

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Event

ROK-U.S. Strategic Forum 2025  
**“Congratulatory Remarks”**

DATE

**Wednesday, December 3 at 9:15 a.m. ET**

FEATURING

**Cho Hyun**

*Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea (via video)*

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Cho Hyun:

President John Hamre, President Song Guido, excellencies, distinguished guests, it is a privilege to join you for the 10th ROK-U.S. Strategic Forum. The steadfast partnership between the Korea Foundation and the Center for Strategic and International Studies has long supported the ROK-U.S. alliance, and I commend both institutions for their leadership.

I also wish to express my appreciation to CSIS for hosting the Statesmen's Forum for President Lee Jae-myung last August. It was a meaningful occasion for him to share his vision for the alliance and reflect on the global landscape.

Ladies and gentlemen, today's Forum convenes at a consequential moment. We now turn the outcomes of the October ROK-U.S. summit into concrete action. I had the honor of accompanying President Lee throughout the summit, and I can attest that the discussions were both constructed and marked by deep mutual trust between our two leaders.

The joint fact sheet distilled the significance of this summit. It reaffirmed the ironclad nature of our alliance and charted a path toward a future-oriented, comprehensive strategic alliance strengthening peace while preparing for the challenges ahead.

At the heart of this partnership lies our shared commitment to peace and stability. Securing peace on the Korean Peninsula, therefore, remains the foundation of our joint endeavor. The United States reaffirmed its extended deterrence commitment and the enduring presence of the U.S. Forces Korea. On our part, Korea expressed its determination to reinforce its defense capabilities to lead the combined conventional defense posture vis-à-vis North Korea. This is consistent with President Lee's remarks at the CSIS Forum, where he made clear Korea's intention to increase defense spending and assume greater role for its own security.

Both sides also reiterated to work together toward the transition of wartime operational control. Yet, deterrence must be paired with diplomacy. We need to prevent inadvertent conflict, deescalate tensions, and restore dialogue with North Korea.

North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs remain a grave concern and a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula is an imperative we cannot relinquish. It was in this spirit that President Lee proposed the E.N.D. Initiative – exchange, normalization, denuclearization. The initiative seeks to break the entrenched cycle of hostility and open a realistic pathway toward lasting peace.

Beyond the peninsula, we must also navigate a rapidly changing strategic landscape. Russia's deepening ties with North Korea, China's growing influence, and Japan's evolving strategic posture all shape the environment we must navigate. Korea aims to manage these shifts with a principled approach, reducing strategic risks while strengthening channels of cooperation in Northeast Asia.

Within this broader regional landscape, ROK-U.S.-Japan cooperation remains indispensable. Together, we play a central role in maintaining regional stability and addressing emerging security challenges. Despite current bilateral strains, Korea will continue to advance cooperation with China and Japan, including the trilateral framework. It is, therefore, encouraging that the APEC leaders meeting created the conditions for the first U.S.-China summit of the second Trump administration.

Moving on, another pillar of alliance transformation is our strategic, economic, and technological partnership. Korea and the United States are poised to usher in a new era of industrial cooperation, advancing U.S. manufacturing while opening new horizons for Korean firms. Our recent trade and investment agreement was grounded in trust at the highest level and lays the foundation for expanded collaboration in shipbuilding, energy, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and quantum, and more.

Equally significant is the U.S. decision to support Korea's peaceful uranium enrichment and spent-fuel reprocessing, as well as President Trump's support of Korea's development of nuclear-powered submarines. These steps will markedly strengthen our shared capabilities in next-generation energy, defense, and shipbuilding.

Ladies and gentlemen, for more than seven decades the ROK-U.S. alliance has evolved with the currents of history. Our leaders have agreed to modernize the alliance in a future-oriented manner so that it meets the demands of a rapidly changing environment. Now is the time to sustain that momentum. Track-two dialogues, such as this Forum, bring creativity and fresh perspectives that complement governmental diplomacy. I have no doubt your discussion today will contribute meaningfully to our shared agenda.

Pragmatism remains the compass of Korea's diplomacy. For us, pragmatism means placing national interest at the center while remaining open to cooperation wherever it can advance peace and prosperity. This is the spirit we bring to our alliance and the spirit that will guide our efforts to shape the region's future.

With that, I look forward to deepening the ROK-U.S. alliance in the years ahead and ask for your continued attention. Thank you. (Applause.)

(END.)