental for the U.S. and for its allies in the struggle against the Soviet alliance. The second many of my compatriots don't realize is that it is really during the Cold War that the U.S. began its true cold war effort. Before the Korean War, we did not have the levels of defense spending that were necessary to tackle the Soviet alliance. Nor did we have regular troops deployed abroad and various parts of the world in peace time to challenge the Soviet threat to various parts of the world. All of that began in the Korean War. My point here is that the alliance was forged in a time when the U.S.-ROK relationship was already global, and in the regional perspective I think too few of my compatriots appreciate the great sacrifices that the ROK forces have made by standing shoulder to shoulder with the U.S. in Vietnam in the 1960's and early 70's.

For straight-forward strategic and political reasons, I think, we should build upon this history of global alliance and make it more relevant to tackle the problems in the region and around the world we face today. The ROK has made important contributions to stabilization efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. During my trip, Foreign Minister Yoo announced that the ROK will send a Provincial Reconstruction Team to Afghanistan and it will be accompanied by attendant security forces. I think this is very good effort on the part of ROK and it supplements what the ROK has already done in Afghanistan with 25 medical personnel at Bagram Air Base.

The ROK has worked very closely with the U.S. in other important regional issues which is the Six-Party Talks process. That is a regional and global issue. Nuclear proliferation in North Korea and from North Korea is a regional and global challenge and threat. I know both the Bush administration and the Obama administration greatly appreciate the efforts that the Lee administration in the ROK has made to coordinate our two nation's effort in handling this very important issue and in being involved in this often very frustrating effort, the Six-Party Talks process. Our related issue is the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). I think PSI is important and a great new policy of the Lee administration to join PSI as a full member. We need a very strong network to police and stop proliferation of nuclear material's delivery system, and since the inception of UN Security Council resolution 1874, all military equipment, all military exports from the DPRK.

I think the ROK is very well qualified to participate as an active and effective member of this program because it is a major trading nation without doubt, and it has been a very constructive member of the related Container Security Initiative which is designed to prevent shipping from being used for terrorist purposes.

The anti-piracy effort in Somalia is also very important for reasons I will return to later in my talk. I think the Lee administration is very wise to send a destroyer with a highly talented crew, to the Gulf of Aden to assist the anti-piracy efforts in Somalia. I think more peacekeeping and more humanitarian efforts of this kind which the U.S. and ROK can both be involved, are very important for the alliance moving into the future.

I think there are other possible areas to enhance cooperation. They are important areas where the ROK can play a very important and unique role. First on nuclear safety and non-proliferation in general, I think the ROK plays a very important role as the most developed nuclear state without reprocessing capability. This is a role that the ROK can play in trying to convince others to truly pursue safe

nuclear energy and not to pursue nuclear weapons technology in the process.

The second issue is global warming. It is something Ambassador Stephens discussed last night. If we think about the problem of global warming as I do, as a professor from the most developed country in the world, who studies the largest developing country in the world, China, if you look at the problems that we face in handling global warming, it is really trying to bridge the differences between the developed world and the developing world. I think the ROK, as a recently developed state, has a great role as a bridge between those two sides. As a country that can understand the problems of the developing world and that can understand the cost of certain policies for the developed world, it can try to form a bridge between the two sides in solving these problems that we must solve.

In economics the ROK plays a very important role. I was glad to see in this financial crisis the policy of the thirty billion US dollar currency swap across the administrations. It was created in the last year during Bush administration and it has continued and extended to the Obama administration. I think this is very good for the two countries' financial stability. I know that the ROK played a very strong leadership role in the G-20. It is the same type of the role that I was discussing before the related global warming. The ROK can do a lot on the international stage to protect against the threat of protectionism which will be a disaster. We've seen it before on the global stage and in this type of environment, to have the protectionism will be very bad for the international economy. ■