

Session Sketch

Asan Plenum 2026

“Modernizing Alliances”

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Session: Concurrent Session 3-2: New Alliance Frontiers

Date/Time: April 8, 2026 / 14:40-16:00

Speakers:

Gordon Flake, University of Western Australia (moderator)

Jeanne Choi, US Department of State

James Kim, American Chamber of Commerce in Korea

Park Young-sun, Sogang University

Shekhar Sinha, Indian Council of World Affairs

Suzuki Kazuto, University of Tokyo

Yoo Myung-hee, Korea University

Rapporteur: Kester Abbott, United States Studies Centre

Session summary:

The session examined how and what practical “new frontier” avenues will be required to modernise alliances and partnerships, reframing “alliance modernisation” beyond a narrowly military conception to encompass economic security, technology, and industrial resilience.

Dr. Jeanne Choi, an energy and economic security analyst in the Office of Economic Analysis in the U.S. Department of State, opened by recalling that the U.S. alliance system was originally premised on the linkage between shared security and shared prosperity. To ensure this principle today, however, she noted that alliance modernisation must incorporate emerging domains such as LNG, semiconductors, and technology governance frameworks. Here, she emphasised energy security and critical mineral supply chains, noting Korea’s structural vulnerability as a resource-poor economy reliant on external energy inputs. She noted that the U.S. alliance system has supported Korea’s economic resilience, with United States LNG exports playing a critical role in reinforcing Korea and other allies in Europe and Asia to reduce dependence on Russian energy. Against the backdrop of China’s dominance in key industrial sectors, she stressed the growing urgency of building trust-based resilient supply chains among like-minded partners and learning from recent geopolitical events like the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East to guide future policy decision-making.

Mr. James Kim, the Chairman and CEO of the American Chamber of Commerce in Korea (AMCHAM Korea), highlighted how businesses are similarly adapting to shifting geostrategic conditions, but noted that increased geopolitical risk is increasingly paired with opportunity. U.S.–China competition and the economic focus of the current Trump administration in diplomatic engagements with allies and partners have accelerated deeper U.S.–ROK economic cooperation. He noted potential opportunities raised by President Lee Jae Myung’s ambition to position Korea as a regional business and financial hub. Given Korea’s current underperformance in this area (with fewer than 100 regional headquarters based in Korea,

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compared to 5,000 in Singapore, 1,400 in Hong Kong, and 900 in Shanghai, and that according to AMCHAM surveys, 70% of surveyed foreign firms view Korea’s regulatory and legislative environment as restrictive,) there are opportunities for Korea and the United States to instill confidence in the Korean market. Kim argued that improving “regulatory interoperability” and addressing the 66 non-tariff barriers would unlock significant economic potential, which could strengthen the alliance’s prosperity more broadly.

Professor Park Young-sun, the Co-Director of the Sogang Mentoring Center at Sogang University and the former Minister of SMEs and Start-ups of the Republic of Korea (2019-2021), focused her remarks on opportunities for cooperation between Korea and the United States and other powers on semiconductors. She identified this area as a logical, priority area for modernising alliances because “semiconductors are foundation of modern economic security, underpinning AI, defence systems, and critical infrastructure.” Indeed, while the semiconductor industry appears global, key bottlenecks remain regionally concentrated in Northeast Asia, precisely where geopolitical competition is most intense. She cited recent diplomatic engagement, including French President Macron’s interest in Korean semiconductor capacity, as evidence that the sector has become a top strategic priority across regions. Korea, as a global leader in memory chips, is not merely a participant but potentially a key pillar of the supply chain. She stated that Korea now faces a critical juncture, where it must choose whether to remain a producer or become an architect of future supply chains. Park mentioned that if Korea wants to pursue the latter, it will need to begin diversifying inputs, strengthening domestic capabilities, and deepening coordination with trusted partners across the U.S., Europe, and the Indo-Pacific. She advocated for a new model of “economic security alliances” centred on joint investment, technology protection, and coordinated crisis response to fully realise these.

Vice Admiral Shekhar Sinha, a member of the Governing Council of the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), provided an Indian perspective, clarifying that non-alignment does not preclude practical cooperation. As conflict increasingly spans both military and economic domains, collaboration must be grounded in trust and pursued alongside structural reforms. He emphasised the need for whole-of-government approaches to industrial and supply chain policy, moving beyond fragmented, stovepipe formats. He concluded his remarks with an optimistic note for global alliances and partnerships, noting that even potential disruptions to traditional alliances, such as President Trump’s threat to abandon NATO, could create opportunities for reconfiguration and renewal in such partnerships and help ensure that they meet contemporary challenges.

Dr. Yoo Myung-hee, a professor by Special Appointment at the Graduate School of International Studies at Korea University, began her remarks by unpacking the structural drivers and consequences behind alliance expansion into new domains. Technological transformation has made industrial capability central to national power, not just economic growth. However, as states pursue industrial policies to secure domestic capacity, tensions among allies are becoming unavoidable. She argued for managing these tensions through mutually beneficial technology partnerships, ensuring that capability gains are shared rather

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than zero-sum. Her recommendations included: (1) expanding joint investment mechanisms (e.g. Korea–U.S. funds) into multilateral platforms; (2) adopting flexible, issue-based “variable geometry” cooperation frameworks; and (3) strengthening resilience against economic coercion, particularly in critical supply chains such as semiconductors, rare earths, and energy chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz. She underscored that influence within alliances increasingly depends on a partner’s control over possessing “indispensable capabilities” that will benefit the broader alliance network.

In the concluding discussion, panellists identified areas for alliance modernisation that should be immediately prioritised. Panellists identified semiconductors and shipbuilding as immediate opportunities for coordinated industrial scaling. However, they cautioned that such efforts must be synchronised to avoid imbalances among partners and ensure benefits to all allies. Suzuki Kazuto proposed strengthening intelligence cooperation, potentially through expanded frameworks involving Japan and South Korea. This was viewed as a means to build trust and enable more advanced collaboration. Finally, critical minerals were emphasised, with reference to the February 2026 Critical Minerals Ministerial Group involving over 50 countries as a model for collective efforts to reduce dependency on critical areas dominated by China. Together, the panellists underlined that future cooperation in these technological and industrial domains that can deliver mutually beneficial outcomes will require building and sustaining a regional and global network built on two foundations: common interest and, more importantly, trust.