

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT
Event
ROK-U.S. Strategic Forum 2025
“Welcoming Remarks”

DATE
Wednesday, December 3 at 9:00 a.m. ET

FEATURING
Song Guido
President, The Korea Foundation

CSIS EXPERTS
John Hamre
President and CEO, and Langone Chair in American Leadership, CSIS

Transcript By
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John Hamre: Great. Thank you all. Thank you. My name is John Hamre. I'm the president of CSIS.

And it's always a pleasure for me to be able to welcome friends here, especially Korean friends here. Korea, as everybody knows, is kind of my adopted second home. I've been to, I think, Korea maybe 53, 54 times, you know, since I've been at CSIS, and it's – there's just a unique quality to the Korea-U.S. partnership that is so very, very important to me personally, and then I think but it's important for the world. And I'm so grateful that we have this opportunity every year, this ROK-U.S. Strategic Forum, to be able to dig deep on some key issues that really do matter to us.

And this is all made possible because of the Korea Foundation, and for 10 years the Korea Foundation has been supporting this and making it – making it possible. And I had the pleasure just a few minutes ago to meet the new president, Ambassador Song Guido, and want to say welcome. Congratulations on this job. It's a splendid opportunity.

I told him he's the first Korean ambassador I've ever met who speaks Spanish. (Laughter.) You know? And I asked, how many are there? And he – and he said, I think I'm the only one – (laughs) – you know? And it lets me make a point, and I make this point politely. Korea for 50 years only considered its foreign policy to require good relations with the United States, a working relationship with Japan, working relationship with China, and then somebody at the U.N., you know, right? And so it was too small, and the Foreign Ministry is too small.

And there's a very – one little anecdote to explain it. Korea has an economic two-and-a-half times larger than the economy of the Netherlands, but the Netherlands has a Foreign Ministry two-and-a-half times the size of the Korean. It doesn't make sense, OK? And you know, for all those years Korea just focused very narrowly on the peninsula, just too narrowly. I understand why. You know, you've got this country just as far as from here to Baltimore, you know, that has nuclear weapons and says menacing things all the time. We would have a different attitude, too, so I'm not being critical. But you know, you're a bigger country than you think you are. You should have a bigger Foreign Ministry to represent your interests.

And in the meantime, that's why you have the Korea Foundation. It's the Korea Foundation that is expanding and carrying the flag of Korean culture and policy and diplomacy which we desperately need. And so I want to say it's a privilege to work with the Korea Foundation, and I think it will continue to do very, very, very important work going forward. But it isn't a substitute for building a stronger foreign service.

And so just, OK, I feel better I got that out of my system. OK.

But anyway, really delighted that we have this event. And this is – this event has drawn very significant attention here in the U.S. I mean, I remember two years ago when Secretary of State Blinken, you know, specifically – it was the only thing he came to that year at CSIS, was to speak at this event. And right now we have a Foreign Ministry – or, our State Department that's – that is still kind of in flux and we got a lot of other things going on, but we are very fortunate

that Jonathan Fritz, who's principal deputy assistant secretary for East Asia, is going to join us here. And I'm very grateful that – for that.

We will also have a word shortly from Foreign Minister Cho Hyun. He was with us before in one of our sessions, I think in 2017. I can't quite remember. But so we welcome him back. He's back in a – in an important new job.

Big, big, big issues to talk about today. I think the whole question we're going to get at this morning is how – is deterrence still credible? Is America's pledge of extended deterrence still credible? Are there things that need to be done, you know, to make deterrence more credible? Is it still possible to get disarmament? And if not, what do we do? I mean, so these are huge, big, big issues. And we're going to talk about – you know, about economics, and then your neighborhood – your very complicated neighborhood. It's going to be quite a good day.

So let's get started. And my role here is really to offer a very brief introduction of Ambassador Song. He's an academic by training, and I've always admired that Korea has seen – has used its universities as a way to draw people into the Foreign Ministry. And he's done it on numerous occasions, played roles – ambassadorial roles, played structural roles. He was – he was the ambassador for Korea to Colombia, and my guess is covered about 15 other countries while he was in the neighborhood – (laughs) – you know, because there isn't enough depth for it. But he took his Ph.D. from a university in Spain and has a very, very deep personal interest in Spanish culture. And as I say, it's most unusual. I think he's ahead of his time because, when you think about it, this world is fractioning when it comes to commerce. Korea should be the winner and South America should be the real target, and so I think there's going to be a real opportunity for Korea going forward.

So could I ask you with your applause to – I just want to make sure I'm doing this right. Do I do it to you, Victor, or do – or to Ambassador Song?

Would you all please, with your applause, welcome to the stage the president of the Korea Foundation, Song Guido. Thank you. (Applause.)

Song Guido:

SONG GUIDO: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Guido Song, the new president of Korea Foundation. I'll read the prepared, my script.

It's a good honor to welcome you all today to the 10th Republic of Korea-United States Strategy Forum cohosted by the Korea Foundation and CSIS. On behalf of the Korea Foundation, I would like to extend my warmest greetings to Dr. John Hamre, president and CEO of CSIS; Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Jonathan Fritz; distinguished members of the Korean delegation; and all the esteemed participants joining us today. We are deeply grateful for your presence here despite your demanding schedules.

This year mark a decade since the inaugural ROK-U.S. Strategy Forum. The Korea Foundation and CSIS began this invaluable journey in 2016. While we encountered numerous challenges in the initial stage, this has been made possible through the dedicated efforts of President Hamre, Dr. Victor Cha, the Korea Chair at CSIS, and the staff members at CSIS. I am confident that our collaboration with regard to the development of ROK-U.S. bilateral relations contributing to a stronger and deeper partnership.

In August at a venue where today's guests now stand, the ROK-U.S. summit reaffirm our countries' shared commitment to advancing our strategic partnership. Discussions touched on key areas such as nuclear energy, shipbuilding, and the emerging industries, reflecting both economic priority and the honest security concerns.

In October, President Lee Jae-myung and President Donald Trump declared a new chapter in the ROK-U.S. alliance, the linchpin for peace, security, and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula and in the Indo-Pacific region. Both leaders welcomed Korean investment in various sectors to advance economic and national security interests, including shipbuilding, energy, semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, critical minerals, AI, quantum computing, and more.

Today, we meet at a time of heightened geopolitical competition, rapid technological change, and continued uncertainty in global trade and supply chains. In this environment, our alliance serves as a strategic anchor providing stability and direction as the region navigates growing complexity.

As agreed upon during the October meeting, our two leaders have pledged to cooperate to implement the joint statement of the 2018 U.S.-

DPRK Singapore Summit, making effort to complete the denuclearization of the DPRK and ensure peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

Meanwhile, recent high-level engagement at the APEC summit have produced three major outcomes: the Gyeongju Declaration, the APEC AI Initiative, and the APEC Collaborative Framework for Demographic Changes. This year's APEC agenda also emphasized supply chain resilience, digital transformation, sustainable growth, and high-standard economic governance – all areas that align closely with ongoing Korea-U.S. cooperation. Our joint efforts in AI, semiconductors, clean energy, shipbuilding, and climate initiative illustrate how the alliance is adapting to future challenges and opportunities.

Together, these commitments reiterate our understanding that our cooperation must extend beyond the peninsula to the wider Indo-Pacific landscape. In this context, returning to fundamentals is more important than ever, reaffirming our shared purpose, strengthening the foundation of peace and stability, and pursuing creative avenues for deeper economic and technological collaboration.

As we begin this two-day forum, I hope it will serve as a timely platform for candid dialogue on the strategic, economic, and technological issues shaping our region. I am confident that today's discussions will generate insights that help advance our shared interests and contribute meaningfully to the future of Korea-U.S. partnership.

Finally, I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to the leadership of CSIS for their outstanding preparation and to all distinguished participants for your continued engagement and support. Congratulations once more on the 10th anniversary of the ROK-U.S. Strategic Forum. Thank you. (Applause.)

(END.)

