



[EAI Online Seminar] “After Trump” Series

Envisioning a Long-Term Vision for a Stronger ROK-U.S. Alliance

East Asia Institute (EAI)

I. Executive Summary**Bilateral Dialogue Should be based on Mutual Understanding of Each Other’s Interests**

- Patrick M. Cronin: South Korea and the United States should align each others’ objectives without aggravating longstanding disputes over issues including burden-sharing, through closer dialogue and more connectivity between the two countries. We need to remain steadfast on focusing on peace on the Korean Peninsula, with shared visions in mind, when it comes to managing North Korean issues.
- Scott A. Snyder: We need to have a dialogue, but not in an environment where we are immediately looking for deliverables, but in one where the two countries can truly understand each other. South Korea, for example, can broaden the domestic dialogue to further discuss South Korean view on issues on rising U.S.-China tensions. In this regard, the two countries can understand where our shared objectives lie, where our differing concerns lie and how we can plan out a shared action in China-related policies, which extend from technology, regional security to values.
- Hyunwook Kim: Two-plus-two meeting that South Korea and the U.S. had from 2010 to 2016 would be another recommendation for strengthening the bilateral alliance and strategic breakthrough. We also need to talk more about the common threat perception and common visions of the alliance, and devise a collective response system coping with Chinese retaliation.
- Jung-Yeop Woo: The scope of the alliance needs to be redefined and agreed upon once again. While some South Koreans wish to limit the extent of alliance within the peninsula and against North Korean aggressions, at the same time we are seeing moves from the U.S. side to make use of the alliance as a mechanism to deal with China issues. It is concerning that the value of the alliance may vary greatly among the two countries, unless the scope of such alliance is clearly marked.

U.S. Role in Bringing North Korea Back to the Negotiation Table

- Patrick M. Cronin: The Biden administration will have to make a choice between staying completely steadfast behind North Korean denuclearization as the main goal and moving closer to the implicit South Korean position of accommodation and coexistence with nuclear North Korea. This should be made clear through a deliberative and careful set of diplomacy. At the same time, the forthcoming administration should not overreact to North Korean provocations, while continuing deterrence measures. Together in the alliance, we shall try to pivot from perceived tension toward a diplomatic roadmap including getting North Korea back to the negotiation on more productive and sustainable terms.
- Scott A. Snyder: We should continue to send the signal to North Korea that the door is open for dialogue and at the same time seek private ways to sustain crisis communication with Kim Jong-un. Trump administration has managed to keep in contact through a set of ‘love letters’, and a private communication channel should be sustained to every extent possible again.



- Sang Hyun Lee: A recommendation for the Biden administration is to continue the legacy of the 2018 Singapore Summit and 2019 Hanoi Summit where mutual understanding between two governments has been made. Despite no visible outcome, the two summits are marked in that it brought back North Korea to a dialogue.
- Frank Aum: Both South Korea and the U.S. should more aggressively indicate to North Korea our willingness to engage. One of the ways to signal such unilateral conciliatory measures is to reaffirm the principles of the Singapore statement. It is true that Biden administration would be reluctant to continue any remnants of Trump's North Korean policy, however, it needs to be reminded that the Singapore statement is one of the only principles or frameworks that North Korea has not yet rejected. If there is a way to maintain deterrence and our security, and to take risk not for aggression but for peace, it is more than worth trying.

Future of the Alliance: Beyond the Korean Peninsula to Encompass the Liberal World Order

- Scott A. Snyder: We need to build a forward-looking rationale and a strong base for our alliance. The rationale has long been focused on the challenges of the past that has continued since the Korean War. Following 70 years of the South Korea-U.S. cooperation, we need to restructure our alliance with a longer-term perspective. The aperture of the alliance also needs to be broadened both in the regional and functional context, with focus on issues ranging from security to technology, COVID-19 and more.
- Patrick M. Cronin: The relationship between South Korea and the U.S. needs to be broadened beyond the North Korean issues. We have both challenges and opportunities where the two countries can do much more through cooperation. The agenda of the alliance can extend from East and West Sea focus to the new 'Seven Seas', including COVID-19, climate change, canons of liberal order, trade, infrastructure to North Korea and communication.
- Jean H. Lee: The alliance should aspire not just to deliver peace and security on the Korean Peninsula but also to help usher in tomorrow's liberal world order. This objective gives the alliance an expanded purpose, which not only restores order but also broadens the utility of the alliance past and beyond the peninsula. South Korea's potential for leadership role in areas of health, environment, technology and more on the global stage can be a future vision of the alliance.
- Frank Aum: Alliance coordination is a two-way street and both South Korea and the U.S. will have the burden of meeting and managing each other's expectations and interests. It seems that a lot of the focus is on the part of South Korea required to do more to align itself with U.S. approach to China, regional security and other global issues. In the flip side, the Biden administration also needs to think about ways to better support its South Korean ally, through means such as being more flexible on North Korean policy and accommodating the wartime operational control(OPCON) transition.

China Money or American Value: Is the U.S. Capable of Leading the Alliance?

- Hyunwook Kim: Given the faltering economic dominance of the U.S. and the overwhelming dependence of many countries on China, it is of concern whether the U.S. has the ability to lead the alliance by providing its allies enough incentives. Where it is unclear whether the countries will choose the U.S. values or choose Chinese money, maintaining hegemony amid U.S.-China competition and leading the alliance would be very costly for the U.S.
- Jung-Yeop Woo: Many countries including South Korea share the concern or fear that following the U.S. lead would ultimately lead to worsening relations with China. It is very important for the Biden administration to reassure its allies and partners with tools they can use in terms of dealing with China.
- Chaesung Chun: We are entering the period of 'hegemonic impossibility' where one single country cannot provide sufficient collective goods to the international needs, as witness in the COVID-19 pandemic. The question now is whether a country is capable of mobilizing its allies and partners to lead the global or regional order, and in this sense, the U.S. is in much more favorable position as a representative of the universal norms. It is highly likely that the U.S. will remain a dominant player that can lead and mobilize its allies, as the U.S. continues to engage with China into the liberal global order.



Trump Brought the Right Amount of Shock at the Right Moment amid Transition of Uncertainty

- Frank Aum: As much as Trump's policy towards alliance with South Korea has not been as strategic and even destroying in some occasions, it did provide the kind of shock that may be necessary at times to help raise important questions within the alliance. Alliance can be likened to 'marriage' in that when you get to a comfortable level, you act out of habit whereas you should be constantly nurturing, reassessing and revitalizing. The two countries therefore should continuously be thinking about our combined posture and interests, and how to respond to the changing dynamics of security and threat environment.
- Sang Hyun Lee: During the Biden administration, the possibility of conflict between South Korea and the U.S. is likely to even out, compared to the Trump period. However, at the same time, a new set of challenges will emerge, which require South Korea to keep abreast of its value-oriented agenda-setting and strengthen allied response to China. Under the 'value alliance' of the Biden administration, South Korea will be expected to push for the sensitive agenda of human rights and liberal order when dealing with North Korea and China. South Korea's foreign policy needs to be aligned in a rather timely manner, as it faces a transition of huge uncertainty both in Washington and Seoul, as South Korea will also get into a presidential election cycle. ■



II. Speaker and Discussant Bios

■ **Frank Aum** is senior expert on North Korea at the United States Institute of Peace. He received his MPP from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, his JD from the University of California, Berkeley. He worked at the Department of Defense, including as special counsel to the Army General Counsel, special assistant to the assistant secretary of defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, and senior advisor on North Korea in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. He also served as head of delegation for working level negotiations with the Republic of Korea on U.S.-ROK Alliance matters, and received the Secretary of Defense Medal for Outstanding Public Service.

■ **Chaesung Chun** is the Chair of the National Security Research Center at the East Asia Institute, and a Professor of the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Seoul National University. Dr. Chun received his PhD in international relations at Northwestern University in the United States, and serves on the policy advisory committee to the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Unification. His main research interests include international political theory, the ROK-US alliance, and Korean Peninsular affairs. He is the co-author of *The Korean War: Threat and Peace*, and the author of a number of publications including *Are Politics Moral* and *International Politics in East Asia: History and Theory*.

■ **Patrick M. Cronin** is the Asia-Pacific Security Chair at Hudson Institute. He received his DPhil from the University of Oxford. Dr. Cronin served as the director of studies at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and senior vice president and director of research at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). His research program analyzes the challenges and opportunities confronting the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, including China's total competition campaign, the future of the Korean Peninsula, and strengthening US alliances and partnerships. His recent publications include "All the Japanese Prime Minister's Course Corrections" (2020).

■ **Hyunwook Kim** is the director and a professor of American Studies at the National Diplomatic Academy. Dr. Kim received his PhD in politics from Brown University. He served as a standing member and policy advisor of the Ministry of Unification, policy advisor to the National Security Office and advisor to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. His main areas of research are ROK-U.S. alliance, North Korea-U.S. relations and East Asian security. His recent publications include *The Biden Administration's Policy Prospects for China and the Korean Peninsula* (2020).

■ **Jean Lee** is a Pulitzer-nominated veteran foreign correspondent and expert on North Korea. Ms. Lee has a master's degree from the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, and she worked as a reporter for the Korea Herald. Lee led the Associated Press news agency's coverage of the Korean Peninsula as bureau chief from 2008 to 2013. In 2011, she became the first American reporter granted extensive access on the ground in North Korea, and in January 2012 opened AP's Pyongyang bureau. She served as a Wilson Center Public Policy Scholar and Global Fellow before joining the Asia Program as Korea Center program director, and she is a contributor to the New York



Times Sunday Review, Esquire magazine and other publications. Ms. Lee appears as an analyst for CNN, BBC, NPR, PRI and other media, and serves frequently as a guest speaker on Korea-related topics.

■ **Sang Hyun Lee** is a senior researcher at the Security Strategy Research Office of the Sejong Institute. Dr. Lee received his PhD in Political Science at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. He served as a policy planning officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, researcher at the Korea Institute of International Relations and researcher at the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses. The main areas of research are international security, South Korea-U.S. relations, war and conflict theory, regional conflicts and military security. His major publications include *The U.S.-China Hegemonic Rivalry and the Korean Peninsula* (2020), *The Trump Administration's Nuclear Policy: International Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime and its Implications on the North Korean Nuclear Issue* (2019), and *Understanding Modern Korea-U.S. Relations* (2019).

■ **Scott Snyder** is a senior fellow for Korea Studies and director of the program on U.S. policy at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). Mr. Snyder received his MA from the regional studies East Asia program at Harvard University and was a Thomas G. Watson fellow at Yonsei University. He previously served as a senior associate in the international relations program of the Asia Foundation, where he founded and directed the Center for U.S.-Korea Policy and served as the Asia Foundation's representative in Korea. His major publications include *South Korea at the Crossroads: Autonomy and Alliance in an Era of Rival Powers* (2018), and *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States* (2015).

■ **Jung-yeop Woo** is the Director of the Center for the American Studies at the Sejong Institute. Dr. Woo received his PhD in political science from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He served as a postdoctoral fellow at the Korean Studies Institute at the University of Southern California and research fellow and the director of the Center for Security Policy at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies. His main areas of research are international security, U.S. foreign policy, South Korea-U.S. relations and security on the Korean Peninsula. His major publications include *Foreign Intervention in Civil Wars* (2017), *Changing Security Environment in Northeast Asia and South Korea's Security Dilemma* (2019), *North Korea's Incomplete Denuclearization and the Problem of the South Korea-US Alliance* (2019), and *Multiple Predictions on U.S.-North Korea Relations* (2018).

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