ASAN PLENUM 2025

PROCEEDINGS

April 23, 2025
GRAND HYATT SEOUL

THE ASAN INSTITUTE for POLICY STUDIES

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Greetings from the Chairman

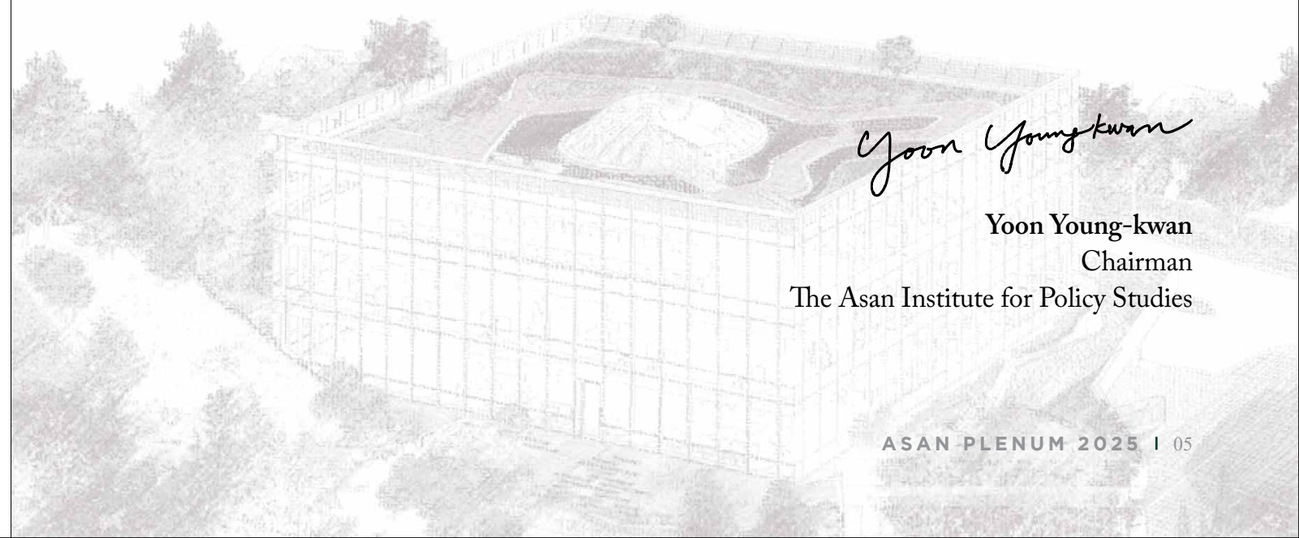
Welcome to the Asan Plenum 2025!

This year marks the 80th anniversary of Korea's independence and the 60th anniversary of normalized diplomatic relations between the Republic of Korea and Japan. Despite significant progress over the decades, renewed collisions of competing strategic visions in Northeast Asia continue to hinder genuine reconciliation. Korea has undergone profound transformation, and new opportunities for security and prosperity lie ahead. What steps can Korea and its neighbors take to move beyond past difficulties and chart a collaborative future?

We are delighted to welcome you as we reflect on 80 years of independence and 60 years of Korea-Japan relations, while exploring new horizons for Korea, the Indo-Pacific, and the wider world. Your participation is essential to our mission, and we are honored by your presence.

As in previous years, the Asan Plenum 2025 has gathered distinguished experts from around the globe for in-depth discussions and analysis. We value the perspectives you bring and look forward to productive dialogue and meaningful insights throughout the event.

Thank you for joining us. We hope you enjoy the conference.



Yoon Young-kwan

Yoon Young-kwan
Chairman
The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

About the Asan Plenum

The Asan Plenum is a yearly gathering of the world's leading experts and scholars. In addressing the most pressing problems facing the world with expertise from around the globe, the Asan Plenum aims to impact the policy-making process and enable the global community to better deal with the challenges it faces.

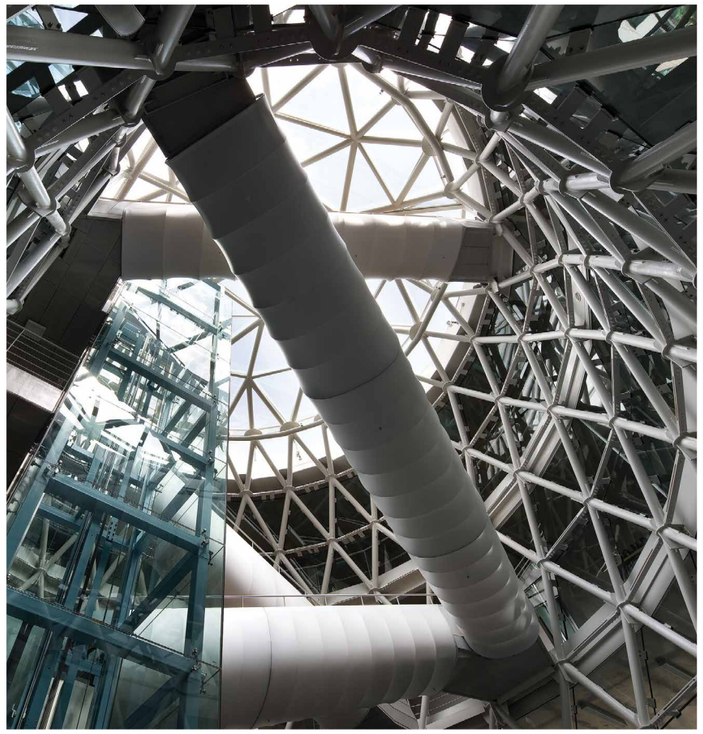
Plenum Format

The "conversational" format of the Plenum is intended to maximize interaction among panelists and participants. Plenary and concurrent sessions will provide further in-depth discussions and networking opportunities. The Plenum features two plenary sessions and four concurrent sessions. Plenary sessions will be held for 1 hour and 20-30 minutes, and all concurrent sessions will be held for 1 hour and 20 minutes.

About the Asan Institute for Policy Studies

As an independent, non-partisan think tank, the Asan Institute for Policy Studies is dedicated to undertaking policy-relevant research to foster domestic, regional, and international environments conducive to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

The Asan Institute was established in commemoration of the late Founder and Honorary Chairman of Hyundai Group, Chung Ju-yung, who left an indelible mark on South Korea's modernization and inter-Korean exchanges toward peace.



Named after Chung Ju-yung's pen name "Asan," Dr. Chung Mong Joon founded the Asan Institute on February 11, 2008, to become a world-class think tank that mirrors South Korea's place on the world stage.

Welcoming Reception & Dinner

Date	April 22, 2025
Time	17:30-19:30
Place	Namsan I+II, III

Dinner Speech

John Hamre
President and CEO,
Center for Strategic and
International Studies

Good evening, everybody. I want to congratulate Korea for standing up for democracy. It is painful for me to say it, but last year, when President Yoon declared martial law, it was a crisis. I remember when I was a young man that the outcome was very different, and this time, Korea stood up for democracy. I want to congratulate you on doing that. It was very important.

I think that when you are invited to offer congratulatory remarks, you are expected to give some light, joyful kind of welcome to everybody. However, I just feel that for an opportunity like this, since these are the architects and the engineers of our partnership, I would like to say a few more substantive words tonight, if I may, as part of my remarks.

First of all, may I ask: Korea, please set aside your vengeance politics as you go into this next election. Korea is such a great country, a wonderful country, but you are hurting yourself with this vengeance politics of getting even all the time. Please set that aside. You will find a leader, but we need to have somebody who is a champion for all of Korea, not for half of Korea. Let me just say that I should not be saying that from America since we are so divided. You can't imagine it. I was talking with Choi Kang, and we agreed that we are so compatible because we both have the same pathologies now as countries.

Let me talk a little bit about where America is right now. I am trying to set the tone for what I hope is going to be a very open and candid conversation that we have tomorrow with each other. The Trump administration is at the front end of a profoundly different international system. Most fundamentally, on the economic side, we are taking the political economy of America, which for the last 80 years has been organized around consumers, and we are shifting it to be organized around producers or workers. That is fundamentally what is happening here, and the Trump administration is intent on shifting the landscape so that we can rebuild a manufacturing foundation in America.

Now there are two pathways for that. One is the one that President Trump himself is so fond of, and that is tariffs. He has been talking about tariffs for 30 years. He has an unusual attraction to tariffs as a strategy for shifting the underlying foundation of the American economy.

I was in a meeting recently with a very senior ambassador in Washington who sat in a meeting with President Trump and was talking about negotiating, asking what we can do. They said that the 10 percent tariff is off the table because we are going to do that no matter what. The steel tariff and the aluminum tariff are off the table because we are going to do that no matter what. The car tariff is off the table, also, because we are going to do that no matter what. But we are open to discussion. That was the starting point.

There is a logic to what the Trump administration is trying to do. Over the last 15 years, 10 million American males between the ages of 25 and 60 dropped out of the workforce. They just stopped working. The Trump administration wants to get them back. These are blue-collar guys. It will be a bigger economy, but they also do not want to pay as much for welfare, for the support structures that we have. They have a clear agenda for what they want to accomplish.

But if you think about it, the only way that works is if you create a permanently higher cost structure for American manufacturing. America becomes the center of high-cost manufacturing, with

350 million consumers. But outside of America, there are going to be 5 billion consumers who are going to be in a lower cost structure. So, if you want to be in the American market, you have to adapt to higher costs. Of course, you cannot export from that market because your prices are too high, and you cannot allow imports in because it will undermine your base. That is the essential logic of where we are heading.

My concern, of course, is that it makes America an island in the global economy. That is not where we have been for the last 80 years. For the last 80 years, we have championed an economic order that was open to everybody. But this is a new structure, and it is going to be a structure that creates an American island, surrounded by people working around that island. And you ask, what does that mean for Korea?

Now you have all been working with that over the years. Your companies are investing in America, but your companies are investing globally as well, and this is going to become a larger problem. What does it mean geopolitically if America becomes a more diminished actor in the global economic sphere? That becomes a big question.

The second major change that is coming with the Trump administration is a feeling that America has carried too much of the burden for national security globally, and that we should not pay that big a burden. That has an immediate impact on Europe. We have said to Europeans, it is time for you to defend Europe against Russia.

In essence, the administration has been very clear. They have said we are not going to pull out of NATO, and we still believe in extended deterrence, but we are not going to be the primary force for that. Using a commercial analogy, we are no longer going to be the insurance policy provider for Europe. We are going to be the reinsurance policy provider. I do not know what triggers reinsurance when we have a war in Ukraine. That is the biggest war in Europe since 1945. It is a question about what that means, but it is a repositioning of America.

Can Korea still count on the United States as a security partner? Even more fundamentally, can Korea still count on the United States for extended deterrence? I am not going to try to answer that question, but extended deterrence is not plausible if we do not have American troops on the ground willing to fight like crazy to avoid nuclear war, right? If we are not prepared to fight to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, how credible is it that we use nuclear weapons? That is the nub of the issue. That is the dilemma that we face together.

I believe that our conventional commitment to Korea is the foundation of security in Asia. There is nothing more foundational than that. But we also have to address this question: What does it mean if we have to deal with North Korea, and how do we do that? What is the content of the credibility of extended deterrence? That, I hope, is going to be the conversation all of you will engage in tomorrow when we have this wonderful conference.

I have posed a lot of unanswerable questions tonight, but I am counting on the talent of everybody in this room tonight and tomorrow that we will find some answers together.

Thank you very much.

Dinner Speech

Chang Hojin
Special Presidential Advisor for Foreign Affairs and Security, Office of the President, ROK

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, let me begin by expressing my heartfelt gratitude to Honorary Chairman Chung Mong Joon and the Asan Institute for Policy Studies for allowing me to say a few words on this occasion celebrating Asan Plenum 2025.

As the theme of this year's Asan Plenum suggests, 2025 marks two significant milestones: the 80 years of independence and the 60 years of Korea-Japan Normalization. Since Korea's independence, the past eight decades have seen extraordinary transformation, but not without its trials. The first half was marked by the Cold War ensuing ideological divide. Korea was at the frontline of that divide, at a devastating cost of the three-year Korean War. Yet, through the sacrifices of its people and the overwhelming support among the community of liberal democracies, the Republic of Korea preserved its freedom and democracy, laying the groundwork for the vibrant society we see today.

With the Cold War behind us around 35 years ago, the international community rallied around the principles of democracy and market-driven growth, advancing globalization and global governance.

However, in recent years, intensifying geopolitical rivalries and political shifts have led to a seismic transformation in the political and economic order, philosophies, and norms that have defined the postwar international order. Signs of new confrontational schisms are also beginning to emerge.

The war in Ukraine has now entered its fourth year, while Northeast Asia is also grappling with its own geopolitical challenges. North Korea's nuclear and missile threats continue to escalate, and its growing military cooperation with Russia—including its deployment of troops to Kursk—poses a serious challenge to the security landscape not only in Europe but also in Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula.

In this new strategic environment, the importance of economic security is being further underscored. Breakthroughs in science and technology—especially artificial intelligence—create new security threats, reshaping military capabilities and operations.

Over the six decades since the normalization of diplomatic relations, Korea and Japan have closely cooperated to uphold the rules-based international order rooted in liberal internationalism and free trade. Together, Korea and Japan have promoted peace, stability, and prosperity not only in our region but across the globe.

By deepening our trilateral summit diplomacy with the United States, Korea, Japan, and the United States, we have established a robust and comprehensive framework for cooperation at global and regional levels across foreign policy, security, economic resilience, advanced science and technology, development assistance, and cultural exchange. Since 1999, Korea and Japan have also institutionalized trilateral summits and other high-level meetings with China, fostering close cooperation not only for regional peace and stability but also in diverse fields such as

sustainable development, economic and trade relations, and science and technology.

Korea and Japan have also worked closely—bilaterally and trilaterally with the United States—in coordinating policies toward North Korea and addressing the North Korean nuclear issue, as seen in efforts such as the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG), Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), and the Six-Party Talks. These efforts have been accompanied by active engagement with other key stakeholders, including China and Russia.

Nonetheless, we also acknowledge that some historical issues between Korea and Japan have yet to be fully resolved. While both governments have affirmed their commitment to "squarely face history and advance toward the future" and to "inherit on the whole the recognition of the history by the previous governments, including the 1998 Korea-Japan Joint Declaration" living up to this promise remains a challenge. As we mark the 60th anniversary, we must pool our wisdom and efforts to move forward, under the banner of "Joining Hands for a Better Future."

At the same time, both countries must successfully overcome the diverse and pressing regional and global challenges we face together to bring peace and prosperity to our nations and the international community. This requires vision, insight, and enlightenment—enabling us to view both the future and the past with sincerity, honesty, balance, and strategic clarity, and to wisely navigate the present.

In this spirit, this year's Asan Plenum—anchored in the twin anniversaries of Korea's independence and the normalization of diplomatic relations between Korea and Japan—is especially timely, not only for the two nations but also for the brighter future of the international community. The concurrent sessions on Visions for Northeast Asia, Emerging Security Architecture, New Faces of War, and New Horizons of Economic Security could not be more relevant to the challenges we face today.

With the depth of expertise gathered here this evening, I have every confidence that the Asan Plenum 2025 will help illuminate the path ahead for Korea-Japan relations and the international community.

Opening Ceremony

Date	April 23, 2025
Time	09:00-10:00
Place	Grand Ballroom I+II

Welcoming Remarks

Chung Mong Joon
Founder and Honorary Chairman,
The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

Welcome to the Asan Plenum 2025. The theme of this year's Plenum is "80 Years of Independence and 60 Years of Korea-Japan Normalization." The 80th anniversary of national liberation and the 60th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations with Japan are both significant milestones that merit our discussion this year.

The number 80 is considered auspicious for Koreans. In the past, it was rare for someone to live to their 80th birthday. To celebrate, we used to hold a big celebration called Pal-sun Janchi. 60 years are also symbolic because they mark a full cycle of the East Asian calendar. We hold a feast to celebrate a person's 60th birthday, known as Hwan-gap. This year is an opportunity to reflect on the past, assess the present, and consider the future of Korea's security at this inflection point in world history.

Let me begin with Korea's relationship with Japan. For thousands of years, Korea preserved its independence between the competing spheres of influence cast by China and Japan. In the 1590s, two Japanese invasions devastated Korea. In the 1890s, Imperial Japan started "the First Sino-Japanese War." The war was fought on the Korean Peninsula and Japanese assassins killed Korean Empress Myeongseong in 1895 at Gyeongbok Palace. It led to the 1905 Eulsa Treaty and formal annexation in 1910.

For the next 36 years, from 1910 to 1945, Imperial Japan exploited Korea. In World War Two, millions of Korean men were drafted to be sent to Japan's military frontlines. According to Professor Chong-Sik Lee of the University of Pennsylvania, about 200,000 Korean women were forced to become "comfort women" for Japanese soldiers. Girls as young as fourteen were taken to the "comfort" stations. When the United States finally dropped atomic bombs on Japan to end the war in 1945, 40,000 Koreans working at factories in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were also killed.

Thanks to America's victory in 1945, the Japanese occupation of Korea ended. It took 20 years for South Korea to normalize diplomatic relations with Japan in 1965. Many Koreans opposed the government's decision to establish diplomatic relations with Japan and demonstrated on the streets violently.

Despite 60 years of relations, there continue to be many points of friction in our relationship. On historical issues, these include historical revisionism by a group of people in Japan about wartime crimes and the denial of justice to Korean victims, such as comfort women and forced laborers. On territorial issues, we continue to see unwarranted Japanese claims to the South Korean island of Dokdo and unilateral interpretations around the continental shelf.

Throughout my career, I have tried to contribute to improving the Korea-Japan relationship. As a Ph.D. student at Johns Hopkins SAIS, I wrote my dissertation on the Japanese industry. As a politician, I wrote a book in 2002, titled "This I Say to Japan." And as the Vice President of FIFA, I tried to make the 2002 FIFA World Cup co-hosted with Japan.

Over the past 80 years, the Korea-Japan relationship has made important progress despite our troubled history. We have helped each other in times of need. For example, we have provided medical aid after natural disasters, such as the 1995 Kobe Earthquake and the 2011 Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan. Our governments have also evacuated each other's citizens from conflicts such as Libya in 2011 and Sudan and Israel in 2023.

Our people-to-people exchanges now exceed that with China. Last year, 7 million Korean tourists visited Japan, making up a quarter of all foreign tourists, while over two million Japanese tourists visited Korea, making up a fifth of all tourists.

The Asan Institute's annual survey shows that the positive feeling of the Korean public toward Japan is the highest in recent years. Support for closer trilateral security cooperation between South Korea, the United States, and Japan is also over 80 percent.

It has been 80 years since Japanese colonists and troops left the Korean Peninsula. At the end of the Second World War, in Europe, the Allied powers divided Nazi Germany as punishment. But in Asia, they divided Korea, not Japan.

Today, the greatest threat to our country comes not from Japan,

but from the communist and hereditary regime in North Korea. The security threat posed by North Korea is more serious than ever. North Korea has unveiled tactical nuclear weapons and nuclear submarines. It has tested dozens of short and long-range ballistic missiles. It has sent thousands of North Korean soldiers to the frontlines against Ukraine. It evades sanctions and steals billions of dollars through cyberattacks.

If we want to overcome the challenge posed by North Korea supported by China and Russia, we better be prepared to "Think the Unthinkable." Last year, I claimed that "We better begin laying the groundwork for the redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons."

Recently, senior American politicians and experts have become more supportive of the redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons. Senator Roger Wicker of Mississippi, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has proposed examining the redeployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons to the Western Pacific. The United States still has

over 100 nuclear bombs deployed in Europe.

Our concern begins with recognizing the reality that North Korea has broken its promises under the Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, signed in December 1991. Under these circumstances, we need stronger collective security measures to deter aggression and miscalculation by North Korea. The relevant question we can ask is whether Russia would have invaded Ukraine if it had been part of NATO.

The United States and its allies need to show credible resolve to deter North Korean, Chinese, and Russian military adventurism. It is time for an Asian version of NATO. We may call it the Indo-Pacific Treaty Organization, IPTO. It could include South Korea, Japan, Australia, the Philippines, and India.

This year's Asan Plenum is an opportunity to reflect on 80 years of Korea's independence and 60 years of Korea-Japan relations. During our Plenum today, we will discuss Korea's relations with its neighbors, visions for Northeast Asia, the emerging security architecture, new faces of war, new horizons of economic security, and North Korea's nuclear threat. I am delighted that we have with us experts from many countries.

I hope that our discussions today will help us find solutions to prevent tensions from erupting into conflict.

Thank you very much for sharing your insight and wisdom.

Congratulatory Remarks

Cho Tae-yul
Foreign Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ROK

Distinguished speakers and guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Let me start by offering my congratulations on this year's Asan Plenum. I thank the Asan Institute for inviting me to speak this morning. For well over a decade, the Plenum has been providing much-needed thought leadership on how best to navigate the enormous challenges facing this region and beyond.

As the theme of this gathering, "80 Years of Independence and 60 Years of Korea-Japan Normalization" reminds us, Korea celebrates 80 years of independence this year. When Korea regained its sovereignty in 1945, the world was emerging from the turmoils of World War II. History has taught us how devastating the endgame can be for the world when the powerful narrowly pursue their naked self-interest at the expense of the common good.

The determination not to repeat the tragedy of the first half of the 20th century paved the way to a new post-war order. It was an order shaped under U.S. leadership and anchored to the belief that peace and prosperity can best be secured when nations cooperate. Korea has been a key beneficiary of that order.

It was enlightened self-interest that viewed the upholding of the then-freshly minted UN Charter outlawing aggression to be critical. That is what brought the U.S.-led United Nations troops to defend South Korea from the communist invasion in 1950. It was the belief that nations can collectively become more prosperous when cooperating, rather than engaging in unbridled zero-sum competition, that undergirded the multilateral trading system conducive to Korea's export-driven growth model. In short, Korea's survival and prosperity depended on an international order based on enlightened self-interest and the rule of law.

It is increasingly clear, however, that the existing order is falling into disrepair. The world is entering a post-post-Cold War era, but we have yet to define the contours of this new era. The vision of preventing "World War Three" as well as "inadvertent war" is unquestionably noble. This is especially true at a time when the

ongoing war in Ukraine could have unforeseen repercussions in the Indo-Pacific and when tensions in the Indo-Pacific have the potential to spiral out of control.

This laudable goal should not be eclipsed by the recent dynamics that are eerily reminiscent of the naked self-interest and zero-sum approach of the inter-war years. The past should not be a prologue. At the same time, there does need to be a greater acknowledgement that the international order must be more consistent with the long-term interests of its key stakeholders. Only then can the international order be more durable.

In broad terms, what Korea has been seeking to achieve through its diplomacy over the last three years, not least during my tenure as Foreign Minister, is contributing to shaping the positive contours of the post-post-Cold War order, starting from our region and extending beyond.

First, making our alliance with the United States more resilient and further advancing our partnership with Japan. The ROK-U.S. alliance has become more attuned to addressing emerging challenges by broadening its horizons to critical technologies and economic security.

On the more traditional front, we have been strengthening extended deterrence to counter North Korea's growing nuclear and missile threats. The Nuclear Consultative Group provides critical reassurance to Korea, and Dr. Kurt Campbell, who is here with us today, deserves huge credit for his instrumental role in its birth. The second Trump administration has reiterated its ironclad commitment to the defense of Korea and reaffirmed the importance of U.S. extended deterrence commitments.

Korea and the United States are also working closely together to unleash the full potential of our economic partnership, including win-win cooperation in shipbuilding, LNG, and balancing trade. The recent phone call between Acting President Han and President Trump marked a promising start in our journey towards a more resilient and sustainable alliance.

This positive momentum can also be seen in our trilateral cooperation with Japan. Indeed, Secretary Rubio, Minister Iwaya, and I have already held two trilateral meetings since the new Trump administration came to office, issuing joint statements after both meetings. Robust trilateral ROK-U.S.-Japan cooperation is dependent on the health of Korea-Japan bilateral relations. Indeed, the two relationships are analogous to interlocking cogwheels.

Fortunately, no relationship has seen more progress over the past three years than Korea's partnership with Japan. The numbers speak for themselves: Korea and Japan have held 14 bilateral summits and 14 foreign ministerial meetings over those three years. In the face of

common challenges and in light of our shared values and interests, strengthening cooperation between Korea and Japan is not a matter of choice, but a necessity. I am heartened by nascent signs of a growing bipartisan recognition here in Korea about the importance of keeping our relationship with Japan steady.

However, it takes two to tango. To help prevent this hard-won momentum from backsliding, both Korea and Japan should sincerely reflect on what went wrong in the past. It is my firm belief that the best way to shape a brighter future is to move first to change my own thinking and behavior locked in the past, rather than wait until the other side does so, which will certainly prompt the other side to follow suit. This year, Korea and Japan commemorate the 60th anniversary of the normalization of relations with a series of joint events. Successfully building a future-oriented relationship between Korea and Japan will serve as a new engine of peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

Second, strategically managing ties with other neighbors. Korea's bilateral relationship with China has been moving towards a healthier and more mature partnership in recent years. In areas where we see things differently—for example in the South China Sea and the Yellow Sea—we will certainly continue to speak with candor and disagree, as was the case during my meeting with Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Tokyo last month.

Resumed dialogues at all levels and reactivated collaborations in many areas during the last year vindicate our principled approach to China. We will continue to work towards a healthy and balanced relationship with China on the basis of mutual respect, reciprocity, and shared interests. The APEC summit meetings, Korea and China are consecutively hosting this fall and next year, will provide us with another good opportunity to advance this goal.

It is no secret that countries in the region don't want to be in a position of having to choose between Washington and Beijing. Nor do they want to see U.S.-China strategic competition become a zero-sum game. Korea is no exception, even as its foreign policy priority lies first and foremost in the robust alliance with the United States, which even China does not contest. So, in many ways, I believe our

engagement with China aligns with U.S. interests.

When Korea spearheaded the resumption of the Korea-Japan-China trilateral cooperation from its dormancy last year, it was partly guided by the view that Korea and Japan's active engagement can help encourage China's constructive role in upholding peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. Engaging China would also better align with the goal of preventing a war between great powers in the 21st century.

In Russia, there can be no business as usual when the war in Ukraine is still going on and Russia's military cooperation with North Korea is going beyond what was seen even during the Cold War period. Nonetheless, this does not alter the geopolitical reality that Russia remains a key player for the present and future of the Korean Peninsula. This is the reason why we have not let go of communications with Russia even under the current circumstances.

I believe Russia is well aware of the dangers of providing North Korea with cutting-edge military technology. It will hone Pyongyang's ability to directly threaten the United States and embolden Pyongyang to believe that U.S. security can be decoupled from those of its allies in East Asia. Negotiations to end the war in Ukraine must ensure that North Korea is not rewarded for its unlawful military cooperation with Russia. Nor should North Korea be allowed to retain the ability to wreak nuclear destruction on South Korea, even if it professes that it will give up the ability to strike across the Pacific.

Third, strengthening the international order by expanding and deepening multi-layered networks with like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific, NATO, the EU, and the G7. The image of North Korean soldiers fighting against Ukraine on a European battlefield underscores how the security of our two regions is becoming truly intertwined.

In an era of interconnected security, it makes every sense for Korea to strengthen its partnership with NATO. Together with Australia, Japan, and New Zealand, Korea has been invited to participate in four consecutive NATO Foreign Ministers' meetings. In fact, standing side by side with NATO has become such a natural part of our diplomacy

that I felt very much at home at this month's NATO meeting in Brussels. The NATO Summit in June in the Hague will offer the chance to hold the fourth NATO-IP4 summit meeting.

Last November, Korea also launched a strategic dialogue with the EU and signed a security and defense partnership. Slowly but surely, our partnership with the G7 is also evolving. I came away from the G7 Foreign Ministers' meeting in Italy last fall more convinced than ever that the G7 and Korea need to think seriously about next steps. The future of the international order will very much hinge on how countries in the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific step up their cooperation. The G7 provides the anchor to lift nations' determination to step up and more effectively pull their weight. I want to thank Dr. Hamre and many others present here for tirelessly championing the case for Korea's inclusion in the G7.

Fourth, cultivating our partnership with the Global South. For the first time, Korea held summit meetings with the leaders of Pacific Island Countries in 2023 and with Africa last year. We also upgraded our ties with ASEAN last year to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and have actively strengthened our collaboration with friends and partners in Central Asia and Latin America.

It has been a great privilege for me to personally oversee the long-awaited establishment of Korea's diplomatic relations with Cuba in my early weeks as Foreign Minister, and recently with Syria in the

waning weeks. It was also gratifying to see both countries keen to benchmark Korea's development journey from the South to the North.

Finally, playing a bridging role on the global stage as a facilitator, supporter, and initiator. For example, as an elected member of the UN Security Council, we have been taking the lead in placing cybersecurity at the heart of the Council's work and facilitating efforts to further strengthen the UN's peace-building architecture with the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) at its core. Our efforts to facilitate the conclusion of a treaty on plastic pollution, even if unsuccessful, were not an exercise in futility.

Korea has also been a staunch supporter of the Global South in their efforts to achieve the SDGs and take climate action. Unlike other donor countries, our ODA grew by 30 percent in 2024 from 2023 and quadrupled since 2010 levels. Together with other partners, we have also initiated efforts to help establish new international norms in areas like AI by hosting the AI Seoul Summit and the 2nd Summit on Responsible AI in the Military Domain last year.

Ladies and gentlemen, in six weeks' time, a new administration will be taking office in Korea. I trust that the incoming administration, too, will recognize that shaping the rules of the post-post-Cold War order is not something that can or should be done by a concert of great powers. Others with stakes in the system, too, must step up. That is why Korea has increasingly been shouldering roles and responsibilities commensurate with its weight over the past three years. The core lines of effort that I have outlined have been serving as Korea's compass for doing so. We have been tackling immediate challenges while simultaneously navigating through the longer-term tectonic shifts in the geopolitical landscape. And we have been doing so in a manner true to Korea's national interests and true to our deeply-held ideals. I sincerely hope that with bipartisan support, this will continue to be the case in the new administration.

Thank you.

Congratulatory Remarks

Mizushima Koichi
Ambassador,
Embassy of Japan
in Korea

Good morning, distinguished guests, participants, ladies, and gentlemen. I am Mizushima Koichi, Ambassador of Japan to the Republic of Korea. First of all, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations on the Asan Plenum 2025, themed "80 Years of Independence and 60 Years of Korea-Japan Normalization." The Asan Plenum has provided a forum for the frank exchange of opinions, bringing together leaders and experts from Korea and abroad. It is also an important opportunity for international networking.

In this relation, I would like to express my respect for the efforts of Honorary Chairman Chung Mong Joon, Chairman Yoon Young-kwan, and all the other members of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies who have worked diligently to develop this forum. I would appreciate that you have organized today's forum in a very timely manner.

The Republic of Korea is an important neighboring country for Japan, with which we should cooperate as partners in addressing various challenges in the international community. Over the past six decades, through the efforts of predecessors, exchanges between Japan and the Republic of Korea have grown both in quality and quantity, with particularly notable increases in recent years.

Following the significant progress in Japan-ROK relations in 2023, facilitated by the leadership of both nations, 2024 has witnessed a further increase in exchanges at both governmental and private levels, including interactions among the leaders of our countries. On the political front, since agreeing to resume "shuttle diplomacy" in 2023, former Prime Minister Kishida visited the Republic of Korea three times and held 12 face-to-face summit meetings, including those held in third countries.

Prime Minister Ishiba also held a teleconference immediately after assuming his office in October last year, and face-to-face summit meetings were held in Laos and Peru. On January 13 this year, Foreign Minister Iwaya visited Korea and held a meeting with Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul. It was the second high-level visit to Korea since the political turmoil in Korea occurred last December, following the visit by the U.S. Secretary of State.

In the meeting, the two emphasized that the importance of Japan-ROK relations remains unchanged, and that trilateral cooperation among Japan, the ROK, and the United States should be further enhanced in such areas as the Indo-Pacific, economic security, as well as policies toward North Korea. The two ministers met again in March in Tokyo. They confirmed that it serves both countries' strategic interests to maintain and progress the positive atmosphere

of Japan-ROK relations, and to further strengthen the trilateral cooperation among the three countries of Japan, the ROK, and the United States.

In the economic field, our bilateral ties continue to strengthen. There are over 2,700 Japanese companies doing business in the ROK. Last year, Japan ranked first for foreign investment in the ROK. As for people-to-people exchanges, the number of people traveling between our two countries reached more than 12 million last year. This is the highest number ever recorded.

While political activities in Korea are gearing up for the presidential election, the international situation, in particular the strategic environment surrounding Japan and Korea, is getting increasingly uncertain. I do believe that as the domestic and international situations become more and more complex, the importance of Japan-Korea cooperative relations continues to grow.

Amid these complexities, neither country has any room to exhaust its energy in contending with the other. Rather, we should focus our energies on cooperation in solving various challenges together. Japan will continue its peaceful path as it has over the last 80 years, and remain committed to contributing to the peace, stability, and prosperity of the world in cooperation with the ROK. Just like the catchphrase for the 60th anniversary of the normalization of our relations, "Hand in hand, toward a better future," let us walk together as partners toward a brighter future.

In conclusion, I would like to once again express my deepest respect to the organizers, distinguished speakers, and all participants attending this event. I hope that today's discussions will contribute to solving various challenges faced by the international community and to building a better future for Japan, Korea, and the world.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Keynote Speech

Kurt Campbell
Chairman and
Co-Founder,
The Asia Group

I would like to thank the Honorary Chairman, Chairman Yoon, and the entire Asan team, a wonderful group that has hosted us with such graciousness today. Foreign Minister, Ambassador, and all the friends of Korea gathered here, I believe I can speak for everyone in saying that we are thrilled to be here. This is an extraordinarily challenging time, and we gather at a moment when our reflections are of critical importance as we work to chart a course for the period ahead.

Before we get started, I do want to remind all of us of the passing of a dear friend last week, and I raise this because it has strategic importance for us as we think about the way forward. Richard Armitage died last week. He was a great friend of Asia, a great friend of the Republic of Korea, and a strong supporter of our alliances and partnerships. I want to begin with this because, although Rich would hate it, in truth, history will reflect upon him as a great and grand strategist. Now, he would dislike that characterization. That is not how he thought about himself. He saw himself as a very practical person. But in fact, the school of diplomacy that he led, which started off quite small, has come to dominate the formulation and execution of American foreign policy. Let me say just a few words about that.

For almost 30 years, there were a number of groups that thought about and reflected on American foreign policy, particularly in Asia, but essentially, there were two dominant schools. There is one school that is extraordinarily powerful and elite, and it has captured the attention of business groups and other strategists in the United States and around the world. And these people were primarily focused on building a critical relationship with China, and they thought that that relationship was dominant, and frankly, all the other relationships in Asia were secondary.

There was another, much smaller group led by Rich Armitage that engaged many of us in this room, including John Hamre, Victor Cha, Randall Schriver, and I would put myself in this group as well. We made a different argument that the most important way to preserve peace and stability, to advance American interests in Asia, and indeed to engage China, was to work with allies and partners in what we now refer to as alliance management.

It is the former group that worked with China in a prestigious way. You get to sit on the stuffed chairs and reflect on the French Revolution. The folks who worked on the maintenance of allied partnerships had to deal with extraordinarily difficult and detailed matters: the operational dynamics of our forward-deployed forces, challenges associated with operational issues, and highly specific work that was essentially about the functioning of our alliance systems in Japan and Korea, in particular.

I think it would be fair to say that most of the people who labored in this group, many with military or intelligence backgrounds, did it in the shadows. It was not high profile. It was often unrewarding, often dealing with things that were politically challenging in several of these countries. But what we have seen over time is that this relatively small group in the United States has now become the dominant foreign policy group in terms of how we think of the world, particularly the Indo-Pacific. And that is no small feat, and that is largely due to the indefatigable efforts of people like Rich Armitage.

I must tell you that the thing I am proudest of, when I look back over the last four years, and I say this even though I do not generally like when people list all the positive things that happened during their own tenure, is that there are a few points worth underscoring. When President Biden came into office four years ago, there was a widespread perception, clearly in China and in other places, that the United States was in a state of rapid decline, literally hurtling into decline, and that we were no longer capable of managing ourselves. We were not making the necessary investments.

Through enormous, mostly bipartisan efforts, I will say again that this is what I am most proud of. We worked closely with partners on Capitol Hill, on both sides of the aisle, and frankly, with more Republicans than Democrats. Together, we tried to build a strategy focused on substantial investment in the United States, particularly in key technologies. These are places where I

believe we all acknowledge the importance of keeping the high ground: in artificial intelligence, in semiconductors, in robotics, and in quantum computing. These are the key technologies of the twenty-first century. We have worked to create incentives for other countries to invest in the United States. The largest investor in the United States over the last four years has been Korea, in so many important areas, including advanced batteries, technologies, and the like.

But then, as importantly, we mirrored that domestic investment with a series of international engagements, including renewed partnerships with Japan and Korea. We have already talked a little bit about the trilateral engagement. I will say more about that later. The Quad and AUKUS are challenging endeavors, but I believe they will bear fruit and become very important. These efforts include bringing India more fully into the Indo-Pacific and working with countries in Europe.

I will tell you that one of the most exciting developments over the last several years was that the strongest supporters we saw on the international stage for Ukraine, in the face of the brutal invasion by Russia, were found in Asia. Japan and Korea were at the forefront of saying that this aggression would not stand. These were extraordinarily important developments, largely based on the framework that Rich Armitage, Joe Nye, and others pioneered twenty or twenty-five years ago.

That struggle between the two approaches largely coexisted for some time. But the debate between those who believed that U.S.–China relations were the most important, and those who believed that alliances and partnerships were the most important has now been settled. It is clearly the latter that is the dominant group in the formulation and execution of American foreign policy.

Today, in the United States, we face a different challenge. I would say, generally speaking, that there are two groups vying for dominance in how we think about the Indo-Pacific and the world. One group, which is truly bipartisan and broad, believes that maintaining strong alliances and partnerships is very much in the strategic interests of the United States. Then there is another group that argues it is better for the United States to think about itself largely in isolation, focusing on and placing its own interests above those of others. This is often referred to as "America First," but in fact, if we are not careful, it will turn into "America Alone."

And one of the reasons that I am here, and one of the reasons I am so grateful for MJ, is his strong commitment to ensuring that the United States continues on the path of committing to strong allies and partnerships. I will say to you quite directly that the battle for hearts and minds on these issues has only just begun in the United States. These are not settled issues, and the voices of key allies and partners, like Japan and Korea, in this ongoing debate are going to be central going forward.

So what does that mean going forward? I will say that, as proud as I am of some of the work that has been done over the course of the last couple of years, I will also say that it is not nearly enough. It was not ambitious enough, and we are going to have to do more going forward. Let me tell you why. The United States has faced many challenges throughout its history. But through every one of those challenges, including the Second World War and the Cold War, we had the internal capacity, both industrial and technological, to take on any challenge on the global stage.

Now, I will tell you that it is different from China. They have made remarkable investments

technologically, in manufacturing, robotics, and shipbuilding, as well as undertaking the largest military buildup in history. I will posit to you that the United States cannot take this challenge alone. That may be controversial in some quarters, but I think that the logic is unassailable. The only way forward is to double down and work much more closely with allies and partners to take on this challenge. There are going to be some who say no, that we are going to do this by ourselves. That is a recipe for failure. We are going to need to work even more closely, and ever more closely, with allies and partners. Frankly, at the top of that list are both Japan and Korea.

Right now, I think there are a couple of things that are worrisome, among many others, in how Washington thinks about the world. One is a tendency to underestimate China. I will point out that just four years ago, the prevailing view was that the United States was in decline. Now, there is a shift in perception, suggesting that the United States is predominant and that it is China that is vulnerable. I would like to underscore to this audience that many of the things China has invested in will give it enormous power and capacity for the foreseeable future. Yes, they face structural challenges. Yes, they have an aging population. However, many of these issues will not become truly significant for decades. China has an enormous capacity that will affect every element of life and politics in the Indo-Pacific going forward, and we have to take that into account.

I would say that the key point is this: behind closed doors, the Chinese regard the American ability to work with allies and partners as our most significant ticket to the big game. Our ability to convene and engage, frankly, causes some pause in Beijing, and it is something that I believe we need to sustain going forward.

However, we must go deeper. Many of our partnerships with Japan, Korea, and Australia have historical roots, but those roots are often paternalistic. They are sometimes thought of as a tripwire. Increasingly, these partnerships must become much more dynamic. They must become much more equal. We need to share more of our technology. We need to do what we can to build deeper people-to-people contacts with many of these countries. The reason I am here now is to briefly share what I think is a work plan, particularly for the relationship between the United States and the Republic of Korea. I will conclude here, and I hope we will have an opportunity to discuss some of these issues during the day today.

So first of all, as the Minister has indicated, we have an incredibly important election upcoming here in the Republic of Korea. It will be absolutely essential that every community between the United States and the Republic of Korea, not just the leaders, not just the diplomats, but increasingly the business community and the technology community, do what we can to ensure that lines of communication and engagement between the new government and the Trump administration are strong. It is easy in some of these circumstances for previous perceptions or old grudges to influence policymaking. We cannot afford that. We need to ensure that our alliance remains strong. We have to identify a number of areas of common purpose. I am confident we can do this.

The reason we are gathering here, and the reason that the Asan Institute has done so much in this venue, is to ensure that there is a deep societal engagement that continues between the United States and the Republic of Korea. Taking advantage of the immediate period after the election is going to be critical for us, and recognizing and setting a joint agenda so that we understand the areas in which we can work together in technology, military diplomacy, and broader strategic efforts, is going to be critical for us going forward.

It is generally unwelcome. I hear every day across Asia that the tariff negotiations have been challenging. It is unclear what direction they are going in. I will tell you that I am encouraged by the ingenuity and determination that have at least been demonstrated by the initial engagements from the Korean team. They are seeking to use these interactions to try to expand on areas that can be incredibly important going forward. There have been many discussions about enhanced technology and other investments in the United States. That is very welcome to the Trump administration. There is also more defense engagement but also work in areas where the United States clearly needs help.

At the top of that list is shipbuilding. Frankly, the Republic of Korea has the ability to assist a largely moribund effort in the United States. One of the areas of deepest concern is our challenges in shipbuilding, both civilian and military. It is the Republic of Korea that can help us, that can work with us in very productive partnerships. There are a number of areas where I believe these discussions, though difficult and intense, can be channeled in ways that are beneficial to both of our countries and draw us ever closer together. I see that reflected in the strategy of our Korean interlocutors, and I commend them for the work that they have done to date.

Another issue, and we have already heard it discussed, is trilateral engagement between the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. I do not need to tell the Minister or many others

around this room that government is often thankless. It is often challenging. You struggle with issues. You run into roadblocks. There are very rare moments when you do something and think to yourself, this is why I have committed my life, my thinking, and my energy to public service. For me, that moment was Camp David. I will say that for years before that, in both administrations in Japan and the Republic of Korea, I had worked with my team at the White House to try to build bridges between Japan and the Republic of Korea, and frankly, to insert the United States into that dialogue. Historically, it was the view that the United States could not push that. We had to wait to see whether some developments would arise almost organically between Seoul and Tokyo. Frankly, I reject that. I believe it is in the American strategic interest to encourage a closer partnership between Japan and Korea.

When the leaders and the teams gathered at Camp David for a historic summit, it was one of the highlights not only of my career but of my life. I will share just one anecdote from that if you will allow me. You know, it is even hard for someone at the White House to get to Camp David. You have to go through all the security. It is a big challenge. But once you are there, it is idyllic and beautiful. The President agreed that when the Japanese and Korean teams arrived, they would come by Marine One helicopters. They would land there and then go to their cabins before we had a chance to meet. My job was to take a little golf cart to pick up both the Japanese and Korean delegations as they arrived. The surroundings were beautiful, with lovely foliage and winding paths. Marine One, with its elegance, was landing on the lawn, and I was driving up, but the Korean team could not yet see me. This happened with both the Japanese and the Koreans. As I was driving up, and the Korean team got off the helicopter, they were all jumping, giving high-fives because it was so exciting. It was incredibly exciting, and they were taking selfies. Then they saw me coming, and they quickly got all buttoned down and pretended it was no big deal. But it was a big deal for all of us, and it was incredibly exciting. And I must tell you, Minister, I'm so grateful. I know your role in encouraging trilateral engagement to continue. It is vital.

I believe the Trump administration is committed to it, and I am so pleased that it is continuing, not only at the foreign ministry level but also with plans for leader-level engagement going forward. This is of central importance. It is the most important strategic innovation. If we can work together strategically, militarily, and politically, it will have a profound impact on peace and stability in Northeast Asia and will serve as a strong deterrent against provocations from a number of countries, including North Korea and China.

I also want to underscore something. There are discussions underway about somehow bifurcating responsibility. Some are suggesting that Europe should not focus on the Indo-Pacific, and that it should be left to other countries. That is wrong. One of the things we have seen in recent years is a profound and deep engagement between the Indo-Pacific and Europe, and that should continue.

I believe the ties that Korea and Japan have created, not only institutionally with NATO and the European Union, but also with individual states, are to be commended. It is critically important. I believe it is a key metric in the maintenance of peace and stability. The idea that such engagement should be discarded is, in my view, wrong. My great hope is that the ties between Europe and the Indo-Pacific will continue to grow and prosper.

I want to speak for a moment about something that is close to the heart of MJ. I want to talk about deterrence on the Korean Peninsula and across Asia, generally. One of the greatest achievements of American foreign policy, which is rarely discussed and frankly little understood, is that over the course of nearly thirty years, dozens of states that had the capability to build nuclear weapons have chosen not to. They have chosen not to largely because of confidence in the United States and confidence in its deterrent posture.

However, there are developments that are now challenging some of the assumptions that

underlie this confidence in the United States. One such challenge is the nuclear saber-rattling that President Putin has engaged in during the war in Ukraine, suggesting that he would contemplate the use of nuclear weapons under certain circumstances.

There are ongoing dangerous provocations on the part of North Korea, and frankly, there is the largest modern nuclear buildup taking place in China, which receives remarkably little consideration. However, it is a major strategic development, and it is playing out in the corridors of power across Asia. Many countries are asking what the United States can and should do.

I am grateful for the work that the United States has done with Korea in enhancing certain engagements and underscoring our commitment to deterrence. My own view is that, over time, we are going to need to do more, and we are going to need to involve our key allies, Japan and the Republic of Korea, more directly in decision-making around military and nuclear use, much in the way we did in Europe during parts of the Cold War. There will be hesitations and resistance to this, but over time, those steps will be essential to prevent nuclear proliferation across Asia, which I believe is in no one's interest and could, frankly, be deeply destabilizing. What MJ and the Asan Institute have underscored is that attention to deterrence and forward-deployed American capabilities is essential. This is not something that can be left to the sidelines. A robust nuclear umbrella over our allies and partners is an essential component of peace and stability going forward.

I also want to take a moment to share something that I hear privately from allies and partners across the Indo-Pacific, and that is a desire to see appropriate diplomacy between the United States and China. I will tell you that, at the current moment, there are virtually no lines of communication open. I do not believe that this is in our strategic interest. It is essential that two great powers at least have the ability to engage and walk away from potential areas of miscalculation.

I am not of the view that we face immediate risks of a bolt from the blue from China. I believe the most likely challenge we face is inadvertence and miscalculation. We need those lines of communication open to prevent incidents and accidents from escalating. I will also tell you that we are now operating in a system in Asia in which our forces are more wired for escalation than they were just ten or fifteen years ago.

I will also say that I am concerned we have taken some steps, particularly with respect to the economic side of our relationship with China, without taking the necessary preliminary measures. We have not stockpiled enough. We have not taken steps to build the capabilities needed to withstand the challenges that will come from China as this standoff intensifies. In that environment, I believe a degree of diplomacy will be essential, not only on diplomatic and military issues but also on economic matters. My hope is that, through the assistance of private interlocutors and other countries, both China and the United States will find a way to de-escalate and continue diplomacy at this critical point.

Lastly, one of the things we have heard so far is the remarkable activity, particularly by Korea, on the global stage. I have worked with Korea on the efforts they have undertaken in the Pacific and in Africa. While most aid budgets are being reduced, including in the United States, Korea is one of the only industrialized democracies where aid and assistance have increased. Korea's engagement in Latin America and Africa is extraordinarily noteworthy. It is an active citizen of the world. We see an increasingly confident and active Korea asserting itself on the global stage. It is time for the Republic of Korea to be more prominently represented in the leading forums of the day. That means inclusion in the G7 at some point. That means participation in the Quad. Korea needs that representation. It will send a message both to the world and to its own people that its contributions are deeply valued.

I want to thank all of you for the opportunity to be back in Korea. It is great to be here outside of government. I look forward to further discussions. Nothing could be more important than ensuring that our trilateral engagement and the partnership between the United States and the Republic of Korea remain strong during the very dynamic period ahead.

MJ, Asan team, thank you very much for this opportunity.

Plenary Session 1

Date | April 23, 2025
Time | 10:10-11:40

South Korea and Its Neighbors

Moderator

Karen House
Harvard University

Speakers

Victor Cha
Center for Strategic and International Studies

Jia Qingguo
Peking University

Lee Sook Jong
Sungkyunkwan University

Nagamine Yasumasa
Anderson Mori & Tomotsune

Shin Kak Soo
NEAR Foundation

Soeya Yoshihide
Keoi University

Rapporteur

Francesca Frassineti
The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

Plenary Session 1, titled "South Korea and Its Neighbors," discussed South Korea's foreign policy 80 years since independence. The session was moderated by Ms. Karen House, a senior fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Ms. House invited the session's six distinguished speakers to reflect on what they thought were major issues that South Korea should be dealing with its neighbors. A key point of discussion was the role of alliances in shaping South Korea's relations with its neighbors. Most participants noted that the ROK-U.S. alliance has been central to how Seoul has dealt with its neighbors, including supporting closer ties with Japan. By contrast, some participants expressed concerns that South Korea's alliance with Washington could negatively affect its relations with China in a zero-sum manner.

Dr. Jia Qingguo, former dean and a professor at the School of International Studies of Peking University, noted that over the past eight decades, South Korea achieved remarkable accomplishments, becoming a modern and prosperous country and a vibrant democracy, "earning well-deserved respect and admiration on the global stage." As Dr. Jia reminded the audience, South Korea and China established diplomatic relations in 1992, and since then, they have become major trading partners. He underscored that this bilateral relationship has progressed rapidly, and it is now underpinned by a high volume of people-to-people exchanges and visits. Dr. Jia noted that over the years, both countries have benefited tremendously from their mutual ties and that they have managed to handle temporary


Karen House


Victor Cha


Jia Qingguo


Lee Sook Jong


Nagamine Yasumasa


Shin Kak Soo


Soeya Yoshihide

rifts through concerted efforts, leading to more stable ties. Having said that, Dr. Jia warned that the China-South Korea bilateral relationship finds itself at another crossroads given the tremendous pressure stemming from the U.S.-China rivalry. While a strong desire exists for mutually beneficial and stable relationships, Dr. Jia noted that "many people on both sides believe that the two countries' respective policies are against each other." In other words, in China, some view the ROK as a threat due to its alliance with the United States and thus push for a more assertive stance towards Seoul to counter the perceived U.S. threat. In turn, Dr. Jia believes that in South Korea, there are many who advocate for anti-China policies based on the fact that, as a U.S. ally, the ROK is perceived as involved in the U.S. efforts to counter the perceived China threat. For Dr. Jia, these groups share "a misguided belief" that confrontation between Seoul and Beijing is unavoidable. Reflecting on whether China and South Korea can sustain stable and mutually beneficial relations in the years to come, Dr. Jia argued that the shared interests and high stakes involved strongly suggest that they not only can, but they must. However, he noticed that the future of bilateral relations also depends on the bold and wise choices that these countries will make.

Prof. Lee Sook Jong, a distinguished professor at the Graduate School of Governance at Sungkyunkwan University, emphasized that when we talk about South Korea's neighbors, we used to refer to the "big four great powers" surrounding South Korea, namely China, Japan, Russia, and the United States. However, Prof. Lee noted that "the term 'surrounding powers' is no longer used so often, which underscores that South Korea has emerged as a very influential partner at the regional and international level." South Korea was also able to catch up thanks to sustained

Plenary Session 1
South Korea
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bilateral ties with the United States, which continue to be extremely important for South Korea's security. Given the significance of the ROK-U.S. relationship, Prof. Lee expressed her disappointment with the current U.S. administration's unilateral and transactional approach exemplified in the decision to impose reciprocal tariffs. As for Japan, Prof. Lee believed that Tokyo is an important bilateral as well as regional partner for Seoul, as they share liberal values as stable democracies. Based on the many commonalities, Prof. Lee encouraged South Korea to join forces with Japan as well as the United States in the context of their trilateral cooperation framework to let the liberal international order prevail in Northeast Asia as well as globally. Regarding China, Prof. Lee believed that a confrontational attitude towards Beijing is very detrimental to South Korea's interests. In this regard, she shared Dr. Jia's concerns regarding growing anti-Chinese sentiments among some cohorts of the South Korean public. For this reason, Prof. Lee welcomed recent efforts to reinvigorate collaboration between South Korea and China. As for South Korea's relations with Russia, she noted that things have become very complicated following Russia's aggression against Ukraine, however, she stressed that "more should be done to discourage greater collaboration between North Korea and Russia." To conclude her remarks, Prof. Lee aptly noted that South Korea's neighbors are not limited to East Asia but extend beyond this region thanks to the global outreach of South Korea's soft power and popular culture products.

Ambassador Nagamine Yasumasa, an Attorney-at-Law and Of Counsel at Anderson Mori & Tomotsune, recalled his years as the Japanese Ambassador to South Korea (2016-2019). He noted that towards the end of his tenure, the South Korea-Japan bilateral relationship soured due to the issue of forced laborers. Following the inauguration of the conservative government in South Korea and the lifting of the pandemic-induced constraints, the downward spiral stopped, leading to government-to-government and people-to-people relations being restored. Ambassador Nagamine praised both sides' efforts to move forward in their relationship following the South Korean announcement of a foundation to compensate victims of forced labor during Japanese colonization, which was welcomed by the Japanese government. Finally, Ambassador Nagamine reiterated the Japanese government's willingness and commitment to support the current positive trend in its relations with South Korea, looking forward to working with the next administration after the June 3 elections. Adding to that, Ambassador Nagamine reiterated the significance of people-to-people exchanges between South Korea and Japan, which are remarkably strong and can be useful in overcoming temporary dips in diplomatic relations.

Ambassador Shin Kak Soo, Deputy Chairman of the NEAR Foundation, stressed how South Korea has recently dealt with severe domestic and international constraints. Domestically, Ambassador Shin expected that the outcome of the June 3 elections would have a significant influence on the direction of South Korea's foreign policy. According to Ambassador Shin, if the Democratic Party candidate prevails, his administration is expected to pursue "better ties with China and dialogue with North Korea at the expense of strong ties with the United States and Japan." On the other hand, if the People Power Party candidate wins "against all odds," the Yoon administration's foreign policy agenda will be largely maintained. Beyond the domestic realm, Ambassador Shin mentioned that South Korea has been facing challenges stemming from North Korea's nuclear program and its strategic collaboration with Moscow, deepening U.S.-China strategic competition, and the Trump administration's undermining of key elements of the liberal international order.

Against this backdrop, Ambassador Shin argued that the next South Korean administration will have to navigate such constraints in a "subtle, creative and effective manner." The most difficult task pertains to the ROK-U.S. alliance, given Washington's likely expectations that South Korea increases its contribution to national as well as regional security. Ambassador Shin also pointed out that the ROK-U.S. bilateral economic ties will be even more affected by disruptive tech wars. Faced with Trump's transactional diplomacy, Seoul should be ready to negotiate a "balanced and win-win deal that can accommodate U.S. needs while preserving South Korea's national interest and prosperity."

Moreover, Ambassador Shin reiterated that South Korea should expand its range of diplomatic interlocutors to uphold the liberal international order. This includes strengthening ties with Japan as well as NATO and enhancing intra-regional partnerships and minilaterals with other countries in the Indo-Pacific region, such as New Zealand and Australia. Similarly, South Korea should reach out to the Global South, particularly Southeast Asia, to provide alternatives to the great power rivalry. In conclusion, Ambassador Shin hoped that the next ROK administration would work on preserving stable ties with Beijing while continuing to pursue "principled diplomacy" on issues such as South Korea's alliance with the United States, freedom of navigation, and the promotion of human rights, including for North Korea's asylum seekers.

Prof. Soeya Yoshihide, Professor Emeritus in the Faculty of Law at Keio University, noted that the ROK-Japan relationship has come a long way since diplomatic normalization. While sharing Professor Lee's dislike of the term "four great powers," Prof. Soeya argued that both South Korea and Japan are surrounded by three great powers, namely the United States, China, and Russia. Prof. Soeya noted that South Korea and Japan share a global agenda as vibrant democracies and developed economies. Moreover, he pointed out that South Korea and Japan are parts of two different minilateral cooperation frameworks, namely the ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral cooperation and the ROK-Japan-China framework. According to him, "regional stability and prosperity can tremendously improve if strategic alignment between these two frameworks is achieved through greater ROK-Japan cooperation."

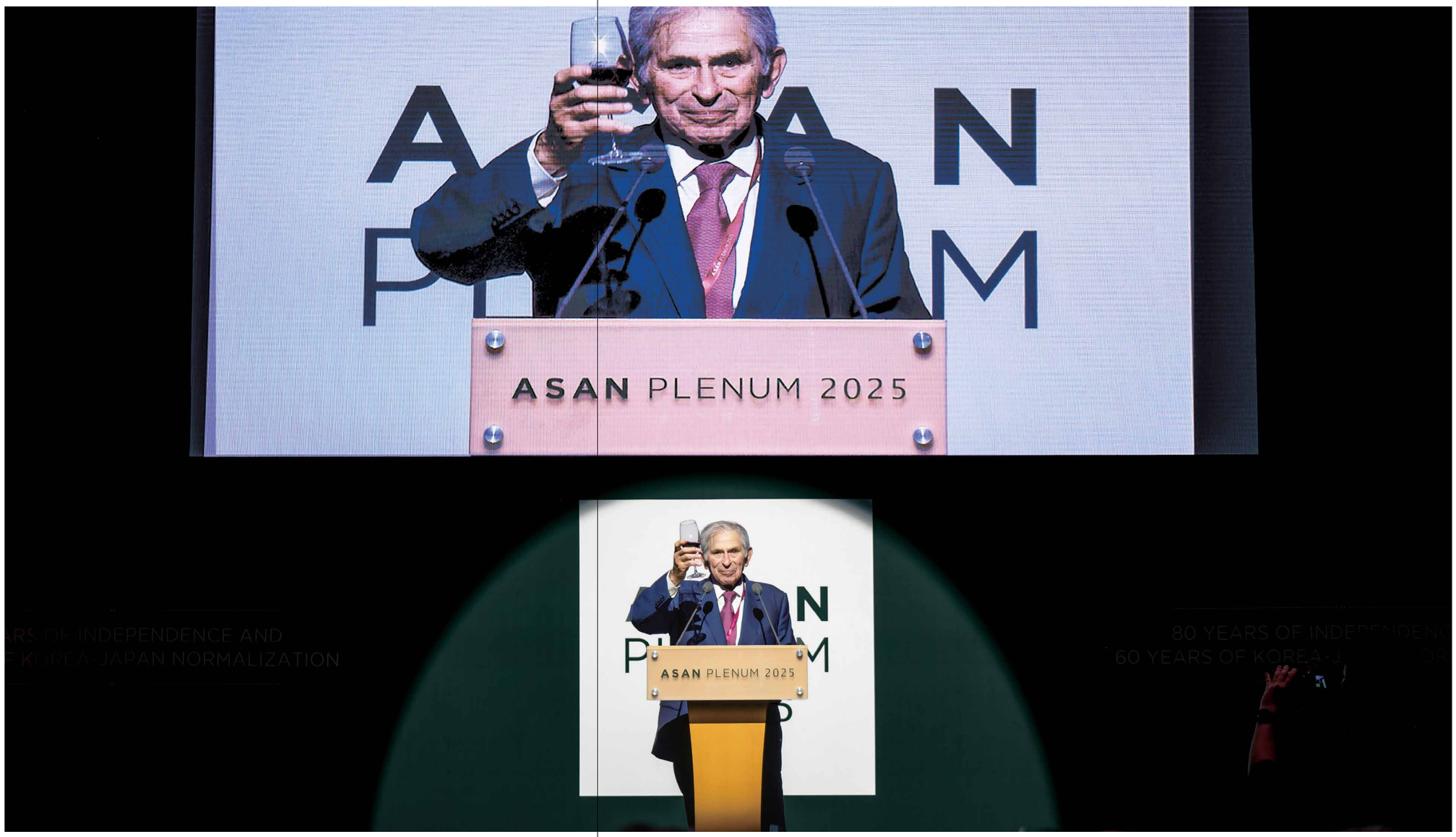
He concluded by saying that South Korea and Japan should continue to cooperate with other like-minded countries to protect multilateral institutions and uphold the free and open international order amidst worrying signals coming from the Trump administration regarding its commitment to U.S. partners in the Indo-Pacific region. On the other hand, he stressed the fact that Japan and South Korea should keep close and regular contact as well as dialogue with policymakers and institutions in the United States to handle the repercussions of the growing alignment among Russia, North Korea, and China.

Dr. Victor Cha, president of the Geopolitics and Foreign Policy Department and Korea Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), opened his remarks by sharing his memory of the late Richard Armitage, who served as Deputy Secretary of State from 2001 to 2005, as one of the staunchest supporters of the ROK-U.S. alliance. Dr. Cha's comments then focused on the United States as "South Korea's most important neighbor," using the "America First" logic to explain why the United States needs to support rather than decouple from the ROK-U.S. alliance.

First, many say that President Trump has a transactional approach toward the U.S. partners and allies. By adopting this same logic, Dr. Cha argued that the Trump administration should have an interest in continuing to invest in the relationship with U.S. allies because they are paying "incredible dividends that even a transactional administration can see as important." Second, Dr. Cha noted that the Trump administration should continue to invest in trilateralism with South Korea and Japan because it provides the United States leverage towards China and the so-called "autocratic axis." Third, he believed that President Trump's antipathy towards European dominance in multilateral institutions should lead Washington to encourage South Korea to play a much bigger role in global governance, whether by being included in the G7 or the Quad. Furthermore, since the "America First" policy always talks about greater burden sharing among the U.S. allies, according to Dr. Cha, the U.S. administration and the next South Korean government should encourage greater synergies in defense cooperation among allies in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. All the more so, given the widespread consensus in Europe that its security is interlinked with security in the Indo-Pacific. In that sense, these joint efforts between partners in Europe and Asia can build upon the groundwork laid by the Biden administration in terms of minilaterals to prepare in case of a potential American retrenchment.

LUNCHEON

Date	April 23, 2025
Time	11:40-13:10
Place	Grand Salon Namsan I+II



Luncheon Speech

Paul Wolfowitz
Distinguished Visiting Fellow,
Hoover Institution,
Stanford University

It is wonderful to be here again for another remarkable Asan Plenum in this beautiful and modern city. Let me begin by thanking our host, Dr. MJ Chung, whom I am proud to call a friend, as do so many in this room. Let me ask for applause to recognize and thank him for all that he has done to strengthen Korea's role in the world, for the benefit of all of us.

Almost twenty years ago, MJ—if he will forgive my informality—invited me to join him, along with Dr. Feulner, former Foreign Minister Dr. Han Sung-joo, and several other scholars of international relations with an interest in Korea, to meet to discuss his vision for what eventually became Asan.

Why, it was discussed, was another foreign policy think tank needed, when there were already so many others? And the consensus in our group was that "the world increasingly needs Korea and Korea needs the support of the Free World, and that means that the world needs to understand Korea better."

Nevertheless, there was no guarantee of success or that people would travel all the way to Korea for meetings like this one. What

if people are invited, and no one comes? But Dr. Chung is bold and willing to take risks on behalf of ventures, particularly ones that are important for his country or for international security more generally.

So here we are, 17 years later. 300-350 participants from 58 different countries are here to listen and discuss issues concerning security in East Asia with some 50 panelists from eight different countries. That's a tribute to Dr. Chung's vision and his willingness to put his energy and resources behind what he thinks is important for his fellow Koreans and the larger world. It's what his father had to do on a larger scale to build one of the most remarkable companies in the world. Dr. Chung has said himself, "We forget how much of a struggle it is to keep a business afloat," or in his father's words, you need to "pour all your blood, sweat, and tears into trying to make it succeed."

Asan's success is also a measure of how much South Korea has grown in importance from the time when the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff declared it was a country not worth defending. I have to add, parenthetically, I don't know what on earth made them think that or made them think such a decision was within the competence of our military rather than the president himself. But it wasn't only the generals who got Korea wrong. The economists did as well.

Sometime in the early 1950s, shortly after the devastating Korean War, one economic expert described South Korea as "a hopeless basket case" with no natural resources and burdened with a Confucian ethic which teaches that gentlemen don't work, and wear white clothes and grow long fingernails to show their contempt for manual labor.

Well, it turns out that natural resources, like energy or minerals, are more often a curse than a blessing. Wealth that is dug or pumped out of the ground, without the addition of human creativity, can easily become a source of conflict and corruption. Fortunately, for all of us who are privileged to be able to attend Plenums like this one, and other activities of the Asan Foundation, Dr. Chung's father, the late and great Chung Ju-yung, did not get

that message about manual labor. Despite—or perhaps because of, that Confucian ethic, to which the success of so many Asian economies is now attributed.

To use a metaphor from the sport of boxing, for seventy years South Korea has been "punching above its weight" for decade after decade since the end of the devastating Korean War. It might be said that the ROK started in the lightweight class, or even the bantamweight class, but today it is now decisively a heavyweight. It has a per capita income that ranks it among the top thirty in the world, and a GDP that ranks it number 12. South Korea's economic strength, if combined with Japan's, would make their combined GDP the 3rd largest economy in the world.

Those are the two most important U.S. security allies in the region that we most fear could come under the thumb of communist China, and the combined GDP of the United States and those two is almost twice as large as China's. Combined defense spending is only 2.5 percent of that total GDP, and both Japan and Korea need to consider doing more, not to fight a war, but to prevent one. What Ronald Reagan used to say about nuclear war could also be said about a long war in Asia: it cannot be won and must not be fought, which means that it must be deterred.

One of the keys to South Korea's remarkable performance has been its focus on education. It now ranks very high in the percentage of high school graduates, college graduates, and science PhDs. Perhaps most surprising of all is South Korea's emergence as a heavyweight in the soft power game. It appears that the impact of K-pop on popular music is comparable to the impact of the Beatles back in my youth.

Of course, there was no Netflix back in my day, but who would have predicted that some South Korean movies would make it onto the best viewer list for Netflix, with 100 million viewers, films that excel not only with dramatic screenplays and outstanding acting but also in their camera work, lighting, and composition with movies which offer stunning views of the landscapes of this beautiful country.

I confess that I'm more impressed by Korean cinema than by K-pop and that I have "binge-watched" several Korean movies, including "Crash Landing on You," "Vincenzo," and "Mr. Sunshine." That "expert" who has so badly underestimated Korea's economic promise, would be astonished by how today South Korea is excelling not only economically but also culturally on the global stage.

Perhaps the biggest and most important surprise of all has been how South Korea, along with the Philippines, Taiwan, and more recently Indonesia, have managed peaceful transitions from dictatorships to democracy, demonstrating, as I believe, that what is called Western values are universal values and that people of Asian cultures value personal and political freedom, despite what some of the proponents of so-called Asian values appear to claim.

It's noteworthy that three of those four democratic transitions happened before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the transitions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. And as Dr. Chung has pointed out, some of the demand for change in China in 1989 may have been inspired by the Seoul Olympics.

From working closely with Secretary of State Shultz, President Reagan, and my successor as assistant secretary, Gaston Sigur, I know that the United States has been strongly supportive of these Democratic transitions, contrary to what some on the left would like to claim. I know that Reagan and Shultz believed that democratic values weren't only for Westerners, but they belonged to Asians, and specifically to Koreans as well. Although it was a well-kept secret for many years, even before his inauguration as president, Reagan made a dramatic intervention with Chun Doo-hwan, on behalf of Kim Dae-jung.

It may seem odd to be talking about transitions to democracy when President Yoon has just been impeached for attempted abuse of his power. But to this outside observer, the extent to which South Koreans as a whole have managed this crisis, consistent with democratic principles and adherence to the rule of law, actually speaks very well for Korean democracy.

And despite his failings, former President Yoon left one important legacy which I hope will not be thrown out with him, and that was his outreach to Japan, a move that paved the way for President Biden's trilateral summit at Camp David, thanks I believe to the good work of Kurt Campbell, who is here with us today. That in turn has opened the door to possibly more formal security structures that could help secure peace in this all-important region of the world, where Korea has a leading role to play.

As the world and Korea face some of what MJ himself calls seemingly insurmountable difficulties, let me conclude by quoting from a poem. One of Chung Ju-yung's favorites, from which he was able to draw an important sense of inner peace. It's by a 14th-century Korean poet called "The Green Mountain Tells Me." It concludes with these words: The green mountain tells me to live silently, the open sky tells me to live without blemish, Discard anger, discard greed, Live and depart as the water and the wind.

Concurrent Session 2-1

Date | April 23, 2025
Time | 13:10-14:30

Visions for Northeast Asia

Moderator

Victor Cha
Center for Strategic and International Studies

Speakers

Kim Sung-han
Korea University

Andrey Kortunov
Former Academic Director
Russian International Affairs Council

Nakabayashi Mieko
Waseda University

Sheila Smith
Council on Foreign Relations

Su Hao
China Foreign Affairs University

Rapporteur

Yang Xiangfeng
Lingnan University

Concurrent Session 2-1, titled "Visions for Northeast Asia," examined the evolving security dynamics in the region amidst ever-intensifying global volatility and uncertainty. Undoubtedly, on everyone's mind was Donald Trump, who had just returned to the White House two months prior. With his ongoing global trade war, featuring a standoff with China where both sides have escalated punitive tariffs to over 100 percent, and his pivot toward Russia at the expense of Ukraine and European allies, Trump is widely seen as upending the existing international order. What future lies ahead for Northeast Asia? Appropriately, the session spotlighted influential voices from each of the major powers in the region. Dr. Victor Cha of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) opened the session by questioning the premise that there is a single vision for the regional order.

Speaking first, Prof. Kim Sung-han, a professor at Korea University and a former National Security Adviser, drew a distinction between idealistic and realistic visions. From his perspective, a feasible vision should primarily aim to manage tensions on the peninsula through negotiations with North Korea to denuclearize it and prevent an all-out war. Beyond the peninsula, he argued that South Korea should actively promote trilateral cooperation in the forms of the AJK (America-Japan-Korea) and CJK (China-Japan-Korea) triangles. His clear preference, however, was for the former. He pointed out that the Camp David summit attended by South Korean, American, and Japanese leaders in August 2023 prompted China to initiate the resumption of the CJK summit, which was eventually held in Seoul in May 2024. Looking ahead, Prof. Kim anticipated a


Victor Cha


Kim Sung-han


Andrey Kortunov


Nakabayashi Mieko


Sheila Smith


Su Hao

prolonged great power competition between the United States and China. He also expressed optimism that South Korea would be in a position to assist the United States while hoping that competition and cooperation might coexist in Northeast Asia.

Dr. Andrey Kortunov, former Academic Director of the Russian International Affairs Council, noted a resonance between the 60th year of ROK-Japan cooperation, the theme of the 2025 Plenum, and the rebuilding of relations between Russia and Ukraine, now that negotiations to end the Ukraine war are already underway. Regarding Russia's position in Northeast Asia, in the

Concurrent Session 2-1
Visions for Northeast Asia

status quo ante, Russia was a minority shareholder who wanted to preserve its place by maintaining a working relationship with North Korea with an eye toward denuclearization. As Russia revitalized its alliance with Pyongyang and North Korea dispatched soldiers to the war front in 2024, North Korea became a much more important partner for Russia. However, there were limits to how far the bilateral relationship could go. First, Russia remains concerned about nuclear proliferation. Second, Moscow would not want to "irritate" China, knowing that China places a higher priority on the peninsula and wields greater influence. The thawing of Russia-U.S. relations under Donald Trump was the third factor that might impact Russia's posture toward North Korea, as well as the region as a whole.

Prof. Nakabayashi Mieko of Waseda University lamented the strategic fragmentation currently on full display in the region, which previously focused more on economic growth. Calling for more dialogue and cooperation to address common societal and economic challenges, she stressed the necessity of a rule-based order. The crucial question then arose: who would lead it? The United States, of course, would want Japan to be on its side, but the Japanese public and the business community are somewhat ambivalent. As the Trump administration turns inward, both Japan and China have reached out to their regional neighbors for support. It is high time that we put more emphasis on education and youth-led community building, she said.

Dr. Sheila Smith, John E. Merow Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, cautioned that it is too early to reach a definitive conclusion about what the future might hold. Reflecting on the long arc of the post-World War II international order, she argued that American strategies have largely centered around flashpoints such as the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait. Accordingly, the geopolitical circumstances have fostered two overriding strategic goals for the United States: maintaining military balance and countering the rise of a strategic competitor, and fulfilling security commitments to America's treaty allies, such as South Korea and Japan. The latter has led to the extension of the nuclear umbrella to these major allies in the name of extended deterrence, and a heightened sense of urgency in integrating defense capabilities, as discussed by Kurt Campbell in his keynote speech, in response to the DPRK's nuclear ambitions and China's growing military capabilities. Despite the uncertainties unleashed by Trump, these two goals continue to be central to the way the United States engages with the Northeast Asian region.

Prof. Su Hao, Emeritus Professor at the China Foreign Affairs University, noted a positive shift in the focus of this year's panel discussion compared to last year's Asan Plenum. Back then, discussions were framed around the Northern Triangle, which included China, Russia, and North Korea, pitted against the Southern Triangle, comprising the United States, Japan, and South Korea. In his view, the Chinese vision of international order is multifaceted. The first facet involves hedging and engaging in the security arena, applicable to bilateral relations such as those between China and Japan, and between China and the United States. The second dimension underscores the importance of peaceful coexistence, with an imperative to completely rule out the prospect of war, whether between the United States and China or on the Korean Peninsula. The third dimension places a greater emphasis on economic cooperation rather than military security. In this context, he saw a silver lining in Trump's tariff war, which took the shine off the military edge of American foreign policy. The fourth dimension emphasizes integrated diplomacy that promotes regional cooperation, with the trilateral cooperation between China, Japan, and Korea as a prominent example. Highlighting President Xi Jinping's recent visits to Southeast Asia and his own travels there, Prof. Hao pointed out the ample opportunities for mutually beneficial economic cooperation and multilateralism, not only for China but also for Japan and South Korea. Collectively, Northeast Asian cooperation can manifest in various institutional formulations, including AJK and CJK trilateralism, as well as engagement with the Indo-Pacific, the G7, and the Global South.

With all panelists having spoken, Dr. Cha commented that there was a consensus that the world is racked with disorder and that global governance institutions have been underperforming. In the ensuing discussion, he asked the panelists to respond to the question of "who benefits and who loses." For Dr. Kim, the answer was fairly straightforward. The first winners are China and Russia, along with some regional leaders or "swing states" in the Global South, such as Saudi Arabia, India, and Turkey. North Korea, too, is benefiting from the global disorder, especially in light of the recent fact that the UN Security Council, paralyzed

by China and Russia's use of veto power, failed to respond to its repeated North Korean provocations. As the United States under Donald Trump turns away from the liberal international order it has led for decades, liberal democracies, fragile states in the Global South, and multilateral institutions including the UN, WTO, and WHO, are all victims.

Dr. Kortunov countered with what he described as "a more radical perspective." He asserted that there are no winners, only losers, because all countries need a stable environment and norms in which they can operate safely. "How can we reverse this unfortunate trend, then?" he asked. While noting that others have suggested a grand bargain approach analogous to what the victorious great powers did in 1945, he rejected it because the underlying conditions are now completely different. After all, back in 1945, the world had just emerged from the Second World War, and the great powers possessed the credibility and legitimacy to restructure the world order. Today, any grand bargain made by great powers would be challenged by middle powers and smaller powers. Consequently, as opposed to a top-down approach, he champions a bottom-up approach aimed at rebuilding global governance, which begins with tackling relatively technical and non-toxic issues, such as climate change, international migration, and resource crunches. Only gradually can we move from what he called "situational multilateralism" or minilateralism to more ambitious and strategic areas of global governance and regional order.

Picking up on Dr. Kortunov's point about a grand bargain, Prof. Nakabayashi wondered what might happen if both Presidents Trump and Xi were to go to Moscow on May 9th, Victory Day. At this perilous time, leadership is what the world needs, but President Trump appears to have forfeited it. Moreover, the United States is no longer as powerful as it once was. Consequently, the key to restoring international order lies with collective leadership based on rules. The sad fact, though, is that agreeing on those basic rules is next to impossible. The inability of the United Nations to stop the war in Ukraine is a clear example. The World Trade Organization, too, has been rendered ineffective in that sense. It functioned well until China joined, and then the United States began to experience buyer's remorse. Consequently, for the world to agree on rules and uphold some form of collective leadership, China will play a huge role, and the United States will need to reflect on its actions and attitude toward China.

Casting doubt on whether a new order is emerging, Dr. Smith nevertheless agreed that the old order is being challenged. The genesis of the change has everything to do with the rise of China and major power competition, and there is no turning back. Contrary to Dr. Kim's country-specific approach, she adopted a regional approach instead. In Europe, the losers range from Ukraine to the Baltic states and Russia's other neighbors, who are wrecked by anxiety. In the Middle East, Iran, with its power greatly diminished, is "a huge loser," as is Assad, Syria's deposed dictator. In the Indo-Pacific, determining who is winning is much less clear-cut, as all countries are busy adjusting and adapting to China's growing power, Russia's war in Ukraine, and now Trump's tariffs. Speaking as an American, she argued that the United States is a big loser due to self-inflicted wounds, even though the eventual outcome of Trump's trade war remains to be seen. The last category of winners or losers is global institutions. While acknowledging the Security Council being "neutralized" and the WTO losing its relevance, Dr. Smith was not ready to characterize other Bretton Woods institutions as losers yet. Some of them still have utility, even as they are under stress and vulnerable to Chinese influence.

Prof. Su, too, was unsure. In the context of the current trade war that Trump just initiated, he contended that all parties are losers. Even so, the jury is still out. Likening the great power competition to a field-and-track match, rather than a boxing match with just one winner, he saw more positive-sum gains possible through regional integration schemes such as free trade agreements.

Speaking of an alternative order, Dr. Kim foresaw that the current disorder would likely be regionalized. That is to say, there will be a balance of power in Europe and the Middle East. The U.S. will invest more in the Pacific, which means that U.S. allies

in Europe and the Middle East will have to share more of the burden. In a few years, after Trump is gone, if the Democrats capture the White House again, perhaps they will restore the liberal international order as President Biden did after Trump 1.0. In that sense, we do not have to be too frustrated for now.

To Dr. Kim's point, Dr. Smith was skeptical. The American people put Trump back in the White House because they wanted a different model of governance. The Democrats are evolving and debating among themselves now. Even if they return to power, the Democratic Party is likely to have very different policy priorities. It is hard to tell what American foreign policy under Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez would look like, but we cannot pin too much hope on the return of foreign policy in the style of Biden. On this, Prof. Nakabayashi agreed that it is important to watch how domestic politics in the United States might unfold, especially on the Democratic side, because the ramifications are too great. The critical importance of domestic politics extends to China and South Korea, too, Prof. Su argued, because all countries face the challenge of maintaining societal resilience and cohesion.

Redirecting the conversation back to international politics, Dr. Kortunov asserted that the balance of power is becoming increasingly ambiguous and hard to define. South Korea, for instance, may be small in size, but it is decidedly not small in terms of economic strength compared to Russia. This also means that without losing sight of hard power, we need to pay due attention to other dimensions of national power. With that in mind, the trajectory of future international politics is unlikely to be as linear as it was in the past.

As a final point of discussion, Dr. Cha asked the panelists to project what the future might be like a year from now. Dr. Kim predicted that they would be discussing the upcoming midterm election in the U.S. and its potential consequences. Both Dr. Kortunov and Prof. Nakabayashi expected to see more clarity. While Prof. Nakabayashi hoped to see compromises, Dr. Smith was not as optimistic. That said, she remained hopeful that relations between Japan and South Korea would continue to make progress. There should also be more clarity in terms of what might emerge from Trump's trade war with China and his efforts to negotiate a ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia. Dr. Su might be the most optimistic of all, as he projected that tensions on the peninsula would be reduced as a result of Trump's re-engagement with North Korea. A second cause for optimism for him is that South Korea will host the APEC summit in the fall, where leaders from China, Japan, and South Korea are expected to hold summit talks.

Concurrent Session 2-2

Date | April 23, 2025
Time | 13:10-14:30

Emerging Security Architecture

Moderator

Noah Sneider
The Economist

Speakers

Chen Dongxiao
Shanghai Institutes for International Studies

Lee Shin-wha
Korea University

Sakata Yasuyo
Kenda University of International Studies

Randall Schriver
The Project 2049 Institute

Luis Simón
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Rapporteur

Jennifer Hong Whetsell
The Project 2049 Institute

Mr. Noah Sneider of *The Economist* opened session 2-2, "Emerging Security Architecture," by referencing the current wave of emerging security architectures in the Indo-Pacific, particularly through minilateral and trilateral arrangements. With the potential transition from President Biden to a second Trump administration, key questions arise: Should the region brace for a possible dismantling of existing security frameworks? Could instability increase, particularly in South Korea, following former President Yoon's impeachment? And how are these evolving architectures perceived in various capitals? To answer these questions, five speakers from China, Korea, Japan, the United States, and Europe were invited to share their perspectives.

Prof. Chen Dongxiao from the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies noted he is from Shanghai and is admittedly farther away from Beijing and its politics. He observed that we will "continue to see the momentum of increase of U.S.-led military alliance with key partners, to include Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, [and] the Philippines." However, he emphasized that a formalized effort like an "Asian NATO" has a "zero opportunity" of forming, as countries in Southeast, South, and Central Asia are "not interested in choosing sides." These nations will likely continue to hedge—economically, politically, and socially—between China and the United States. He described the security architecture as evolving and fluid, with multiple layers beyond military cooperation at play. In contrast to the U.S.-led alliance system, Prof. Chen also highlighted the "persistent momentum of ASEAN-plus mechanisms," and explained that Beijing has been "advocating for a security community with a large number of neighborhood countries." China, he added, will continue expanding its influence in Southeast and South Asia, a trend President Xi has accelerated in recent months, including his latest visit to Vietnam, Malaysia, and Cambodia. Beijing is also strengthening various 2+2 or 3+3 mechanisms with other Asian states, including many in Central Asia. Chen remarked that it would be no surprise if Beijing pursues a similar approach with South Asian countries. However, he noted a key challenge for Beijing is whether these mechanisms are meaningfully connected. Some, such as the ASEAN-plus frameworks, can be linked, but overall, the region's security structures remain fragmented. He also pointed out that


Noah Sneider


Chen Dongxiao


Lee Shin-wha


Sakata Yasuyo


Randall Schriver


Luis Simón

Beijing is particularly concerned about whether the U.S.-led alliance system is genuinely interested in serious engagement with China or if it is primarily focused on containment. On the possibility for a revitalized multilateralism in the region, Prof. Chen cautioned that while there is potential and member countries have expectations for such mechanisms, it is unlikely in the immediate future that an overarching, all-encompassing multilateral structure will emerge.

Prof. Lee Shin-wha from Korea University voiced concern over the "disruption without direction" currently affecting the security architecture. She highlighted the "absence of responsibility in global governance" and argued that an "America alone policy will not work." She noted that global governance will remain strained due to ongoing U.S.-China hegemonic competition. While the Biden administration attempted to champion a liberal, democratic order and value-based diplomacy, the Trump administration's shift toward an America First policy raised concerns by targeting alliances and partners. She noted that cuts to establishments like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Endowment for Democracy, Radio Free Asia, and Voice of America have damaged U.S. soft power, further weakening the liberal democratic order. Such a strategy, she warned, could result in "negative consequences for liberal democracies, hurting those who are like-minded to the United States." She cautioned against the deepening cooperation among China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran. As U.S. soft power wanes due to recent cuts in developmental aid, China is better positioned to exert influence in the Global South.

Prof. Lee expressed concern that the current environment risks falling not just into a great power competition trap, but into a "Kindleberger trap," marked by "power without responsibility and contestation without coordination." Highlighting the potential of middle powers, Prof. Lee argued that minilateral groupings can respond faster than large multilateral bodies by focusing

on practical cooperation in areas such as "joint exercises, technological transfer, and supply chain security." However, she noted that this "purpose-driven framework" currently lacks shared norms and vision, which could hold countries together during this transitional period of power. She also underscored the strategic importance of the Korea-Japan relationship, pointing out that while Trump is currently preoccupied with the Middle East, he is likely to revisit the ROK-U.S.-Japan trilateral framework in the near future. However, given Trump's likely aversion to norm- and value-based rhetoric, Lee believes "President Trump probably doesn't want to echo what Biden did. That's why Korea and Japan have to figure out the strategic value-add" in their relationship with the United States. She suggested that a rebranding of the alliance's messaging would be essential.

Prof. Sakata Yasuyo from Kenda University of International Studies emphasized, "Japan is very steady in trying to continue the trilateral between the U.S.-Japan-ROK for the security of the Indo-Pacific region." She argued against calling current efforts an "Asia NATO," saying policymakers must recognize that "the strategic landscape is very different between Europe and the Indo-Pacific." She drew a clear distinction between a NATO-type relationship of collective self-defense under unified command and the current lattice-work approach in Asia, which does not seek to replicate NATO's model or carry its unnecessary political baggage. Instead, she suggested focusing on efforts such as defense industrial cooperation, instead of focusing on North Korea or the People's Republic of China. On multilateralism, she affirmed Japan's ongoing commitment to coalition-building under the banner of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), and listed four tools it employs in cooperation with like-minded countries: Reciprocal Access Agreements (RAA), Logistics Agreements (LOGSA), General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), and Defense Industrial Cooperation Agreements. She noted that Korea and Japan currently share only GSOMIA and do not have a formalized 2+2 mechanism, remarking that "Korea and Japan's bilateral relationship is still underdeveloped and should be expanded." There are other opportunities like RAA, LOGSA, and defense industrial cooperation agreements. On emerging security frameworks, she stressed that alliances are essential, but that "institutionalization of integration and coordination" is key. She added, "Coordination of hubs—coordinating and connecting hubs with other hubs—is important," calling for deeper Korea-Japan integration. Sakata stressed that the region's networked security architecture is being redesigned, as Cold War-era systems are now obsolete. She stated that the architecture cannot be "a collection of relationships, but it has to be a working platform of integrated, pooled capabilities." She highlighted the importance of joint operations and defense supply chains, particularly in logistics and defense cooperation, citing U.S. shipbuilding partnerships with Japan and Korea as a notable example.

Mr. Randall Schriver from the Institute for Indo-Pacific Security (formerly known as the Project 2049 Institute) offered a more optimistic view, asserting that the "fear of dismantling of security architectures should be in check." He noted that trilateral arrangements like the U.S.-Japan-ROK alliance predate the Biden administration. Furthermore, he said that the Trump administration had shown respect for these frameworks—citing examples such as hosting a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) meeting on Day 1, re-endorsing the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) agreement, Secretary Hegseth's visits to Guam, Japan, and the Philippines early in his tenure, and the continuation of expanded U.S.-Japan military cooperation. Mr. Schriver characterized the current regional security architecture as a sort of "reverse-engineered concept," which started as an ad hoc arrangement, with various modules and minilateral arrangements emerging organically. As each minilateral remains somewhat experimental, with uncertain agendas and outcomes, he suggested that the limiting factor is not a desire to dismantle these frameworks, but rather their ad hoc and evolving nature.

His main concern, however, was the Trump administration's view on foreign policy. "We have been asking Europe for decades to care about the Indo-Pacific," Mr. Schriver said, "but now Trump is saying, 'Europe should take care of Europe.'" He argued that

the notion that theaters are not linked is flawed, emphasizing the need for European support to overcome the tyranny of time and distance in the Indo-Pacific, and noted that expecting Europe to apply sanctions and export controls in Asia while taking a different approach in Ukraine is naïve. He also warned that the United States is "ceding information space" to disinformation campaigns, especially while asking allies for more contributions such as access, basing, and overflight (ABO). "This is a flawed approach," he said. "We are imposing significant tariffs on our allies but asking them to follow us into conflict. That is dangerous." Finally, he noted that U.S. development aid cuts have harmed its global goodwill and warned that "the U.S. will be a diminished power in the context of the U.S.-China competition" if it continues to lose influence through weakened soft power.

Prof. Luis Simón from Vrije Universiteit Brussel emphasized that "the European and Indo-Pacific theaters are inherently interlinked." The key question, he argued, is not whether they are linked, but how and to what extent they are interconnected. At the core of this linkage lies U.S. extended deterrence, which serves as the foundational element bridging the two regions. Building on this foundation, he challenged two prevailing assumptions. First, the belief that U.S. alliances in Europe and Asia are fundamentally different in structure—Europe as multilateral and Asia as bilateral—is increasingly outdated. In the Indo-Pacific, countries are moving toward a hybrid model marked by overlapping bilateral ties as minilateral and trilateral arrangements rise. Moreover, there has been less appreciation for how the European theater is also shifting. In fact, Europe is witnessing a rise in bilateral, trilateral, and subregional defense dynamics beyond NATO's traditional multilateral framework. Prof. Simon observed that "as the United States draws down its force posture in Europe, this trend toward greater sub-regionalization could accelerate in the coming years." Second, the notion that U.S. alliances are shaped solely by regionally defined threats and priorities has also been called into question—particularly in light of the Ukraine war. Recent developments suggest a shift toward a more integrated view of global security challenges.

Prof. Simón argued that both the Biden and Trump administrations share the view that the European and Indo-Pacific regions intersect but differ on how to frame this connection. Although Biden tended to discuss competition in global terms, Trump identifies the Indo-Pacific as the primary arena of competition and rejects the notion of China and Russia as a unified bloc. Prof. Simon concluded by emphasizing that, given the trade-offs in the U.S. force planning, the future of transatlantic and Indo-Pacific cooperation depends on ensuring that joint efforts reinforce the overriding priority of strengthening deterrence in each region, rather than detracting from it. He argued that countries should "strive towards a cross-regional ecosystem of shared concepts, standards, and technologies that bolster deterrence by denial and respect." The United States and its allies can achieve greater efficiency and scale, outmatching their competitors while respecting regional priorities.

Concurrent Session 3-1

Date | April 23, 2025
Time | 14:40-16:00

New Faces of War

Moderator

Timothy Martin
The Wall Street Journal

Speakers

Oded Ailam
International Consultant on Intelligence and Warfare

Richard Falkenrath
Johns Hopkins University

Shin Beomchul
Sejong Institute

Tokuchi Hideshi
Research Institute for Peace and Security

Wang Junsheng
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

Rapporteur

Dongkeun Lee
Australian National University

Concurrent Concurrent Session 3-1, titled "New Faces of War," discussed the development of new technologies and their impact on modern warfare. The session was opened and moderated by Mr. Timothy Martin of *The Wall Street Journal*. It covered not only new technologies but also broader changes in warfare amid rapid political shifts in the contemporary world. Mr. Martin began the session by asking, "To what extent are we facing the new faces of war?"

In response, Mr. Oded Ailam, a member of the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs (JCFA) Research Institute and formerly serving at Mossad, presented the case of the Gaza War that began in October 2023. Mr. Ailam explained that it was the first "total digital war" in history and led to a complete restructuring of the military. He particularly emphasized a drone campaign that targeted communication and observation centers within a few hours—markedly different from previous forms of warfare. These drones, purchased through AliExpress, cost only a few dollars each. Alongside the cheap drones, Hamas used inexpensive and outdated Russian grenades to penetrate Israel's high-tech defense system, which came as a major shock to Israel.

In turn, Israel responded with its own "total digital war," employing a real-time network connected to an AI system—something not present in earlier conflicts such as the U.S. campaigns in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. The delivery of information was reduced to under 50 seconds, compared to the previous delays of hours or even days—a speed previously unseen. The rapidly collected information from satellites, drones, SIGINT, ground sensors, and soldiers was integrated into AI platforms such as "Torch-X" and "Carmel," and shared in real-time with all participants in the war. Using this shared data, warfighters employed the AI platforms for various functions, including facial recognition and behavior prediction—all executed through a single system in seconds. This capability enabled soldiers to minimize civilian casualties, as AI systems were responsible for decision-making instead of humans. Furthermore, once a target was identified,


Timothy Martin


Oded Ailam


Richard Falkenrath


Shin Beomchul


Tokuchi Hideshi


Wang Junsheng

the AI system guided operators on which units had the highest probability of hitting the target—again, within seconds. With this new AI-driven system, Israel was able to reduce civilian casualties in Gaza, and this approach is expected to become the dominant model in future warfare.

Dr. Richard Falkenrath, a Senior Fellow at the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs at the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University, identified three key features of the new faces of war: (1) Technology Availability, (2) Time, and (3) Trust. He particularly emphasized that advanced weapons technologies are now accessible to a wide range of actors, unlike in the past when such technologies were restricted to a few states. As a result, he argued that great powers must now be "humbled," as these weapon systems are available to almost all players. Moreover, he pointed out that digital dependency has introduced new vulnerabilities, especially in long-distance missions far from a country's mainland. This suggests that the development of new technologies may not benefit great powers as previous advances did—for example, nuclear weapons, which were exclusively held by a few dominant states.

On the issue of time, Dr. Falkenrath noted that modern warfare tends to last longer than earlier conflicts. Citing examples such as Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, he emphasized that these wars endured far beyond initial expectations. However, most military and strategic planning still focuses on short-term operations, resulting in what he described as a "mismatch between military planning and reality." This is also evident in one of the most recent conflicts, the Russia-Ukraine War, which, he noted, is turning out to be protracted as well.

Finally, Dr. Falkenrath addressed the erosion of trust in international politics. In the 1980s, the United States focused on

Concurrent Session 3-1
New Faces of War

preparation and deterrence, supported by strong trust with its allies. This trust was particularly crucial given the United States' reliance on foreign bases and its frequent military operations far from home. Today, however, that trust has diminished, meaning the advantages the United States once enjoyed may no longer be available. In particular, allies are increasingly questioning the credibility of U.S. deterrence and are adopting more zero-sum thinking. This shift increases the risk of conflict. Most concerning, he concluded, is the decline of international cooperation and a rules-based peaceful order—an erosion that exacerbates the challenges posed by emerging technologies.

Dr. Shin Beomchul, a senior research fellow at the Sejong Institute and former Vice Minister of National Defense of the Republic of Korea, offered five key points in response to the moderator's question. First, he highlighted the gap between the development and application of new technologies. For instance, although AI is rapidly being introduced into modern warfare, few military personnel have hands-on experience with it. He noted that this is not a new phenomenon in human history. Dr. Shin cited the Industrial Revolution and the development of nuclear weapons as historical examples of the disconnect between technological advancements and their application in actual warfare. Therefore, he stressed the critical importance of countries adapting to new technologies—South Korea included, which is currently facing challenges in this area.

Second, Dr. Shin discussed the vulnerabilities of supply chains, noting that the acquisition of

advanced military technologies cannot be achieved by any one country alone; rather, it requires reliance on international supply networks. This suggests that countries with more robust and secure supply chains will enjoy greater sustainability during wartime.

Third, he emphasized the growing importance of the cyber, space, and command-and-control domains. In future conflicts, offensive and defensive operations will take place simultaneously, making rapid intelligence collection even more crucial. Regarding the space domain, which has traditionally been limited to surveillance, Dr. Shin noted that it is evolving beyond that role. Many countries are now investing in space capabilities, raising the potential for future clashes in space. As such, possessing satellite-jamming capabilities will become essential for disrupting enemy operations and establishing battlefield superiority.

Fourth, Dr. Shin addressed the transformation of weapon acquisition programs. He observed that the timeline for acquiring weapons is shrinking in the contemporary era, and if states fail to adapt their procurement processes to meet these faster timelines, they risk acquiring outdated systems. For example, while the current acquisition process takes around five to seven years, already faster than the previous ten-year timeline, some modern weapons can be developed in just two to three years. Without flexible procurement procedures, countries may end up deploying obsolete systems.

Lastly, he concluded by highlighting the increasingly blurred line between peace and war due to the rise of gray-zone tactics. Contemporary warfare now encompasses information warfare, psychological operations, and media manipulation, extending beyond traditional kinetic confrontations. If countries are unable to adapt to these forms of non-traditional warfare during peacetime, they will be unprepared for conventional conflict—ultimately risking defeat.

Prof. Tokuchi Hideshi, President of the Research Institute for Peace and Security (RIPS), outlined five key points in response to the moderator's question. First, he stated that the use of military

force has become more difficult because modern weapons are highly destructive. Second, international law governing the use of force has gained importance, further restricting the application of kinetic power. Third, increased interdependence among countries has made the use of force more complex. Fourth, developments in information and cyber technologies have become highly significant. Lastly, the spread of international norms such as human rights has increased the political and humanitarian costs of war. Collectively, these factors have made the use of kinetic force more difficult in contemporary times and have ushered in what he described as "the age of total warfare."

Based on these points, Prof. Tokuchi emphasized that we are beginning to witness more grey-zone tactics that blur the line between wartime and peacetime. Ultimately, military means are becoming more powerful when used in conjunction with non-military instruments such as politics and economics. He cited the example of China's use of its Coast Guard and maritime militia in the South China Sea, noting that such maneuvers are likely to continue. Therefore, we are living in an era in which it is essential to enhance our preparedness in order to reduce the costs of hybrid warfare.

Prof. Wang Junsheng, Director and professor of the Department of China's Regional Strategy at the National Institute of International Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, responded to the question by discussing potential scenarios of warfare in the region. He particularly emphasized the Korean Peninsula and repeatedly highlighted the importance of dialogue between the two Koreas and neighboring states. He also noted the potential linkage between the Taiwan Strait issue and the Korean Peninsula, suggesting that a crisis in the Taiwan Strait could prompt North Korea to attack South Korea. To prevent such developments, Professor Wang stressed the importance of continued communication among countries in the region. He pointed to former President Trump's engagement with North Korea as a potential opportunity to revive dialogue. Furthermore, he argued that the two Koreas should consider deepening dialogue with China to promote regional stability, emphasizing that Beijing has long advocated for conversations between the two Koreas. Finally, he suggested that the ROK-U.S. alliance should reconsider the continuation of joint military drills, as they may provoke North Korea to further develop its strategic nuclear capabilities.

The discussion continued with follow-up questions from Mr. Martin. He asked all panelists how prepared their respective countries are to face the challenges posed by the development of new technologies in the contemporary era. The question and answer session proceeded in a reverse order of the initial presentations. In response, Prof. Wang stated that the core issue in the Asia-Pacific is not the technologies themselves but the lack of dialogue between countries. He emphasized that denuclearization efforts since the end of the Cold War have largely failed, and this remains the central dilemma facing China. Prof. Tokuchi reiterated his concept of "the age of total warfare" and argued that countries must be prepared not only in terms of military strength but also in diplomatic and economic capabilities. In particular, he stressed the need to strengthen intelligence capacities to address hybrid warfare. He added that international partnerships are especially important in today's security environment.

Dr. Shin responded that South Korea is prepared to meet the challenges posed by emerging technologies in the contemporary security landscape. He noted that Seoul is already spending 2.5 percent of its GDP on defense and is pursuing a military transformation. However, he also raised concerns about the North Korean nuclear threat, which cannot be addressed solely through high-tech weapons. He argued that strategic nuclear balance can only be achieved through the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons or nuclear sharing with the United States. Nonetheless, when comparing technological advancement and the application of new weapons systems, Dr. Shin stated that South Korea is ahead of North Korea. Dr. Falkenrath explained that the United States faces a complex picture regarding its preparedness for war. He emphasized that, due to its global responsibilities, the U.S. defense and intelligence budget nears one trillion dollars—yet progress remains slow. For instance, in the event of a Taiwan Strait crisis, the United States would have to consider various scenarios, including amphibious operations and naval blockades. The former represents a traditional threat that the United States is prepared to confront, while the latter involves hybrid tactics that would pose greater challenges.

He stressed that the most urgent priority for the United States is investing in its alliances. Dr. Falkenrath concluded by stating that without a strong global alliance structure, the United States cannot maintain its status as a global superpower. Finally, Mr. Ailam responded by sharing the lessons Israel learned from the Gaza War. He noted that the Israel Defense Forces have undergone a transformation and are now employing new technologies to minimize civilian casualties and make rapid decisions.

Concurrent Session 3-2

Date | April 23, 2025
Time | 14:40-16:00

New Horizons of Economic Security

Moderator

Anthony Kim
The Heritage Foundation

Speakers

Jeanne Choi
U.S. Department of State

Gao Fei
China Foreign Affairs University

Narayanappa Janardhan
Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy

Marcus Noland
Peterson Institute for International Economics

Suzuki Kazuto
University of Tokyo

Yoo Myung-hee
Seoul National University

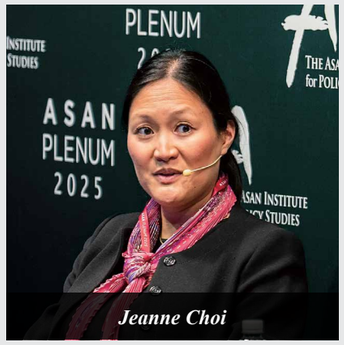
Rapporteur

Ben Forney
Seoul National University

The session "New Horizons of Economic Security" explored global economic security issues, including supply chain challenges, U.S. tariffs, energy policy, and the role of middle powers. Today, economic security is incentivizing greater resilience but also accelerating protectionist headwinds. The Indo-Pacific, through which 80 percent of global trade passes, is central to this competition. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) has made strides with agreements on three key pillars, while China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) shifts from big-ticket investments to high-tech areas. As new horizons of security are emerging, energy security has also become a key factor in this global competition. How can states navigate rising protectionism while enhancing supply chain resilience? The moderator, Anthony Kim from the Heritage Foundation, led the discussion.

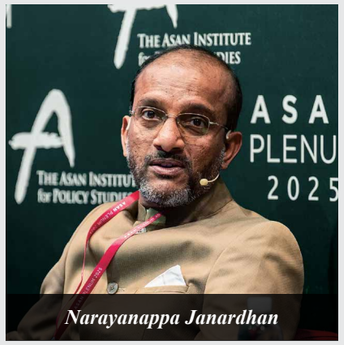
Dr. Jeanne Choi of the U.S. Department of State opened the session by highlighting the growing intersection between energy policy and economic security. She emphasized that energy demand is expected to surge, driven in large part by the rapid expansion of AI technologies and the proliferation of data centers. This rising demand is forcing countries to make strategic decisions about how to secure reliable energy supplies. For countries like South Korea and Japan, which rely heavily on energy imports, the challenge is especially acute, and ongoing disruptions, such as those caused by the war in Ukraine and global transportation bottlenecks, have further complicated global energy supply chains. Dr. Choi also underscored the importance of critical mineral supply chains, which are essential


Anthony Kim



Jeanne Choi

Gao Fei



Narayanappa Janardhan

Marcus Noland

Suzuki Kazuto


Yoo Myung-hee

for both defense and advanced technologies. These supply chains are highly concentrated, not only in upstream mining but also in downstream processing, and it is this dynamic that poses serious risks to economic security. Following a question from the moderator on nuclear energy, Dr. Choi explored the potential role of small modular reactors (SMRs) in shaping the future energy landscape of both the United States and South Korea. While she acknowledged the promise of SMRs, she also cautioned that the technology is still in its early stages of deployment and has yet to be deployed on a commercial scale.

Prof. Gao Fei of China Foreign Affairs University offered a Chinese perspective on economic security, focusing particularly on the challenges posed by U.S. tariffs. He noted that the world is currently grappling with multiple political and economic crises, and he highlighted how developments such as artificial intelligence and robotics are reshaping global economic dynamics. While global economic cooperation has brought significant benefits in recent decades, Prof. Gao pointed out that it has also widened the gap between the wealthy and the poor. He argued that the most pressing challenge today stems from the United States, particularly the "reciprocal" tariffs introduced under the Trump administration. He described these tariffs as "unbelievable," noting that such extreme measures were

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New Horizons of Economic Security

historically reserved for times of war. Prof. Gao acknowledged that China has greatly benefited from its reform and opening-up policies and that globalization has brought shared benefits to many nations. However, as the world's second-largest economy, he asserted that China must respond to what it sees as unfair U.S. trade practices—because if it doesn't act, no other country will. Despite these tensions, he emphasized that China remains open to dialogue and is willing to engage in negotiations with all countries, including the United States, provided those discussions are grounded in mutual respect.

Dr. Narayanappa Janardhan of the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy in the United Arab Emirates presented a perspective on economic security from the Gulf and emphasized the evolving nature of global power dynamics. He noted that we are witnessing the gradual transition away from a U.S.-led global order. In this emerging landscape, middle powers are gaining influence by operating within what he described as a "multi-plex" world—a more accurate framework than traditional labels like unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar. He highlighted minilateralism (small, flexible partnerships among like-minded states) as a key strategy for middle powers to pursue their interests, often reducing dependence on traditional superpowers like the United States. According to Dr. Janardhan, non-ideological partnerships are becoming more relevant than formal, ideological alliances. As a result, rather than entering a period of deglobalization, he argued that we are now in a phase of re-globalization, marked by the realignment of global supply chains and shifting priorities. He also stressed the growing significance of non-traditional security issues and the expanding scope of Gulf-Asia relations. Trade between the two regions soared from $45 billion in 2000 to $650 billion in recent years, with current agreements increasingly framed as "strategic" and "comprehensive." As global competition intensifies, even among allies, new Gulf-Asia mechanisms are emerging that could reshape future security architectures. Maritime security, he noted, is a key area where bilateral and multilateral cooperation is already underway between Gulf and Asian countries. He proposed that countries like the UAE, India, and South Korea could deepen collaboration on these issues, independent of U.S. involvement. When asked about nuclear energy, Dr. Janardhan pointed out that in the Gulf, nuclear development is driven not only by technological advancement but also by security considerations, particularly the need to deter potential nuclear proliferation in neighboring countries.

Dr. Marcus Noland of the Peterson Institute for International Economics highlighted the challenges U.S. allies are facing in the aftermath of the Trump administration's tariff policies. He noted that while the United States and South Korea maintain strong cooperation on both security and economic fronts, recent political developments have placed these efforts at risk. In particular, President Trump's push to repeal the CHIPS Act and the imposition of arbitrary tariffs on South Korea have created significant uncertainty, according to Dr. Noland. Economic modeling, he explained, suggests that such policies will slow growth in both the United States and South Korea. "The United States has gone rogue," he remarked, describing a scenario in which South Korea is caught in an increasingly difficult position. In response, he argued that South Korea should consider joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), especially given the strained relationships it has with major regional players like China and Japan, both of which have used economic coercion against Seoul in recent years. Touching on industrial policy, Dr. Noland addressed discussions around revitalizing shipbuilding in the United States, but noted that practical limitations, such as a shortage of skilled labor and domestic steel, make it unlikely the United States can meaningfully re-enter the sector. On energy security, he predicted renewed U.S. interest in green energy post-Trump, but raised the question of whether nuclear energy is a strategic necessity or merely a distraction.

Prof. Suzuki Kazuto of the University of Tokyo discussed the complex economic security challenges

facing Japan. At its core, he emphasized, economic security is about managing and mitigating risk. Japan now finds itself in a difficult position regarding several risks connected to both longstanding agreements and unpredictable new variables. Specifically, Suzuki pointed to the 2019 U.S.-Japan Trade Agreement on Goods (TAG), signed under the Trump administration. While this deal was intended to strengthen bilateral trade, it appears to have been sidelined amid renewed tariff threats from Trump. The current wave of "reciprocal" tariffs, which are based on the idea of reducing trade deficits, makes negotiations with the United States particularly challenging. Prof. Suzuki stated that Japan's economic security team is actively assessing how to reduce the risk of new tariffs, including the possibility of negotiating exemptions to the proposed 24 percent tariffs. A key wildcard in this equation is Nippon Steel's acquisition of U.S. Steel, a move that could either complicate or help reset the economic relationship. As a result, Suzuki noted, Japan is now beginning to view the United States itself as a potential economic security risk, and Japan is updating its economic security action plans accordingly. Strengthening ties with South Korea is a key priority, given that both countries face mounting economic pressure from China and the United States. Tokyo and Seoul are working to coordinate their response strategies, recognizing their shared vulnerabilities.

Former ROK Trade Minister Yoo Myung-hee, now with Seoul National University, offered a broad and nuanced perspective on economic security. Reflecting on her experience negotiating the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement and its amendment, she expressed frustration over how quickly hard-won trade agreements can be undermined by sudden policy shifts, such as the new tariff measures by the United States. She likened defining economic security to a blind man describing an elephant: it's a broad, often ambiguous concept, shaped by each country's unique economic structure and security priorities. Increasingly, technological and economic developments are intertwined with national security concerns. However, she cautioned that if countries use "economic security" as a catch-all justification for national security measures, it risks undermining competitiveness and stifling innovation. For example, she noted, the United States views its trade deficit and manufacturing decline as national security concerns, which blurs the line between genuine security threats and economic policy. In sectors like semiconductors, U.S. restrictions have significant spillover effects on allies such as Japan and South Korea. As economic security policies become more expansive, they may inadvertently hinder the very innovation they aim to protect. Minister Yoo argued for "rightsizing" the definition of economic security—drawing clearer distinctions between legitimate security risks and broader economic or technological challenges. To do this, countries need to develop shared understandings and practical principles. She called on like-minded nations to collaborate in shaping a balanced and coherent approach.

Following remarks from the panelists, there was a question from the audience on the sustainability of the Trump administration's plans to rebuild manufacturing capacity in the United States. Dr. Noland cast doubt on the long-term sustainability of U.S. manufacturing, citing high costs, and criticized the inconsistency of U.S. trade policy, specifically pointing out the irony of Washington pressuring allies to confront China while simultaneously undermining those same alliances through trade conflicts. Follow up on Dr. Noland's previous comment on the inability to bring shipbuilding manufacturing back to the United States, an audience member asked if any other panelist agreed with Dr. Noland's analysis. In response, Minister Yoo noted that while the United States may seek tariff exemptions to revitalize domestic production, structural challenges remain—particularly labor shortages. In South Korea, she pointed out, one-third of shipbuilding workers are already foreign laborers due to the industry's high labor intensity and cost. In their final comments, Prof. Gao reemphasized China's desire for negotiations based on mutual respect, and Prof. Suzuki concluded the session by warning against the politicization of trade. The economy, he argued, operates according to its own logic. Attempts to weaponize economic tools often defy market principles and undermine the trust that is essential for stable international partnerships and the economic security of all.

Plenary Session 4

Date | April 23, 2025
Time | 16:10-17:30

North Korea's Nuclear Threat

Moderator

Ahn Ho-Young
Kyungnam University

Speakers

Ahn Byung-suk
Pyeongtaek University

Bruce Bennett
RAND Corporation

John Everard
Former UK Ambassador to the DPRK

Sydney Seiler
Center for Strategic and International Studies

Shin Beomchul
Sejong Institute

Yabunaka Mitoji
Osaka University

Zhu Feng
Nanjing University

Rapporteur

Han Jae Eun
George Mason University

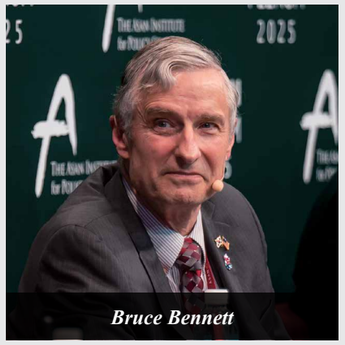
Amid South Korea's transformation over the past 80 years, North Korea's expanding nuclear arsenal casts a growing shadow. Plenary Session 4, titled "North Korea's Nuclear Threat," examined strategic options to deter escalation and reinforce stability, as debates over extended deterrence and nuclear armament gain renewed urgency on the Korean Peninsula.

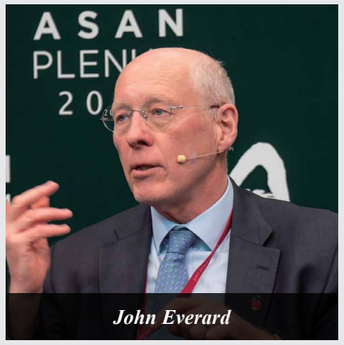
Prof. Ahn Ho-Young, a Chair Professor at Kyungnam University and former ROK ambassador to the United States, opened the session by raising the unraveling situation of the ongoing tariff war under the Trump administration and remarked that North Korea would be the least affected country. Instead, Pyongyang appeared to be preoccupied with advancing its nuclear weapons and missile development programs, continuing its strategic trajectory with little regard for external economic disruptions.

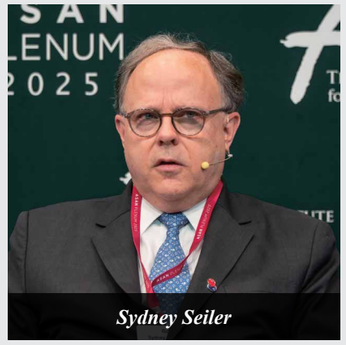
Prof. Ahn Byung-suk, a Distinguished Professor at Pyeongtaek University, outlined four core principles for reshaping nuclear deterrence policy. First, he insisted on upholding the goal of complete denuclearization by emphasizing that it is a fundamental prerequisite for South Korea to secure strategic initiative in pursuit of the peace and stability it envisions. By consistently denying North Korea recognition as a nuclear state, he argued that Pyongyang will increasingly be forced into a strategically disadvantageous position. Second, he urged consistent application of incentives and pressure. Kim Jong Un, he argued, has skillfully exploited international engagement and sanctions. While the carrot and stick may vary depending on the context, the ultimate objective must remain consistent—


Ahn Ho-Young


Ahn Byung-suk

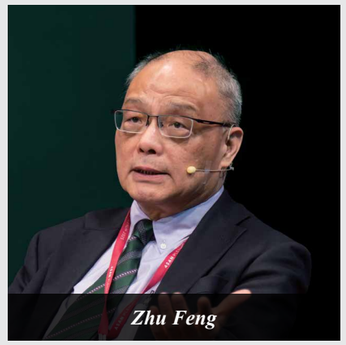

Bruce Bennett


John Everard


Sydney Seiler


Shin Beomchul


Yabunaka Mitoji


Zhu Feng

Plenary Session 4
North Korea's
Nuclear Threat

denuclearization. Prof. Ahn contended that the strategic aim of denuclearization must not waver in order to induce behavioral change within the regime. Third, he advocated for strategic patience grounded in strong deterrent efforts. Prof. Ahn argued that Kim Jong Un is unlikely to voluntarily relinquish nuclear weapons, and thus, a long-term approach would only be a solution. However, he clarified that such patience is not passive waiting, but must be underpinned by a form of pressure rooted in conventional deterrence and deterrence by denial that can eventually compel internal transformation within the regime. Lastly, he called for a pivot from reliance on external pressure to cultivating internal pressure through a focus on human rights. While past policy has concentrated on sanctions and external leverage, he stressed the importance of influencing domestic awareness within North Korea. By centering the human rights agenda and shifting public consciousness, he argued, the regime could be pushed to make new choices for survival and prosperity.

On the evolving ROK-U.S. Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG), Prof. Ahn acknowledged improvements but flagged concerns over credibility and feasibility, especially as North Korea increasingly utilizes its nuclear arsenal as a tactical, not merely strategic instrument. He emphasized the need to enhance the visibility and operational effectiveness of the NCG, particularly through robust joint operational planning. He noted that discussions on additional steps, such as the redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons, should follow only after these foundational measures are firmly established.

Dr. Bruce Bennett, a senior defense analyst at RAND Corporation, raised a series of underlying strategic questions that, he suggested, the international community may not yet be adequately prepared to confront. He noted that North Korean troops recently dispatched to Russia were reportedly special forces, accompanied by military equipment and production capabilities. This development, he argued, signals a significant shift in Kim Jong Un's calculus. Faced with persistent economic failure, Kim appears willing to take risks previously deemed improbable, including sacrificing elements of military readiness to address imminent economic challenges. Dr. Bennett questioned the extent to which North Korea may have sacrificed its military readiness or capability during the Ukraine war, and if so, argued that such a decision fundamentally challenges long-held assumptions about Kim Jong Un's strategic intentions.

Drawing from a recent report by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency on global nuclear threats, he emphasized that North Korea's nuclear posture is evolving. Beyond aggressive rhetoric, Pyongyang is now reportedly considering discretionary nuclear use on the Korean Peninsula—no longer confining its nuclear doctrine to deterrence or retaliation. This shift, he warned, necessitates an urgent reconsideration of current strategies and military preparedness. Dr. Bennett criticized the prevailing "one-size-fits-all" deterrence framework and proposed a conditional and adaptive approach, such as setting clear inspection deadlines and, if unmet, signaling potential U.S. nuclear modernization in South Korea. While acknowledging the controversy such measures might provoke, particularly from China, he argued that a more assertive posture could compel Beijing to intervene more constructively. Citing a 2017 *Global Times* editorial, he reminded the audience that China has, in the past, issued stern warnings against North Korean transgressions.

Ambassador John Everard, a former UK ambassador to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, warned that while the probability of a North Korean nuclear strike remains below 5 percent, it is still too high to ignore. He emphasized the need for a cool-headed assessment of both the likelihood of such an event and the range of options available to deflect it. He outlined a

potential three-step escalation scenario. First, Kim Jong Un may experience growing insecurity and regime instability, primarily driven by economic collapse and mounting desperation. Second, this internal instability could lead him to initiate an attack on South Korea. Third, the situation may escalate further to involve the use of nuclear weapons. Amb. Everard highlighted the severity of North Korea's current economic conditions. The currency is falling, food insecurity remains persistent, and societal strain is escalating. He noted that these problems persist regardless of any material compensation North Korea might receive from Russia in exchange for troop deployments and munitions supply.

Looking ahead, he raised concerns about the post-Ukraine war scenario: once this source of revenue disappears, North Korea may face an even more acute economic crisis. With China preoccupied with its own domestic economic challenges and given that North Korea is not even included in the Belt and Road Initiative, he argued it is unlikely that Beijing would step

in to replace the financial support currently provided by Russia. Under such conditions, Ambassador Everard warned that Kim may view coercion against South Korea as one of the few remaining options. Yet the South Korean government is unlikely to provide any financial concessions, leaving Kim with even fewer alternatives. This could increase the likelihood of a direct military provocation aimed at compelling Seoul to find a quick solution to its economic crisis. Given the potential depletion of conventional arms, he suggested that tactical nuclear weapons might become Kim's most viable option. Amb. Everard labeled this scenario a "dark grey swan,"—not probable, but entirely within the realm of possibility. He called for proactive contingency planning and emphasized the importance of renewed diplomatic engagement to deter further escalation. In response to a question regarding China's potential compellence toward North Korea, he expressed doubt that China would side with South Korea and the United States if intervention risks large-scale Chinese casualties.

Mr. Sydney Seiler, a Senior Advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), asserted that the idea of North Korea developing nuclear weapons specifically targeting South Korea and potentially using them is not surprising to serious observers of the regime. The only optimism he could identify was that the policy community is finally engaging in frank and open discussions about this once-taboo possibility. He criticized what he termed the "설마(*seol-ma*) syndrome," a persistent form of denialism regarding both the extent of North Korea's nuclear development and the assumption that it would never use nuclear weapons against fellow Koreans. Drawing from over three decades of experience in nuclear negotiations, he argued that North Korea has never demonstrated a sincere intention to abandon its nuclear arsenal. As someone directly involved in multiple rounds of negotiations, he emphasized that the regime fundamentally does not seek a better relationship with the United States. He also underscored that Pyongyang's provocations are coercive rather than defensive in nature. In response to a question

about whether President Trump's approach may have backfired—given that unmet expectations appeared to lead Kim Jong Un to double down on nuclear developmenthe cautioned that unless Kim demonstrates a genuine commitment to denuclearization, future engagement will lack traction. Even if the probability of nuclear use is low, he warned, the risk is serious enough to demand robust contingency planning.

Dr. Shin Beomchul, a senior research fellow at the Sejong Institute and former Vice Minister of National Defense of the Republic of Korea, asserted that denuclearization in the near term is unattainable due to South Korea's limited leverage over Pyongyang. In light of this reality, he recommended a three-track strategy: reinforcing U.S. extended deterrence, pursuing a European-style nuclear-sharing arrangement, and developing independent nuclear capabilities. He underscored the importance of coordinating closely with Washington, particularly before any potential U.S.-DPRK agreement, arguing that failure to do so would undermine longstanding efforts to maintain assurance within the alliance. Dr Shin also urged sustained investment in advanced deterrent capabilities, including submarine-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs) and nuclear-powered submarines. He further warned that a crisis on the Korean Peninsula could emerge concurrently with rising tensions in the Taiwan Strait, highlighting the need for robust, forward-looking bilateral contingency planning between Seoul and Washington.

Prof. Yabunaka Mitoji, a professor at Osaka University and a former Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, reflected on his experience during the era of the Six-Party Talks. He recalled that after North Korea had pledged to shut down its nuclear facilities, the United States uncovered Pyongyang's secret overseas bank accounts. Since then, he observed, Washington has maintained a fundamentally skeptical posture toward North Korea. Shortly thereafter, in 2006, North Korea conducted its first nuclear test—an event that marked a decisive turning point. Despite later efforts such as the 2018 Trump-Kim summit and the strengthening of trilateral cooperation among South Korea, Japan, and the United States, Prof. Yabunaka argued that substantive progress toward North Korea's denuclearization has remained elusive.

Prof. Yabunaka expressed concern over recent shifts in U.S. foreign policy rhetoric, particularly instances where North Korea has been implicitly referred to as a nuclear state—breaking a long-standing international taboo. He warned that time is running out, pointing to the alarming shift in Japanese public discourse, where a nation once firmly committed to reliance on the U.S. nuclear umbrella is now increasingly open to discussing nuclear options. This trend signals a potential erosion of Japan's traditional "Three No's" nuclear doctrine and a growing openness to the redeployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons. While acknowledging that the strategic environment has changed significantly since the early 2000s, Prof. Yabunaka nonetheless advocated for renewed multilateral dialogue. He emphasized that new diplomatic frameworks are urgently needed to address regional instability and suggested that a revamped negotiating format—potentially even including Russia—should not be ruled out.

Prof. Zhu Feng, a Dean and professor at Nanjing University, emphasized that while denuclearization remains China's priority, the humanitarian consequences of North Korea's prolonged isolation, particularly since the pandemic, have been largely neglected. He criticized what he viewed as an excessively hardline posture adopted by the United States and South Korea, cautioning against overreaction to Pyongyang's provocations. He pointed out that it is merely a desperate attempt by the regime to ensure its survival. Although he expressed skepticism that North Korea would initiate a nuclear strike, he stated that if Pyongyang were to launch an unprovoked nuclear attack, China would align itself with the United States and South Korea. Zhu also condemned the reemergence of Cold War-style dynamics in the region, warning that escalating tensions on the Peninsula not only threaten regional stability but also jeopardize China's critical trade relationship with South Korea.

Panelists broadly agreed that North Korea's nuclear weapons are increasingly used in a coercive fashion, and while the probability of North Korea using nuclear weapons remains low, it is real and growing. Discussions emphasized the importance of credible deterrence, tailored ROK-U.S. coordination, and proactive contingency planning. However, views diverged on how to manage Pyongyang: many of them stressed pressure and readiness, whereas Chinese perspectives prioritized restraint and humanitarian concerns. Uncertainty over China's future role and the erosion of past diplomatic norms highlighted the growing uncertainties in the region.

Closing Ceremony

Date | April 23, 2025
Time | 17:30-17:35
Place | Grand Ballroom I+II

Closing Remarks

Yoon Young-kwan
Chairman,
The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

Ladies and gentlemen, I appreciate all of you for your active participation and your willingness to share your insights. Your dedication and contribution enlightened us so much, and the diverse perspectives we heard today have not only deepened our understanding of the dynamics of international relations surrounding the Korean Peninsula but also reminded us how important these questions are at this time of turbulence and uncertainty.

I hope you enjoyed today's sessions as much as I did, and while we may have come from different countries and regions, I sincerely hope that we can leave today with a shared sense of intellectual enrichment and probably a shared sense of common purpose for further cooperation. I would like to take this moment to express our sincere gratitude to our dedicated staff at the Asan Institute. They have worked for several months to prepare this conference to make it a success.

I wish each and every one of you a safe and pleasant trip back to your home country, and I hope to see you again sometime in the future.

Thank you very much.

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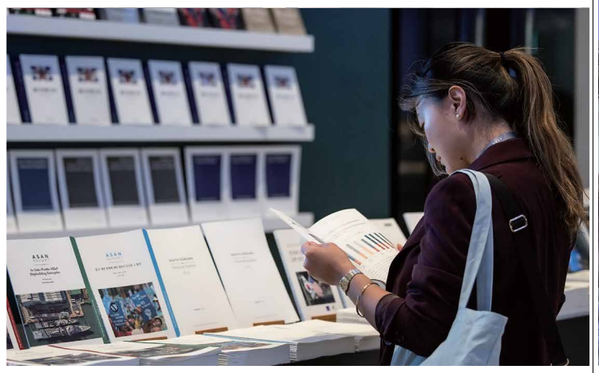
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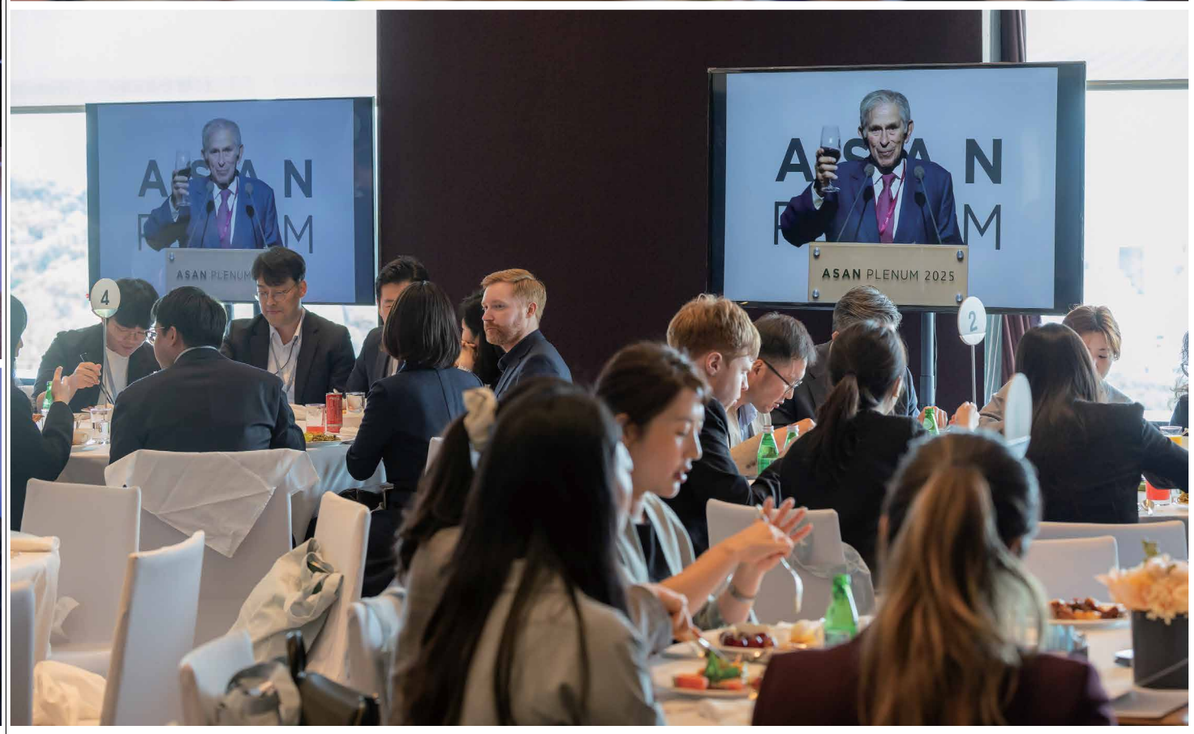
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First Edition June 2025
Published by The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
Address 11, Gyeonghuigung 1ga-gil, Jongno-gu, Seoul, Korea
Telephone +82-2-730-5842
Website www.asaninst.org
E-mail info@asaninst.org
Bool Design EGISHOLDINS
ISBN 979-11-5570-308-3 95340

Acknowledgements

The Asan Plenum 2025 Proceedings publication was compiled and edited by Kim Suhyeon.
Editing was done by Song Ji Eun and Dr. Peter K. Lee, the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

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9 791155 703083 (PDF)
ISBN 979-11-5570-308-3

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