

Smart Talk
No. 31

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This product presents a policy-oriented summary of the Smart Talk.

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**60 Years of Partnership and Shared Prosperity:
U.S. Foreign Policy on Northeast Asia**

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On March 18, 2013, the East Asia Institute invited Scott Snyder of the Council on Foreign Relations to discuss the U.S. rebalancing strategy as a major initiative in the U.S. foreign policy and its implication for Northeast Asia. The following are some of the main points from the presentation and the subsequent discussion with South Korean experts and scholars.

Summary of the Seminar

With the growing significance of Asia and the rising influence of China, the United States has been devoting considerable efforts to its rebalancing strategy toward Asia. Rebalancing strategy unveiled by the Obama administration gives priority to Asia as the administration strongly feels that the U.S. efforts in the region have been underinvested in comparison to those in the Middle East.

Aspects of the U.S. rebalancing approach include military, political, and economic components. Regarding the three components, the Obama administration has emphasized strengthening the military alliance with East Asian countries, conducting the “forward-deployed” diplomacy by increasing the U.S. diplomatic presence abroad, and maintaining the U.S. efforts to promote economic cooperation through bilateral and multilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Although the Obama administration officials have emphasized that one of the main goals of the rebalancing strategy is to establish stable and

constructive relationship with China, the United States’ greater emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region may inevitably create hindrance in U.S.-China relationship.

Taking these facts into account, Scott Snyder began his presentation by arguing that the current rebalancing as it relates to South Korea presumes the status quo, but the rising tensions in Northeast Asia make it difficult for the United States to maintain stasis in the region. Defining the rebalancing as “adjusting relative weights in portfolio,” Snyder acknowledged that the U.S. rebalancing efforts are in the process of evolution as the Obama administration finds it necessary to respond to Northeast Asia with an attempt to address new developments in North Korea.

The matter of whether the U.S. rebalancing strategy is sustainable in both material and political terms was raised during the discussion. In response to a discussant’s question on what the rebalancing strategy meant for North Korea, Snyder referred to the recent \$1 billion pledge by the United States on missile defenses along the Pacific Coast to deter North Korea. Through the missile defense pledge, Snyder implied that fiscal constraints have not hindered U.S. greater commitments in East Asia. In fact, building more missile defenses, according to Snyder, is the latest tangible evidence that the Obama administration is not stepping back from its commitment to rebalance toward Asia. However, Snyder added that although the purpose of the missile defense pledge was to represent the U.S. commitment in defending Asian allies, South Korea did not necessarily perceive the U.S. mis-

sile defense pledge as the answer to deterring North Korean nuclear capability. Snyder suggested that in order for South Korea and the United States to effectively respond to the mounting nuclear threats in Asia, the two countries need collaborative efforts to deter further nuclear proliferation on the Korean Peninsula.

Political sustainability of the U.S. rebalancing strategy toward Asia is less clear at this point than the material sustainability. The question of political sustainability would be better addressed depending on whether U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry implements the U.S. rebalancing strategy in the same way former Secretary Hilary Clinton has done, which was to increase allocation of U.S. attention and resources to the Asia-Pacific.

With respect to China's stance on the U.S. rebalancing strategy and the U.S. approach to North Korea's nuclear provocations, one of the discussants raised the point that convincing China to regard the future reunification of the two Koreas as beneficial was a necessary task that South Korea and the United States must jointly accomplish. Nevertheless, Snyder stressed that in the early stage of the Xi Jinping leadership, relying on the cooperation between the United States and China to effectively respond to North Korea's nuclear program remains to be seen. Through regular consultation with China, extensive efforts by the U.S. government to mitigate China's concerns over the U.S. strategy to rebalance its resources and attention to Asia are necessary.

Considering the economic scope of the rebalancing strategy, Snyder advocated a multilateral form of economic ties among the United States and Asian countries, such as the TPP. Despite his positive outlook on multilateral economic cooperation in Asia, Snyder raised a question of whether South Korea has any incentives to join the TPP since South Ko-

rea had already agreed upon the FTA with the United States.

The discussion concluded with the question of how the rebalancing strategy assigned new responsibilities to Asian countries. Considering administrations starting anew in the United States, China, and South Korea, Snyder and the discussants agreed that the new Park administration should take the lead in implementing the rebalancing strategy according to its own needs, as well as promote more creative policy agendas that take into account the new multilateral architecture. Such an approach from South Korea toward the rebalancing strategy will raise an awareness of a stronger middle power that embraces the Asian identity rather than one that merely abides by the superpowers' hegemonic objectives. ■

About the Speaker

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