A Comprehensive Vision for the U.S.-ROK Alliance

SCOTT SNYDER

The U.S.-ROK security alliance has been one of the key components of U.S. policy in Asia for over five decades, but the alliance has traditionally been premised on the narrow cold-war task of guaranteeing security on the Korean peninsula. South Korea’s transformation as a leading economic power and its transition from authoritarianism to democracy has led to the convergence of the two societies, expanding the potential for forms of cooperation that extend well beyond the peninsula. But the U.S.-ROK relationship has traditionally been conceptualized primarily in bilateral terms that focus solely on deterring new conflict on the Korean peninsula while neglecting the need to establish a basis for cooperation in the service of shared regional and global interests in stability and prosperity.

South Korea has developed the economic, political, and security resources to be considered as a first-tier partner on the international scene, but the development of an expanded U.S.-ROK partnership commensurate to South Korea’s potential ability to join in promoting global and regional stability is only in the early stages of development. The United States can benefit from South Korea’s emergence as a leading economic nation and vibrant democracy in Asia by deepening institutional forms of cooperation and broadening the scope of its partnership with South Korea from a primarily peninsula-focused security alliance to a comprehensive alliance with the capacity to address newly emerging global, regional, and emerging non-traditional security challenges.

The expansion of institutional channels necessary to promote broadened cooperation on the basis of common values, interests, and norms could lay the foundation for deepening and expanding cooperation in Northeast Asia. There is an opportunity to transform the U.S.-ROK alliance relationship to fully realize its contributions to regional and global stability and prosperity, as well as to bolster the respective national interests of both countries in Asia. A policy agenda designed to achieve these objectives would promote the expansion of U.S.-ROK bilateral cooperation in a global, regional, and non-traditional security and economic context while addressing changes in the traditional security and economic relationship between the two countries. The establishment of a Center for U.S.-Korea Policy with the mission of developing such an agenda and identifying practical means by which to institutionalize such cooperation is an important first step toward harnessing the newly expanded potential for the relationship.
Initial program activities include: Agenda Setting in U.S.-ROK Relations, Benchmarking America’s Alliance Partners: Implications for U.S.-ROK Cooperation; U.S.-ROK Cooperation on peacekeeping and international development assistance; U.S.-ROK dialogue on China and architectures for multilateral cooperation in East Asia; U.S.-ROK Cooperation on nuclear and climate change issues; contingency planning for North Korea and Implications of Global/Regional Cooperation for the U.S.-ROK security alliance; the influence of civil society and legislative bodies on the U.S.-ROK alliance.

The Center for U.S.-Korea Policy is a project of The Asia Foundation based in the Foundation’s Washington, D.C. office. The main objective of the Center for U.S.-Korea Policy is to broaden the foundations for institutionalized cooperation between the two countries. To fully achieve this objective, the Center for U.S.-Korea Policy will identify and promote cooperation on specific issues and serve as a resource for promoting realization of such cooperation through expanded dialogue with policymakers in Seoul and Washington.

Scott Snyder is Director of the Center for U.S.-Korea Policy and Senior Associate at The Asia Foundation and Pacific Forum CSIS.

NEWS & EVENTS

FEBRUARY 26 • THE ASIA FOUNDATION, WASHINGTON, D.C.
CHINA’S RISE AND THE TWO KOREAS
Scott Snyder, Center for U.S.-Korea Policy Director and Senior Associate at The Asia Foundation, will discuss the findings of his new book, China’s Rise and the Two Koreas: Politics, Economics, Security, which explores the transformation of the Sino-South Korean relationship since the early 1990s. By assessing the strategic significance of recent developments in China’s relationship with both North and South Korea and the likely consequences for U.S. and Japanese influence in the region, this meticulous study lends important context to critical debates regarding China’s foreign policy, Northeast Asian security, and international relations more broadly. The event is co-sponsored with the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

David Lampton, George and Sadie Hyman Professor of China Studies and Director of the China Studies Program at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, will provide comments.

To RSVP for this event, contact rsvp@asiafound-dc.org

FEBRUARY 17 • THE ASIA FOUNDATION, SEOUL, KOREA
PROSPECTS FOR DEEPENING THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE
As the opening event for The Asia Foundation’s Center for U.S.-Korea Policy, this conference will bring together U.S. and Korean experts to discuss possibilities for strengthening U.S.-ROK alliance cooperation in a range of issues. Including both American and South Korean perspectives as well as comparative views with respect to other U.S. alliances, the discussion will comprehensively assess the future of the U.S.-ROK alliance in light of the new Obama Administration and agenda forged by the “U.S.-ROK strategic alliance” in April 2008. The program is co-sponsored with The Asia Foundation’s Korea office and Friends of The Asia Foundation/Korea.

To RSVP for this event, contact csmoon@asiafound.org

FEBRUARY 10 • THE KOREA SOCIETY, NEW YORK, N.Y.
CHINA’S RISE AND THE TWO KOREAS
Scott Snyder, Center for U.S.-Korea Policy Director and Senior Associate at The Asia Foundation, will discuss the findings of his new book, China’s Rise and the Two Koreas: Politics, Economics, Security. Samuel Kim, Senior Research Scholar at the East Asian Institute at Columbia University, will serve as a panelist.

To RSVP for this event, contact patrick.ny@koreasociety.org

TASK FORCE ON U.S. POLICY TOWARD THE KOREAN PENINSULA
As part of the Independent Task Force Program of the Council on Foreign Relations, this task force aims to examine internal changes in South and North Korea and their implications for regional stability in an attempt to forge a more integrated U.S. policy toward the peninsula. The Independent Task Force on the Korean peninsula will be co-chaired by Ambassador Stephen Bosworth and General John H. Tilelli, and directed by Scott Snyder, who joins the Council on Foreign Relations as Adjunct Senior Fellow for Korea Studies.

PUBLICATIONS


Brad Glosserman and Scott Snyder (September 24, 2008), “Memo to Prime Minister Aso: Build Trilateralism,” *Pacific Forum CSIS*.


For a complete list of publications, please visit: www.centerforuskoreapolicy.org

**VIEWS ON THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE**

“The National Assembly of Korea would like to extend its wholehearted congratulations on the inauguration of U.S. President Barack Obama, which we surely believe will serve to develop U.S.-Korean relations into a future-oriented and strategic alliance befitting the 21st century.”

— **Korean National Assembly**, Resolution Congratulating President-elect Barack Obama on His Inauguration as the 44th President of the United States, January 13, 2009

“The government will seek to strengthen and develop the Korea-United States strategic alliance in a concrete way under the leadership of new governments in the two countries, with the new U.S. administration's inauguration as momentum.”

— **Yu Myung-hwan**, ROK Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade at a press conference, Seoul, January 12, 2009

“For some time, Korea-U.S. relations were less than desirable. Since my Administration took over, however...bilateral ties are being reborn as a strategic alliance based on ever-more-solid mutual trust.”

— **President Lee Myung-bak** in his New Year Policy Address to the Nation, January 2, 2009

“The South Korean government is strongly convinced that Obama’s election win would elevate the future-oriented alliance between South Korea and the U.S. to a higher level.”

— **President Lee Myung-bak** in a message to Obama on his election as U.S. President, November 5, 2008

“The pending transformation to the structure of our command relationships is aimed at increasing the defensive capabilities of this alliance...We now enter an era when the Korean people can be confident and proud of having ultimate responsibility for their own defense – while remaining assured that the United States will continue to be steadfast in its support of the ROK-U.S. Alliance throughout the 21st Century and beyond.”


“Our alliance, always strong, is itself transitioning to a broader and deeper partnership...[Korea and the United States] are bound together in so many ways, and this is our continuity – through our militaries, our economies, our experiences, our values, and all of that most importantly through us, the people. That's the continuity, and I look forward to continuing our mission of bringing this alliance to a new level.”

— **Kathleen Stephens**, U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, in a speech to the Korean-American Association, Seoul, November 4, 2008

“The North Korea-U.S. diplomacy will start on the basis of firm South Korea-U.S. alliance.”

— **Prime Minister Han Seung-soo** at the National Assembly, Seoul, November 4, 2008

**ABOUT THE CENTER**

The **Center for U.S.-Korea Policy** aims to deepen and broaden the foundations for institutionalized cooperation between the United States and South Korea by promoting bilateral policy coordination. A project of The Asia Foundation, the Center is based in the Foundation’s Washington D.C. office. The Center supports the Foundation’s commitment to the development of the Asia Pacific by supporting a comprehensive U.S.-ROK alliance partnership on emerging global, regional, and non-traditional security challenges.

The **Asia Foundation** is a private, non-profit, non-governmental organization committed to the development of a peaceful, prosperous, just, and open Asia-Pacific region. Drawing on 50 years of experience in Asia, the Foundation collaborates with private and public partners to support leadership and institutional development, exchanges, and policy research.

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The Center for U.S.-Korea Policy is based in the Washington D.C. office of The Asia Foundation with seed funding from the Smith Richardson Foundation. The Center accepts donations from the public and private sector for its programs and operations. Inquiries should be directed to Scott Snyder at ssnyder@centerforuskoreapolicy.org.