

[Special contribution]

Navigating a New World: The Evolving Challenges and alliances in Global Security

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Sorry I can't be with you in person at the National Defense university Forum which I've had the opportunity to attend previously, but I'm happy to offer a few comments about this Brave New World that we're all struggling with. To note that The International Security order is rapidly changing and in ways that we hadn't anticipated but that will present to you as professionals dealing with South Korea's security as well as Americans and others severe new tests is a truism. But it's often worthwhile pausing for a little bit to think about a platitude or a truism something we all know to reflect on what it actually means. There is no question that South Korea and the ROK-U.S. Alliance have provided a very firm foundation for one of the miracles of the past 70 years in which a war-torn nation has emerged as one of the most vibrant democracies, economies, and technology leaders. South Korea has taken its place among the major middle powers of the world so we can celebrate that and we do celebrate that.

But we should also notice that the international chessboard is changing so rapidly that the answers that we gave to the challenges that we faced in 1953 or 1993 are not necessarily sufficient answers to the questions we face today in 2023 or may face in 2033. So before I comment on the challenges I thought I would first pause to reflect on what has been accomplished because I think it's important to understand that foundation. Then I'll turn to the more difficult question about what at least at this point we can say about the challenges ahead.

We have all been celebrating the 70th Anniversary of the end of the Korean War - seven decades in which the Armistice has allowed South Korea, despite the threats from North Korea and despite provocations from North Korea, to emerge thanks to the hard work of its people and government. South Koreans have seen more improvement in their well-being, in their lives, in their health, and in their

incomes than in any seven decades in all of Korean history.

I continue to say what a miracle it is, how fantastic a country you have built, how proud you should be of it, and how proud everyone is and indeed how proud Americans are to have played a part in creating the environment in which these achievements were able to take place. Now I note this is not just the 70th anniversary of the end of the Korean War – this week we marked the 78th anniversary of the end of World War II, with the unconditional surrender of Japan. Few have noticed that the end of that war was also the beginning of the long peace in which for the past 78 years there have been no great power wars. So as historians we should look and remember that is extremely anomalous. It is actually very hard to find an analogous period in which over 78 years there were no wars between major powers. There have been wars of course - smaller Wars - but no great power war. That is not to be taken for granted and it cannot be taken for granted in the future, but it is a big accomplishment.

Secondly, we have built and preserved a nuclear order that no one could have imagined if we go back 78 years ago to the end of World War II and the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. If anybody had said that for the next 78 years you would not see another nuclear weapon used in war they would have given a thousand to one or ten thousand to one odds against. I mean it is quite miraculous that over these 78 years there has emerged a strong taboo against any use of nuclear weapons in war. We cannot take this for granted, but it is nonetheless something to note and be thankful for.

Thirdly, who could have imagined there would only be nine nuclear weapon States today when there are probably 40 or 50 states – including South Korea - which could develop their own nuclear arsenals if they chose to. The non-proliferation regime in which South Korea has been a shining example and pillar is something in which we can all take pride but which we should also notice is not natural or necessarily permanent. It is always under stress and I think what President Yoon did with the Washington declaration just a couple of months ago was another example of the way South Korea's leadership in this realm has contributed to the global nonproliferation regime that has left us all safer than we would be otherwise. So there is much to be thankful for looking back. Now, what about looking ahead?

Looking ahead, the summary bottom line is things are going to be much more severe and test us in ways that we haven't been tested over these past seven decades. I will mention five features of what I call the grave new world. First, the post-Cold War era is over, dead, and buried. Secretary of Defense Mattis in his National Defense strategy conducted the formal burial of the so-called unipolar order in his 2018 National Defense Strategy. As he said, we became accustomed to thinking we could use our forces to fly anywhere, sail anywhere, land anywhere, and fight anywhere with uncontested Supremacy - but that was then. Now we

recognize that in every arena of warfare and every domain we are fully contested by others - in particular by China, but also to some extent by Russia and other middle powers. So again, as the U.S. tries to take care of its own security and fulfill its commitment to others it is dealing with adversaries which contest American power in every domain. Secondly, a multipolar geopolitical landscape is emerging. It will not be a unipolar or bipolar world, but a multi-aligned, multi-dimensional world in which alignments will be more subtle and complex. Interstate relationships will be tight in some areas and loose in others. States will be thick cooperators in some domains and fierce rivals in others. For example, South Korea will continue to have China as its major trading partner, but at the same time depend on its relationship with the U.S. for its security. While there will be claims that you need to choose one or the other, we are going to be in a world that is beyond the old black and white paradigm. We must become accustomed to what I call "50 Shades of alignment and opposition." Going to that will be painful for Americans and others and require a lot more intelligence and agility.

Third, the defining geopolitical challenge of today and the rest of our professional lives as far as any eye can see will be the rapid rise of China and its impact on the U.S. and the Global Security order of which the US has been the principal architect and guardian. As I wrote in *Destined for War*, a Thucydidean Rivalry occurs when a rapidly rising power seriously threatens to displace a major ruling power. These circumstance involve is a severely heightened risk of war. Twelve of the sixteen Thucydidean rivalries of the past 500 years the last 16 times this ended in war - frequently wars neither party intended. Today, Thucydidean dynamics are magnifying the potential for misperception and miscalculation in relations between the U.S. and China. Under such circumstances, accidents or provocations by third parties are more likely to lead to a crisis or war.

Fourth, Russia has launched a war against Ukraine that it cannot win, thanks to the resilience and courage of the Ukrainians and the support that they've received from the West. But at the same time it is a war that Putin cannot lose if he is to maintain his position as leader of Russia. Putin may resort to nuclear use if he were to conclude it is the only alternative to suffering a humiliating defeat. If that were to happen, we would be dragged into a striking New World in which the incentives for further nuclear proliferation may become irresistible. That is another reason why the Biden Administration has worked so hard to manage this war in order to not fight World War III over Ukraine.

Fifth, South Korea is forced to continue surviving next door to a very erratic and sometimes seemingly irrational North Korea that has an a powerful conventional Army and an robust nuclear arsenal which is increasingly able to threaten even the United States. Living beside Kim Jong-un and the North Korean regime has been very challenging for South Korea for 70 years and is likely to become more challenging in the period ahead.

So again, we are in what I call a grave new world with many rapidly changing challenges which forces us to step back and assess the answers we have given to the big questions of the last 78 years. We are fortunate that those have been good answers and we have a solid foundation to build on but those old answers may not be sufficient in today's rapidly changing conditions. Accordingly, it is important to ask serious questions about the status and strength of the U.S.-South Korea Alliance. My view is that the alliance was reaffirmed with the Washington Declaration this past April. It is tighter and stronger than it has been in decades and will continue to be so in the future, but I think that is a question you need to look at for yourselves.

Secondly, the meeting this past weekend at Camp David in which South Korean President Yoon, Japanese Prime Minister Kishida, and President Biden met showed that even in the difficult relations between South Korea and Japan the tides are shifting due to the challenge posed by China and the common interests of Japan, South Korea, and the U.S. in dealing with a more erratic North Korea. These forces are driving leaders to take big steps, despite difficult political challenges at home, and even in our own minds to

What will Asia look like going forward? My bet is that we're going to see an emerging, multi-dimensional, and subtle balance of power in which you will see a spectrum of alignments and oppositions across various dimensions. The South Korea-Japan-U.S. relationship will not be part of the Quad. AUKUS will be distinct from the Washington Declaration. India will not be a formal U.S. ally. The Philippines and others in Southeast Asia are going to have to find their way, but you can see the straws in the wind.

Over the next year and next decade I believe we will see the emergence of what in traditional terms would be called a balance of power, but it will be one that is more multi-dimensional and complicated. In some dimensions you'll have very thick partnerships between two parties who will be serious rivals in other dimensions.

To conclude, I believe that Americans and Chinese are going to have to get beyond the kind of black-or-white, either-or style of thinking that we're accustomed to. We must think in terms of at least 50 Shades of complexity in a relationship that I hope will eventually be characterized as a rivalry partnership in which in some domains the U.S. and China will be the fiercest rivals history has ever seen and in other domains they will find themselves having to be thick Partners so that each country can ensure its own Survival.

So again, thank you for letting me have a chance to offer two cents worth for the conference. I'm sorry I can't be there to hear the rest of the presentations and participate in the conversation. I would simply conclude that as a longtime Watcher and admirer of South Korea and - especially its Security Forces - I have been very impressed by South Korea accomplishments and by what Alliance has

done in providing security for South Korea, the region, and indeed for the world. The period ahead is going to be even tougher but I think we have the wind at our back. Thank you very much.