

Session: Concurrent Session 2-2 (Trans-Pacific and Trans-Atlantic Alliances)

Date/Time: April 8, 2026 / 13:10-14:30

Rapporteur: Ha Chae Kyoum, University of Cambridge

Moderator: Kang Insun, Former Second Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, ROK

Speakers:

Peter Dean, Australian National University

Iwama Yoko, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies

Moon Seung-hyun, Dongseo University

Luis Simon, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Kathleen Stephens, The Korea Society

Steve Yates, The Heritage Foundation

Session Sketch:

The session, “Trans-Pacific and Trans-Atlantic Alliances,” was convened by Ms. Kang Insun, former Vice-Minister of the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This session engaged with the broader theme of “Modernizing Alliances” by examining the current status of alliances in the Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific and sharing each other’s experiences.

Professor Peter Dean first described the current situation a period of “strategic autumn.” We are not yet in the winter, but it is a period of seasonal change that is shaped by rising competitions. However, if we can manage this period, winter is not inevitable, and perhaps we can jump to spring. To do so, he argued that there is a lack of understanding and cohesion between the US and its partners, as well as amongst the partners themselves which should be strengthened through new sets of dialogues between the U.S. allies.

Sharing Japan’s perspective, Professor Iwama Yoko emphasized the importance of strengthening Japan’s relationship with Korea which she argued is “the most important partnership,” but has not yet reached its potential. In particular, she pointed out the two countries’ shared strengths such as civilian nuclear power and challenges including aging society, and proposed several political, strategic, industrial, and social dialogues to develop their bilateral relations so that the two countries could also serve as a hub for other regional stakeholders such as countries in Southeast Asia.

Ambassador Moon Seung-hyun raised a question on the sustainability of the hub and spokes system as the United States faces challenges in multiple theatres simultaneously. Given such

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circumstances, he proposed three aspects that the ROK should work on responsible ownership, increasing its industrial capabilities, and spoke-to-spoke cooperation with other junior allies of the United States. In particular, he emphasized the importance of a functional and practical approach concerning cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo which should be sustainable politically.

Professor Luis Simon introduced the concept of “downstream and upstream” dimensions of deterrence in thinking about the cross-theatre cooperation between Europe and the Indo-Pacific. While the downstream part focuses on operational planning, which would suit better with a division of labor between the two regions, the upstreaming part refers to industrial technology where cooperation between the two regions is feasible. Despite the differences between the two regions, Europe and the Indo-Pacific are both confronted by revisionist nuclear powers which provide opportunities for cross-theatre cooperation.

Ambassador Kathleen Stephens argued that from the U.S. perspective, modernizing alliances is not a new concept, but a topic that has always been discussed between the US and allies. This has been at the center of US foreign policy since the end of the Second World War. She reminded the audience that at the end of the Cold War, there were questions for the role of NATO but we saw an expansion of NATO and the growth of the U.S. network, and reemphasized the role of values for alliances.

Steve Yates argued that the shift in the global system is owing to the inertia of existing systems such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization which were tested and had not been effective in dealing with global challenges. It is the failure of such layers that led the United States to recognize the need to find modernization of its alliances.

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