



[EAI Online Seminar] “After Trump” Series

Prospects for US–South Korea Cooperation in an Era of US–China Strategic Competition

East Asia Institute (EAI)

Session 1: Politics and security

Protecting Regional Democracy through the ROK-US Alliance

- Marc Knapper: In 1990s, the ROK-US relations was very much about the Korean Peninsula and the constant threat from North Korea. However, the relationship has now expanded to encompass trade, investment, health and environment. Countries like South Korea, United States and Japan which share regional democracy and the value of human rights need to speak out against China regarding issues such as human rights, Xinjiang and Hong Kong.
- In addition, South Korea and Japan, which are on a worsening path, should solve historical issues and move on to the path of cooperation as representatives of democratic countries within the region. Although the US will not directly act as a mediator to improve South Korea-Japan relations, the US will continuously emphasize the importance of South Korea-Japan relationship for its goal of protecting shared values within the region, including freedom of religion, rally and speech.
- Jonathan D. Pollack: The current situation in which the Korean and Japanese governments are confronting each other on various issues is not beneficial in long term, and only China will benefit from the confrontation among regional democratic countries in East Asia. Furthermore, the situation will not move forward unless the US takes more active action in improving South Korea-Japan relations.

South Korea’s Insufficient Contribution to Regional Security Cooperation amid US-China Competition

- Lindsey W. Ford: While extensive cooperation has been pursued in the Indo-Pacific region, led by QUAD countries, South Korea has not actively participated in security cooperation at the regional level for a long time, only focusing on Korean Peninsula issues. It is natural for South Korea to prioritize its domestic security tasks including the North Korean nuclear threat, but considering South Korea’s status at the regional and global levels, as well as its expanding economic cooperation, its contribution to regional security cooperation is still insignificant. South Korea can more actively present a vision on regional peace and security based on Moon Jae-in government’s New Southern Policy; and may contribute more to security cooperation within the Indo-Pacific region.
- Rather than focusing on South Korea’s official participation in QUAD, the focus should be on enhancing practical defense cooperation between South Korea and the members of QUAD. South Korea can contribute to the expansion of the regional security cooperation network by promoting bilateral and multilateral cooperation with QUAD members. As an influential middle power, South Korea has many areas to contribute to regional security cooperation.



In particular, it has proposed to strengthen future cooperation with Australia and India in areas such as maritime, space, and defense security at the bilateral level.

- Chaesung Chun: The Biden administration's foreign policy will focus on strengthening diplomacy based on legitimacy and norms. There is no doubt that South Korea's strategic purpose is in line with the US. However, South Korea still depends on China, and there is a pending issue of North Korea. Therefore, this must be considered when planning the ways to maintain the alliance-based network between the US and South Korea. For South Korea, it is necessary to strengthen the security system, among regional alliances, but the key is how to collectively respond to China's retaliation and minimize damage in the future, as the country has already experienced from THAAD issue. Taking this situation into account, the carefully designed package to continue regional alliance network in Asia and to strategically response to the rise of China. This includes flexible security network, a solid collective mechanism to respond to China's potential retaliatory measures, and China's coercion, and well devised division of labor in jointly responding and cooperating with Asian allies.

North Korea's Denuclearization Issue: A Foothold for Cooperation or Another Obstacle for the Biden Administration?

- Young-Sun Ha: Immediately after the Hanoi Summit, North Korea complained to the US about various obstacles to denuclearization, and conveyed its intention that only partial denuclearization is possible. In this state, South Korea and the US need to prepare for the complete denuclearization roadmap. For the new calculation for North Korea-US denuclearization talks, North Korea strongly insists on the three stages of denuclearization. The three-stage denuclearization strategy includes: 1) unilateral process of trust building, 2) a step by step simultaneous action for the exchange of the partial reduction of nuclear capabilities, excluding nuclear capabilities for minimum deterrence and the gradual lifting of sanctions and the beginning of the peace building on the peninsula, and 3) implementation of both complete denuclearization of North Korea including minimum deterrence and the complete security guarantee on the basis of abolishment, US hostile policy toward North Korea, including US forces in Korea and also nuclear strategic assets around the Korean Peninsula through nuclear arms control talks in the Asia Pacific.
- North Korea appears to show its willingness to reduce a part of its nuclear capabilities in exchange for a gradual life of sanctions. Meanwhile, North Korea is yet to take the strategic decision to accept complete denuclearization and their veracity on complete denuclearization has not yet been proven.
- The United States should make joint efforts with South Korea for developing a new roadmap towards complete denuclearization and also for cooperating on a blueprint for North Korea's peace and prosperity in the twenty first century. Moon Jae-in and Biden administration's joint efforts to develop a new calculation for North Korea's denuclearization will be one of the most urgent tasks in Asia-Pacific region.
- Jonathan D. Pollack: Five American presidents have tried to slow down or prevent outright North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons capability, using the full range of political, economic and diplomatic tools and strategies. Fully realized operational nuclear weapons capability by North Korea would be a strategic disaster for China and for the United States. Since it can negatively affect both countries, North Korea's nuclear weapons can be the task that US and China can cooperate on. To this end, the US and China need to realize through dialogue that North Korea's nuclear weapon is a common security concern for both countries. Since it is impossible to separate North Korea from China in geopolitical, economic and historical aspects, it is necessary for the US to try to have candid talks with China on the North Korea issue, even though it is likely to be difficult.



- Jung H. Pak: The continued US-China rivalry has weakened China's willingness to cooperate on major security issues including North Korea's denuclearization, while attempts to expand its influence on the Korean Peninsula and reduce US influence in Northeast Asia have increased. Furthermore, China's influence on the security dynamics on the Korean Peninsula has also been boosted by the enhancement of relations with North Korea in 2018, the convergence of interests with China, North Korea and South Korea, and the Trump administration's precarious approach.
- China will seek to maintain stability on the Korean Peninsula for the time being and may want for security guarantee such as easing sanctions against North Korea, deterring US and South Korea from military exercises, and refraining from criticizing the North Korean human right violation issue. At the same time, China may try to make use of South Korea's effort to win China's support for its pursuit of a peace process on the Peninsula as a way to achieve its goal, which includes weakening US confidence on the Korean Peninsula or for reducing military power.
- In order to coordinate strategic understanding between China and South Korea amid consistent effort in regional and global level on North Korean denuclearization, the US should take a multilateral approach instead of unilateralism that has been practiced during the Trump administration without outstanding progress. In order to achieve this plan, the US should consider launching and regularizing the trilateral talks with China and South Korea. The US, South Korea and China need to confirm the goal of North Korea's denuclearization, and the need to implement strong sanctions to prevent nuclear proliferation. Moreover, these countries need to develop a roadmap for negotiations to provide both carrots and sticks in the North Korea's verifiable denuclearization efforts. At the same time, they need to study on how economic cooperation can increase human enhance, inflow of information into North Korea and integrate North Korea into the regional economy.
- Sook Jong Lee: To respond to Dr. Lindsey Ford's point that South Korea is active on the Peninsula and also in the globe, but bypassing the region, this is heavily related to the increasing dilemma of resolving the nuclear issue of North Korea. The North Korean threat becomes so immense to South Korea, and our imagination of regional policy has been framed narrowly to focus on 'North Korea centered peace cooperation building.' Besides, South Korea's regional policy is not successful because North Korea is crowded with very strong countries.

Biden's New America, and the Future of the ROK-US alliance

- Sook Jong Lee: Based on the survey result from 2005 to 2020 conducted by the East Asia Institute on Korean Identity, Korean's support for the Korea-US alliance has been strengthened since the mid-2000s. Over the past 15 years, support for the Korea-US alliance has increased by 17.6 percent, and the support base has been solid regardless of ideology and political orientation.
- Meanwhile, regarding a survey question on the awareness of threats from other countries, it shows that people are more supportive to US-Korea alliances when they feel the greater threats from North Korea. In addition, regarding a survey question on US-China competition, more than 64 percent responded that South Korea should take a neutral stance amid US-China competition. However, if they had to choose between the US and China, more than twice as many people responded they would choose the US. As a conflict between the US and China intensifies, the awareness on threat has increased, and this suggests that intensifying US-China competition could negatively affect the South Korea-US alliance.

Considering the so-called transactional approach that the Trump administration has shown to its allies, the new Biden administration's stance of respecting the alliance is comforting to Koreans. It is expected to have a positive



impact on Korea-US alliance. In addition, as the Korean government strengthens regional and global cooperation in areas such as democracy, health, and climate change, South Korea will be able to strengthen cooperation with the US in the aforementioned areas.

Session 2: Economy, Energy and Environment

Finding the Right Balance between National Security and Economic Interdependence

- Yul Sohn: In contrast to the United States that can leverage its power to increase its strategic and economic counterbalance to China, South Korea is forced to play a more complex game. Given its deep yet asymmetric economic interdependence with China as well as demands for Chinese cooperation with regard to North Korean threats, South Korea needs to accommodate China while at the same time courting US engagement both economically and militarily. In that sense, two countries need strategic consultation and coordination over complex interdependence in the following three areas. 1) A recent development in weaponized trade and interdependence invoking national security boils down to the question of how we can restrain the abuse of a broader definition of security, namely over-securitization, and strike a right balance of national security and economic interdependence. South Korea underwent THAAD retaliation by China, US countervailing duties on steel and aluminum under Section 232, and Japan's tightening of export controls over chemical components crucial to South Korea's semiconductor industry. 2) Second question comes down to the China challenge, where the world is struggling to seek a collective approach against China's disruptive mercantilist behaviors. 3) Last area of concern is the compelling need for a rules-based economic order in the region, which would restrain Chinese predation, America's protectionism, increase middle power space, and sustain liberal norms.
- David Dollar: The US has the tools to restrict exports and impose tariffs on products that have obvious national security implications. We are striving for what Hank Paulson has called, "small yards with high fences." In other words, define a small number of national security technologies that get serious restrictions, but otherwise allow trade, investment, joint research - all of the foundations of an open innovation ecosystem. The US needs to coordinate with alliance partners like South Korea on the definition of critical technologies and sanctions to protect them.
- Mireya Solís: Economic security should not equal national security because then this may be used as a pretext to unilaterally control the economy referring to national security logic. At the same time, great powers should refrain from being involved in export controls, tightening FDI screening mechanisms, and pursuing cyber-security rules, with reasons that they are concerned about the possibility of a coercive economic diplomacy.
- Mireya Solís: Biden Administration is expected to place greater emphasis on working with like-minded countries that could be more effective in efforts to avenge over-restrictiveness and establish best standards when it comes to export controls. At the same time, the US could regain its credibility through confidence building measures, tightening its own rules on Section 232, for example, ensuring that national security tariffs are only authorized when a genuine security threats arise. The US should also articulate policy measures so that they are not just directed against China as a country, but target specific behaviors or security risks.
- YoungJa Bae: It would be desirable to restrict technology that has obvious national security implications. The problem lies in the fact that since many technologies are of civilian nature, specifying what technologies and products hold such threats and those that should be regulated under the national security perspective is vague. The relationship between national security and trade investment needs to be discussed in a multilateral framework. This is also where



the leadership role of the United States is important as it needs to help form multilateral norms regarding trade, investment and national security.

ROK-US Cooperation against the China Challenge

- David Dollar: Chinese practices that deviate from international norms are spreading protectionism, weakening intellectual property rights, and providing generic tax breaks for R&D subsidies. In spite of all, decoupling the U.S. economy from the Chinese economy is not practical nor can it get popular support from Asian countries neighboring China, including South Korea, to which costs of decoupling could be directed. The US should rather make an attempt to address specific practices abovementioned, in coordination with allies and partners, instead of complete decoupling. South Korea plays a significant role in consistently conveying messages to the US that decoupling could bring about a considerable aftermath to its allies, and that larger trade agreements are necessary to set a good foundation for trade in the Asia-Pacific region.
- YoungJa Bae: While it is true that technology war between the U.S. and China are posing great challenges to Korean IT companies including LG U+, Samsung, etc., this could accelerate further innovations and divert from its tendency to heavily rely on China, diversifying new importers. This could in turn strengthen technology alliance between South Korea and the U.S. It is now the time that we should restart the Joint Committee on Science and Technology Cooperation, which has been suspended during Trump Administration, and search for a new agenda at a government level. At a corporate level, a more specific projects of cooperation are expected, within a complementary structure of division of labor South Korea and the U.S. have developed.

Will the Biden Administration Rejoin TPP?

- Yul Sohn: South Korea and the United States should be able to set an example of upholding a rules-based international order. In this regard, for the United States, rejoining the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) or joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) is a powerful signal of its return to global leadership, reassuring its commitment in the region to its allies and partners. This will prove more effective than unilateral actions for forging a preferable order that restrains China's predatory behavior. A Biden administration will not prioritize reentering CPTPP, but it might converse to fix some CPTPP "problems" and rejoin if conditions are right. At the same time, South Korea will need to pursue a two-track approach: 1) building a domestic coalition that enables it to join the CPTPP membership, on one hand; and 2) recovering cooperative relationships with Japan in ways that coordinate efforts to reengage the United States to strengthen rules and norms on China, on the other.
- Mireya Solís: It is expected that the Biden administration will pivot away from unilateralism and return to multilateralism and strengthening the alliance. South Korea and the US can especially cooperate in rebuilding a norms-based international order; this can be done in areas of preventing post-COVID-19 protectionism, reforming WTO's Appellate Body, and joining CPTPP together. Establishing international norms through the means of joining CPTPP may be a "tall order, but it is what the times call for."
- David Dollar: Joining TPP will be a "very heavy lift" for the Biden administration and it will not happen quickly. A possible best alternative would be for the U.S. to join a plurilateral agreement with a subset of TPP countries, mostly the advanced capitalist democracies including Japan, Australia, New Zealand and South Korea, which can later be integrated with TPP in a longer term. This form of agreement helps the U.S. and South Korea avoid the kind of controversy that may arise from joining the TPP.



Energy Cooperation May Be the Key to Thawing US-China Tensions

- Samantha Gross: Whilst tensions between the US and China are sharply on the rise, especially in traditional areas of cooperation including economy and security, energy cooperation may be a good place to start the dialogue, since interests are so obviously aligned in this area-the liquified natural gas (LNG) sector. For the US, China and South Korea, respectively the world's second and third largest importer of LNG, are a very attractive market. At the same time, the US's LNG supply not only is affordable but also helps South Korea and China diversify its import sources, whose demand for LNG will be on the rise following their pledges to decrease the prevalence of coal.
- Wang Hwi Lee: Cooperation between South Korea and the U.S. on energy or environment has been almost "absent." South Korean government will have to align its energy policy in line with that of the U.S., which means joining the Global Green New Deal initiative if Biden Administration sets in. The form of carbon cooperation between the U.S. and China also matters; if the U.S. and China opt for the high carbon cooperation, Korea will increase import of oil and LNG from the U.S., and if they turn to a low carbon cooperation, Korea will be under pressure to reduce carbon emission as soon as possible.

Pledges on Carbon Neutrality Should Be Translated into Action

- Jeffery Ball: The world is witnessing a race of pledges on de-carbonization or carbon neutrality, including President Moon Jae-in's recent announcement to go carbon neutral by 2050 as well as pledges made by leaders of Japan, China, Europe and more. What really matters is to translate such pledges into action, and in order to operationalize such goals, geopolitical strategies need to be established and economic incentives should be provided. Many of the developed countries that announced to reduce their carbon consumption are indeed investing heavily in coal infrastructure businesses in developing countries like Vietnam. The pledges therefore should not only be limited to the domestic level, but also be expanded to the global level. Countries need to shift economic incentives so that various key players in the traditional energy sector including multinational corporations and international-development bank, can foresee profits from clean energy that are as alluring as those they have long have inked from dirty energy.
- Samantha Gross: Cooperation over competition is what is needed to accomplish the pledges including President Moon Jae-in's pledge on carbon neutrality. Year 2050 may sound distant, but in terms of building and turning over the current energy infrastructure we have, strategic policies and sharing of best practices between states should be in place. ■



Speaker and Moderator Bios

■ **YoungJa Bae** is a Professor of the Department of Political Science and Diplomacy at Konkuk University. Dr. Bae received her PhD in political science at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the United States and serves on the policy advisory committee to the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and vice chairman of the Korean Association of International Studies. She was a visiting scholar at National Taiwan University under Taiwan Fellowship. Her major research interests include international politics and S&T, science diplomacy, and international political economy. Her major papers include "Regulations on Foreign Direct Investment and National Security," "US-China competition and Science and Technology Innovation" and "S&T Diplomacy as Public Diplomacy: Theoretical Understanding".

■ **Yul Sohn** is the president of EAI and a professor at Yonsei University's Graduate School of International Studies. He received his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Chicago. He previously served as the dean of Yonsei University GSIS, president of the Korean Association of International Studies, and president of the Korean Studies of Contemporary Japan. His research focuses on the Japanese and international political economy, East Asian regionalism, and public diplomacy. His recent publications include *Japan and Asia's Contested Order* (2018, with T.J. Pempel), and *Understanding Public Diplomacy in East Asia* (2016, with Jan Melissen).

■ **Sook Jong Lee** is a Professor of Public Administration at Sungkyunkwan University and Senior Fellow of the East Asia Institute. She has been directing the Asian Democracy Research Network since its formation in 2015, leading a network of about nineteen research organizations across Asia to promote democracy with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy. Her recent publications include *Transforming Global Governance with Middle Power Diplomacy: South Korea's Role in the 21st Century* (ed. 2016), and *Keys to Successful Presidency in South Korea* (ed. 2013 and 2016).

■ **Wang Hwi Lee** is a Professor of Political Science and Dean of the Division of International Studies at Ajou University, Suwon, South Korea, where he has taught international political economy since 2006. He is the author of "*The Politics of Economic Reform in South Korea: Crony Capitalism after Ten Years*", "*Pulling South Korea away from China's Orbit: The Strategic Implications of the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement*" and "*Crisis Management of the COVID-19 Pandemic in South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore*." His research interests have been focused on issues of the political economy of economic policy and institutions in East Asian countries. Lee received his Ph.D. from London School of Economics and Political Science.

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■ **Young-Sun Ha** is chairman of the board of trustees of the East Asia Institute. He is also a professor emeritus at Seoul National University's department of political science and international relations. Ha currently serves as a member of the senior advisory group for the Inter-Korean Summit Talks Preparation Committee. He also served as a member of the Presidential National Security Advisory Group, co-chairman of Korea-Japan Joint Research Project for New Era, president of the Korea Peace Studies Association, and research fellow at Princeton University's Center for International Studies and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. His recent books and edited volumes include *A New Perspective on the Diplomatic History of Korea*, *World Politics of Love: War and Peace*, *U.S.-China Competition in the Architecture of a Regional Order in the Asia-Pacific*; *Korean Peninsula Among Big Powers: 1972 vs. 2014*, *Complex World Politics: Strategies, Principles, and a New Order*, *The Future of North Korea 2032: The Strategy of Coevolution for the Advancement*, *The Emergence of Complex Alliances in the 21st Century*,



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■ **Jeffrey Ball**, a writer whose work focuses on energy and the environment, is scholar-in-residence at Stanford University's Steyer-Taylor Center for Energy Policy and Finance and a lecturer at Stanford Law School. He also is a nonresident senior fellow in the Brookings Institution's Energy Security and Climate Initiative. Ball's writing has appeared in *Fortune*, *Texas Monthly*, *Mother Jones*, the *New Republic*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Joule*, *The Atlantic*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times*, among other publications. At the Stanford center, a joint initiative of Stanford's law and business schools, Ball heads a project assessing the climate implications of infrastructure investment by major economies including China, the world's largest carbon emitter, coal burner, and renewable-energy producer. Among Ball's writing honors were two in 2019: He won a [New York Press Club Award for Journalism](#) and was named a finalist for a [Gerald Loeb Award for Distinguished Business and Financial Journalism](#) for "[Lone Star Rising](#)," a 2018 long-form story he wrote in *Fortune* on how a renewed oil boom in West Texas' Permian Basin, one of the world's biggest oil-producing areas, is reshaping both the region and the global energy system. Ball was the primary author of a 2017 Stanford report that assessed countries' comparative advantages in the globalizing clean-energy sector. That report, [The New Solar System](#), was released in March 2017 and laid out a strategy to boost solar energy to a level that would contribute meaningfully to global carbon reductions. Ball came to Stanford in 2011 from *The Wall Street Journal*, where he was the paper's environment editor and before that was a columnist and reporter focusing on energy and the environment. He graduated from Yale University, where he was editor-in-chief of the *Yale Daily News*. Follow him on Twitter at @jeff_ball.

■ **David Dollar**, a senior fellow in the John L. Thornton China Center at the Brookings Institution and host of the Brookings trade podcast, *Dollar&Sense*. He is a leading expert on China's economy and U.S.-China economic relations. From 2009 to 2013, he was the U.S. Treasury's economic and financial emissary to China, based in Beijing, facilitating the macroeconomic and financial policy dialogue between the United States and China. Prior to joining Treasury, Dollar worked 20 years for the World Bank, serving as country director for China and Mongolia, based in Beijing (2004-2009). His other World Bank assignments focused on Asian economies, including South Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Bangladesh, and India. Dollar also worked in the World Bank's research department. His publications focus on economic reform in China, globalization, and economic growth. He also taught economics at University of California Los Angeles, during which time he spent a semester in Beijing at the Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 1986. He has a doctorate in economics from New York University and a bachelor's in Chinese history and language from Dartmouth College.

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■ **Jonathan D. Pollack** is a nonresident senior fellow in the John L. Thornton China Center and Center for East Asia Policy at the Brookings Institution. Between 2012 and 2014, he served as director of the John L. Thornton China Center. Prior to joining Brookings in 2010, he was professor of Asian and Pacific Studies and chairman of the Strategic Research Department at the U.S. Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island. He previously worked at the Rand Corporation in Santa Monica, California, where he served in various senior research and management positions, including chairman of the political science department, corporate research manager for international policy and senior advisor for international policy. His recent publications include *Strategic Surprise? U.S.-China Relations in the Early 21st Century*, *Korea-The East Asian Pivot*, *Asia Eyes America: Regional Perspective on U.S. Asia-Pacific Strategy in the 21st Century*. His principal research interests include Chinese national security strategy; U.S.-China relations; U.S. strategy in Asia and the Pacific; Korean politics and foreign policy; Asian international politics; and nuclear weapons and international security. He received his master's and doctorate in political science from the University of Michigan, and was a post-doctoral research fellow at Harvard University.

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