

Center for Strategic and International Studies

Online Event

“CSIS Commission on the Korean Peninsula: Recommendations for the U.S.-Korea Alliance”

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FEATURING:

General Vincent Brooks (Ret.),

Chairman and President of the Korea Defense Veterans Association; Former Commander, USFK, UN Command, and ROK-US Combined Forces Command

Wendy Cutler,

*Vice President, Asia Society Policy Institute;
Former Acting Deputy U.S. Trade Representative*

Randall Schriver,

Chairman, Project 2049 Institute; Former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs, U.S. Department of Defense

Kathleen Stephens,

*President & CEO, Korea Economic Institute of America;
Former U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Korea*

CSIS EXPERTS:

John J. Hamre,

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Victor Cha:

Good afternoon, good evening, wherever you're tuning in from. We're here at CSIS. This Victor Cha, senior vice president and Korea chair at CSIS, and professor at Georgetown University. We're going to let the room fill in a little bit, so I'm going to – (laughs) – stall, I guess, until we get the room filled. This is a webinar on the CSIS Commission on the Korean Peninsula: Recommendations for the U.S.-Korea alliance. I still see similar people – quite a few people – still coming into the room. So I'll give it another 30 seconds or so before we – before we get started.

(Pause.)

OK. So again, this is a webinar on the “CSIS Commission on the Korean Peninsula: Recommendations for the U.S.-Korea Alliance.” Before I introduce the commission members, all of whom are probably well known to you, I thought I would begin by just explaining a little bit about the context of how we came to write this report. With just about a year left in the Moon administration, and with a new administration coming in in the United States, we thought that it would be useful to do an analysis that sort of took stock of the U.S.-Korea alliance in the context of a changing geostrategic environment with regard to the question of North Korea, with regard to Chinese coercive behavior in the region, with regard to changing trade patterns and new agreements being reached, some of which didn't include the United States, the pandemic of course, and a whole host of other issues.

With limited time left in the Moon government and with a new government in the United States coming in, we thought it would be useful to do a report that took stock of this. So we pulled together – CSIS did a bipartisan commission of experts, scholars, and former policymakers from the U.S. government. And we spent about two months in meetings talking about the future of the relationship, how it fits in U.S. strategy in Asia, the importance of the alliance in the region and more broadly in the world. We consulted with a wide group of South Koreans, not in person but largely by Zoom webinars, from all sides of the political spectrum to hear their views. And then over the course of a couple of months we put together this report, which is – which will be available to you – if you've not already received it we can certainly send it to you – that offers some thoughts about the U.S.-Korea alliance and the Korean Peninsula.

The co-chairs for the commission are our President and CEO at CSIS John Hamre and our trustee – CSIS Trustee and Professor at Harvard University Joseph Nye. Our rapporteur for the project was Katrin Katz, who I'll introduce in a minute. And our secretary for the project was Dana Kim from CSIS.

So let me very briefly introduce the commission members. Again, they'll be very well-known to you. Vince Brooks is currently chairman and president

of the Korea Defense Veterans Association, former commander of USFK, U.N. Command, and ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command. Wendy Cutler, currently Vice President at the Asia Society Policy Institute and former acting deputy U.S. trade representative. Michael Green, senior vice president for Asia and Japan Chair at CSIS, professor and director of Asian Studies at Georgetown. Randall Schriver, chairman of Project 2049 and former assistant secretary of defense for Indo-Pacific security affairs. Kathy Stephens, president and CEO of the Korea Economic Institute of America. And Sue Terry, senior fellow at CSIS, Korea Chair. And then – I’m sorry – and then Katrin Katz, who is an adjunct fellow with us at CSIS and a lecturer at Columbia University, was the rapporteur for the project, which means she did almost all the writing for the project and wrote a terrific, terrific report. And Dana Kim, who was our secretary for the project from CSIS.

Two commission members who were not able to join us this morning here in Washington, D.C. are Mark Lippert, former U.S. ambassador to Korea; and Rich Armitage, former deputy secretary – deputy secretary of state.

So with that, with the introduction of the commission members, I would – I’m going to turn it over in a minute to Professor Nye to give us some opening framing remarks, and then each of our commission members will say – will give a short set of remarks with regard to certain aspects of the report. Then we’ll go to some questions and answers from the audience, and then we’ll go to Dr. Hamre to give us some final remarks.

So with that, I’m going to turn it over to Joe. Over to you, Joe.

Joseph S. Nye Jr.: Well, thank you very much, Victor.

And I will start with the premise of our commission right at the beginning that Korea is – South Korea is one of the world’s great success stories, both economically and in terms of its political system. And it has managed to accomplish this despite being one of the really geographically unlucky countries in the world in the sense that it’s forever sandwiched in between giant neighbors.

But it’s solved that problem successfully by forming an alliance with the distant great power, the United States, which has no territorial aspirations in the region. And that means that the alliance between the United States and Korea has been a success as well. And the success rests very heavily on the fact that U.S. troops are stationed in Korea. And they’re not only there to protect against a potential invasion from the north, but they also produce a – if you want, a guarantee of the larger point of the United States is committed to extended deterrence of the Korean people and governments.

And in that sense, the United States and South Korea are locked in what we called in some of our discussions on the commission a community of destiny. Any attack or nuclear attack or any kind of attack on South Korea

would wind up killing Americans. And in that sense, we cannot divorce ourselves from each other. We are locked, as I said, in this community of destiny.

And that's why I thought the recent events subsequent to our report, which was the signing of the SMA agreement on military expenditures and the successful 2+2 meetings of the defense and state diplomatic parts of the two governments, was so important. In other words, if I look at what we are reporting on, we're reporting on a success story. And what our report does is tell us what we have to do to keep it that way.

So these are some broad framing remarks, but I'll let the rest of the commissioners spell out more specific points.

Mr. Cha: Thank you, Joe, for those great framing remarks.

And now I would like to go to General Brooks.

General Vincent Brooks (Ret.): OK, thanks very much, Victor. And it's an honor to be with everyone today. Thanks for dialing in to hear the results of our work; a great honor to be part of this commission.

I'll build on some of the things that Joe Nye just talked about. And I'll focus on extended deterrence. First I would say that extended deterrence must be viewed as a reality. It's real. But it is challenging, as we discussed, to convince our – really the beneficiaries of extended deterrence, who are our allies, of that reality. And as a result it must be frequently affirmed in dialogue, as it was recently by Secretary Austin in his recent trips to Japan and Korea, and also in actions that cause it to become more tangible. And that happens through senior-level military exchanges and through confidence-building activities that make it very clear that it's something that our allies can count on.

As Joe just talked about, there is a community of destiny, a shared destiny between the two countries, and we did discuss this quite a bit. Both countries have people in harm's way, and it is for them that extended deterrence actually provides protection. And it's important to highlight the affirming presence of the United States military there, but not only the military – somewhere around 30,000 – but the hundreds of thousands of American civilians who live there, who study there, who work in the Republic of Korea today.

We, further, talked about the capabilities for extended deterrence themselves. They need to be upgraded, and that is in both countries – particularly the defensive measures, but even from the U.S. perspective some of the offensive measures that are nuclear and in South Korea some of the offensive measures that are not nuclear. And there must be an

improvement in coordination between the two countries when it comes to these measures for applying extended deterrence.

And finally, I would say that the alliance really has to energize the existing channels of communication. Prime among them would be the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group. This is an existing body, but it needs revitalization. And we believe that it's important to use such a mechanism to have a continuous dialogue about extended deterrence and to create the conditions of consultation that are so important in an alliance, and at the same time to recognize that there may be new mechanisms, new channels of communication that must be developed as well if they're needed.

So I'll stop at that and I would hand it back over to you, Victor. Thank you.

Mr. Cha: Thank you, General Brooks, for those remarks.

Now we're – the next commission member we'll go to is Wendy Cutler.

Ms. Welsh: Great. Thank you. Your essay concluded with this: We in Los Angeles and leaders in other global cities are ready and willing to partner with the Biden administration to unite the country around a foreign policy that works for Americans and for the world. So what do you think are the highest potential opportunities for this administration to work with cities to advance foreign and domestic policy priorities?

Wendy Cutler: Well, thanks, Victor. And thanks to C(S)IS for including me in this project. I think we – in a short period of time we accomplished a lot.

I just want to briefly talk about our economic and trade relationship. I was struck to see that it was mentioned in the 2+2 joint statement, where both sides talked about the need for a robust economic and trade relationship but also the need for economic cooperation on future-oriented issues. And that's really what this commission talked about.

I think we all agree that that KORUS has added – successfully added an economic pillar to our overall alliance, but what we need to do now is to build on KORUS. And particularly as we look at regional and global economic challenges, there's a lot that the U.S. and Korea can do together. And indeed, we identified a number of those areas that I'll briefly touch upon.

One, the issue of WTO reform is critical right now. Korea has benefited from a rules-based system, like the United States has, but the WTO is in crisis. And working together, there's a lot we can do on that front.

Second, the issue of secure supply chains and trying to deal with our respective vulnerabilities and look ahead, as all countries look to diversify

and add resiliency to their supply chains. In the obvious sector of semiconductors there's work we can do here together with respect to supply chains, but it shouldn't be limited to semiconductors.

We also talked about the importance of the climate change agenda and how trade can contribute to that, particularly with respect to lowering tariffs for environmental technologies, reducing fossil fuel subsidies, and bringing the climate change agreement into trade agreements.

Furthermore, we discussed the whole issue of advanced technologies and digital trade, where we share a lot of common interest and strengths. And particularly in the Indo-Pacific region where a number of countries, including the United States and Korea, have bilateral agreements or are working on bilateral agreements, there's a lot that we can do together to thread these agreements together and help set the standards and set the norms and rules for trade in these important sectors. And we also touched upon how we can work together to address the China challenge. Now, we did so in a way to recognize the complexities here with respect to Korea, but we discussed the need for an affirmative agenda, that it's in our mutual interest to set rules, for example, on non-market economy behavior. And we can do so together in the WTO.

And I finally – I conclude with the recommendation that we both remain open to CPTPP accession. Korea never joined the CPTPP. It got awful close, and how apparently Seoul is reconsidering whether to join or not. In the U.S., it's not really on our trade agenda right now. I'm hopeful maybe with time there'll be serious reconsideration. But we did discuss the idea that maybe at some point we'd both join together or perhaps that Korea on its own decides to join earlier, given that it would be a very natural partner given its high standard free trade agreements.

So with that, Victor, I'll turn it back to you.

Mr. Cha: Great. Thanks, Wendy. That was terrific.

Next we'll go to Michael Green, who will talk about regional relations. Mike.

Michael J. Green: Thank you, Victor.

So I was asked to say a little bit about the aspect of our taskforce that looked at how we can align the very successful U.S.-ROK bilateral alliance more closely with alliances and partnerships in the region – most notably with Japan, but also Australia, with India, and with NATO. Taking advantage of what Korea brings to regional challenges and really the interest that the U.S. and ROK share in a stable and rules-based open regional order.

Japan, of course, is the most challenging political neighbor for Korea to do this with. And in surveys that Victor and I have done over the past decades about the future of Asian regional order, when we've asked in 10 different countries about issues of democracy, trade, the American role, concerns about coercion, no two countries have been more aligned in their vision for the future of Asia than Japan and Korea. And the lost opportunity is enormous. Vince Brooks could tell a lot to this group about what we lose in terms of operational coordination among the U.S., Japan, and Korea because of the political difficulties between Seoul and Tokyo.

But we also something in the broader regional strategy. And this goes as well, I would argue, for the relationship among the U.S., Japan, and Australia, what we do with NATO. Most of the other U.S. alliances and partnerships are moving together. The recent Quad-ening of the U.S, Japan, Australia, and India demonstrated this. And Korea's falling a bit behind of all this.

I think there's an enormous opportunity for Korea to be a leader in this effort, and the U.S.-Korea alliance to play a key role, whether it's infrastructure financing, capacity building for the coast guards and navies of the Philippines or Vietnam, women's empowerment, capacity building, democracy, and governance. Korea's really a leader, but the strategic ambiguity concept that's prevalent in many quarters in Seoul has rendered the Korean side a bit hesitant to be seen as too explicitly involved in these efforts. And I think the key, and we mention this in our report, is to think not of a strategy for containing or challenging China, but rather a strategy for empowering other Asian states, making them more resilient, where Korea's played a key role and could be aligned very closely in the future with other democratic allies and partners.

I think the consequences of not aligning more regional strategy for Korea and the U.S.-Korea alliance are considerable. I worry, I think many of us worry, that Beijing sees somehow that the U.S.-Korea alliance is the most vulnerable alliance because of the ambiguity about regional strategy. And I would argue that in terms of setting the agenda in Asia and in Washington, D.C., Seoul has lost an opportunity by not being more closely aligned not only with Japan, but with Australia, and with other key allies, including on the trade and digital issues that Wendy mentioned.

So we talk about this in the report and think it's something of a lost opportunity for the alliance, something of an imperative, but an opportunity for both the U.S. and ROK to build a more secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

Thanks, Victor.

Mr. Cha:

Great. Thank you, Mike.

Next we'll go to Katrin Katz, who will talk about how we look – the commission looked at inter-Korean relations. So, Katrin, over to you.

Katrin Fraser
Katz:

Thank you, Victor. Thank you for your kind introductory statements.

It has been a great honor for me also to be a part of the work of this commission. I have to say that the work that went into writing was made considerably easier by the many great ideas that this esteemed commission brought to the table in our – in our many meetings, as well as the ideas from our South Korean friends, the experts that also contributed.

So, as Victor noted, I have been asked to speak briefly on the topic of inter-Korean relations. So I'll briefly note the commission's recommendation in this area and then make two comments on that.

The commission report does make a broad recommendation for the Biden administration in the area of inter-Korean relations in the context of a list of principles for the U.S. to draw from in addressing the threat presented by North Korea's nuclear weapons. Specifically, the recommendation notes that the U.S. should support North-South engagement efforts, particularly in the humanitarian area, yet there are two important caveats in this area. One is that North-South engagement must be closely coordinated with denuclearization negotiations. And second, that they – that any engagement efforts must remain compliant with the U.N. sanctions regime.

So two comments, quickly, on that broad recommendation. Two quick points.

As we know from the experiences of the past few years, this is an area of potential discord between the allies. The Trump administration took the stance, particularly following the Hanoi summit, you know, asking Seoul to tether inter-Korean engagement to denuclearization progress. And the Moon administration, you know, was arguably more eager to move forward on inter-Korean progress than – you know, than the Trump administration was; or, rather, the Trump administration was careful to remind the administration that this must remain tethered to progress in U.S.-North Korea talks, denuclearization process more generally. And at that time it was very much stalled.

So, moving forward, if the Biden administration does take this approach this could be an area of discord. Arguably, the Moon – President Moon has increased political pressure at this time because he has one more year in office and very much wants to cement progress in this area. So this is an area to watch.

But I will note a silver lining. That silver lining right now is that the U.S.-South Korea communication channels have reopened. We had, you know, as we all know and as our listeners will know, very successful 2+2 meetings

last week. The March 18th joint statement between the governments of the U.S. and South Korea references close coordination – I’m quoting here – “on all issues related to the Korean Peninsula” as well as a commitment to maintaining high-level consultations on the U.S. ongoing North Korea policy review. And furthermore, the allies have expressed openness to engage on a broader range of issues, as well.

So, to close up these remarks, careful alliance management among the experienced teams on both sides – and the Biden administration brings a lot of experience in this area – as well as new atmospherics should help to diminish the potential for serious risks due to ongoing and actually longstanding sensitivities and complexities in this area. You know, the stakes, arguably, have – are as high as ever in this relationship, and both sides do recognize that. So I’m personally hopeful that this can be a(n) area where new opportunities for coordination – close coordination can be found in the weeks and months to come.

Thank you.

Mr. Cha: Thank you, Katrin, for those remarks. And thank you, again, for doing such a fantastic job in drafting the report.

Now we’ll move to Ambassador Stephens. Kathy, over to you.

Kathleen Stephens: Yeah. Victor, thank you. It’s great to join all of you. I – (laughs) – am on an unstable internet connection, so if you lose me, please move on.

But I learned a lot from this process. I am especially pleased that I was asked to focus on the commission’s look at the U.S. and South Korea and how we work together globally. Clearly, this builds on some remarks that have already been made.

But one thing that particularly pleased me as a former ambassador in Seoul – and I think I speak for Mark Lippert, also formerly in Seoul – any of us who have been posted in Seoul have kind of seen over the years how the U.S. and South Korea work together in so many areas globally, although it has not gotten the kind of attention over the last few years, given some of the alliance difficulties, that it might have. But it’s not a new area to talk about global contributions. We could go back to troops to Vietnam or Iraq or Afghanistan; during my time in Seoul, of course, the stand-up of the G-20, the role that the ROK played there; development. The list goes on and on. And we do talk about some of that in the report.

But looking forward, you know, there’s – I think all of us had a real sense, which I strongly endorse, that this is an area that merits and has in the report its own chapter, that there’s an agenda, which is very much the Biden administration’s agenda, in cyber, in public health, in space, in energy and the environment and the fourth industrial revolution, where South Korea

brings great capacity, capability, energy and interest in working with the United States on these issues.

It has the – I think the side effect also of engaging new people in the alliance in this kind of broader effort, and also reinforces some of the goals we've talked about in other areas, both regionally and in trade, in terms of the values agenda.

So, you know, with the report, which I do – chapter three is on these global contributions. We tried to think of specific areas where we start off. And I think each of us might have different ideas about what are the most ripe, but I would say all of them are quite ripe. And, you know, clearly public health is one I would highlight for global, regional, and – as well as bilateral cooperation.

So with that, thank you very much for allowing me to be a part of this.

Mr. Cha: Thanks, Kathy. We really appreciate your joining the commission, and thanks for those great remarks.

And we'll go now to Sue Terry, who will talk about the recommendations on North Korea.

Sue Mi Terry: Thank you, Victor.

It was really an honor to be on this commission. As Victor noted, I will focus my remarks on the North Korean issue.

As we all know too well, there's no more intractable foreign-policy problem than North Korea for the U.S.-ROK alliance. Today North Korea continues to produce nuclear weapons at a rapid rate while working on missiles that can be launched faster, more difficult to detect, and harder for ballistic-missile defenses to stop. Kim Jong-un has already this year even threatened to improve his nuclear arsenal even further, including the development of tactical nuclear weapons.

So the commission discussed what can be done. And we came to conclude that to have an effective North Korea policy, whatever specific policy path we choose, first and foremost, U.S. and South Korea, as it moves forward, should not depart from several core principles, principles like the realization that denuclearization, while not a short-term prospect, should still remain a long-term goal. This is actually a matter of debate right now among the Korea-watchers community and arms-control community. Principles like, you know, close coordination with U.S. allies Seoul and Tokyo is a must, which means maintaining transparency at each step and not using alliance equities such as bilateral exercises as bargaining chips in negotiations.

But it also means that, at least in the short term, priority and focus are on stopping further growth of North Korea's nuclear program and managing that threat, which means there is a strong impetus towards testing whether a more limited set of objectives is possible with North Korea, at least initial freeze to the North Korea's operations, nuclear operations. But again, this does not mean – we talked about trading away. This does not mean that we should trade away critical sources of leverage, like sanctions, in exchange for reversible steps. In fact, the commission recommends that it's important to maintain pressure on the Kim regime.

And then we talked about other core principles like not losing sight to – on human-rights abuses on North Korea, which means appointing a special human-rights envoy, a position that still remains vacant; and as Katrin Katz noted, supporting President Moon's engagement efforts, particularly in humanitarian areas, with understanding that these policies are aligned with denuclearization negotiations and sanctions requirements. Katrin articulated this point quite nicely, so I will not further elaborate.

And then, finally, on China, we need to also recognize that we cannot outsource our North Korea problem – issue – to Beijing because its strategic interests and priorities and approach are still – they diverge from ours, candidly. But, of course, we still need to work with Beijing. It is North Korea's main trade ally, partner, and ally. So we need to continue our efforts in recruiting China to maintain – continue to maintain pressure on the Kim regime.

Victor.

Mr. Cha:

Great. Thanks, Sue, for those comments.

So those are all the commission members who were able to join us today. I wanted to just say a couple of other things before we go to – we have a lot of questions. So before we get to them, I wanted to just say a couple of other things. The first is that in the report we talk about how both sides – both governments need to continue to recognize and make the argument to their domestic publics about why this alliance is important. It's – you know, the polling reflects still very positive views that Americans and Koreans have with regard to the alliance, but particularly after the four tumultuous years that we've been through, it's important to remind both sides of the – of the importance of this alliance.

Second, a point that one of the commissioners made – I don't think he would mind my associating him with these remarks – Deputy Secretary Armitage made was from a more philosophical perspective. And that is that as the United States we should continue to sort of have a better understanding of South Korea's views on its unique geopolitical dilemma, as well as Korea's history with the United States at this time of reflection in the United States, and about the United States' place in the world.

Because, you know, Korea's history is one really, as Professor Nye noted, that's been sort of squeezed between the great powers. And for that reason, you know, the United States, we kind of look at the world one way, and Korea looks at the world a different way. And those can create cognitive frames that are sometimes misaligned or dissonant. And so at least from a U.S. perspective we should – we should – we should be aware of that. And that would help us with understanding the relationship.

And then, third – and Mike made reference to it too – is that at a time when the Biden administration is really focusing on the importance of reasserting democratic values and arresting the sort of democratic erosion that we've seen really over the past almost decade and a half around the world, that, you know, Korea being one of the most vibrant democracies in Asia, this is a real opportunity, a real growth area for the alliance because it's not just important for the two allies, but it's one of the ways that the U.S.-Korea alliance can provide not just security benefits but non-security benefits to countries in the region and around the world. Whether it's through rulemaking, as Wendy talked about, or whether it's through development assistance, as Mike talked about, it's a real growth area and opportunity for the relationship.

So with that, I thought I would start to go to some of these questions. And I will direct them to certain commission members, but commission members please feel free to weigh in as you wish. And so the first question is – asks about how the United States will combat North Korean and Chinese efforts to disrupt U.S. alliances in northeast Asia, namely with South Korea and Japan. So I think in some sense this was the subtext of the 2+2. But I think, Mike, do you want to – would you like to address this question?

Mr. Green:

Sure. You know, the – Beijing's view of U.S. alliances after the opening to China in the early '70s was ambiguous. They didn't love them, but they were useful for countering the Soviets. The story of the post-Cold War era is one of China becoming more and more dissatisfied with the American alliance network. And as China has expanded its own military capabilities and coercion against neighboring states, naturally U.S. allies have started to cooperate more. And the announcement by the summit and deliverables by the Biden administration with the Quad a few weeks ago was one of the more significant diplomatic developments in Asia that we're seeing.

And so that's the dynamic. And Korea is in the middle trying to maintain some kind of strategic ambiguity because of its geographic – especially geographic, but also economic situation. Very close to China. It doesn't have the latitude of a maritime power, like Australia or Japan. And it's understandable. But I worry, I think a lot of us worry, that from Beijing's perspective strategic ambiguity looks a little too much like neutralism.

And so the best way to answer the question for Korea and the U.S.-Korea alliance is to find some opportunities to show not what Korea is against, but what Korea is for. And that's why, for example, when Korea helps with capacity building for the maritime forces in Vietnam, it generally does so on its own. Whereas the U.S., Australia, Japan, tend to coordinate more. Korea ought to be – ought to be more part of that team effort for capacity building to help countries in Asia, not to hurt China.

I saw a question about the Quad in the chat. I don't see Korea, or frankly any other country, formally becoming a member of the Quad. But I think you are increasingly going to see countries like Canada, or the U.K., New Zealand, participating in aspects of what the Quad does. That larger ecosystem of democracies, allies, middle powers, cooperating is going to expand. And I think Korea being part of that sends a signal to China that Seoul stands for the same, you know, position to coercion – rules-based open order that not only a U.S. or a Japan, but a Canada, or an Australia, or a Britain stand for.

So I think that's going to be the dynamic. And it's going to create opportunities for Korea to show what it stands for in ways that are not meant to threaten China. And that's why we look for ways to counter, frankly, efforts to sort of portray the Korean-America alliance as somehow not part of the fabric of Asian international relations.

Mr. Cha:

Great. Thanks, Mike.

The next question that I wanted – there are a couple of questions on North Korea and human rights. So I thought I'd go to Sue on those. And they're essentially asking that the Biden administration seems to be more vocal than the previous administration when it comes to human rights abuses in North Korea. Secretary Blinken talked about it last week while he was he in the region. And the question is, you know, to what extent this is going to complicate – or, I guess, one is, how important is this as a part of the new administration's North Korea policy? And two, is this going to cause friction with Seoul?

So, Sue.

Ms. Terry:

I do think the Biden administration thinks this is an important issue. Secretary Blinken laid out some of U.S.'s North Korean priorities. You know, and some of the things are what we recommended, right, that U.S. is committed to denuclearization as a goal, that the U.S. will not put U.S. troop presence on the negotiating table, and so on. And he did talk about human rights issues. So I do think that, unlike the previous administration which was sort of – when President Trump first focused on human rights issue but it went away, I do think the Biden administration will prioritize this.

But I – and I do think that this is a potential source of discord, to be honest, with the Moon administration. The Moon administration has a year left. We know that they feel quite – you know, they're not – desperate is not the right word – but they are very eager to make progress with North Korea. We've seen Seoul cracking down on the defector groups and NGO groups for their leaflet activities. So I do think this is a potential discord between Seoul and Washington. And this is why communication and dialogue and trying to have these meetings is important.

And I do think, you know, this is something that Seoul and Washington have to work through. But I think Biden administration is aware of it. And they have expressed to Seoul that it is an important – human rights is an important issue. It's a part of the North Korean problem. It's not only the nuclear issue. Human rights is both a problem and part of the solution when we're talking about North Korea.

Mr. Cha: Thanks, Sue.

The next question I'd like to go to Kathy on. And I remember, Kathy, when you were ambassador you always talked about how it was important to maintain dialogue with, I guess, the equivalent in Korea would be, you know, sort of both sides of the – both sides of the aisle, not just the ruling party but also the opposition. And the question here is, you know, Korea has a presidential election, as Sue said, in less than a year. And if there were to be an administration change from liberals to conservatives as a result of the election, how do you think this would impact the U.S.-Korea relationship?

Ms. Stephens: Yeah. Well, thank you. And actually, before the presidential election we're going to have a mayoral election for Seoul and Busan in just a few weeks here, which – so the political season, thankfully I guess, is not quite as long in South Korea as it is in the United States, but it seems to get longer all the time. I mean, certainly, you know, the other party coming to power, a conservative party, would lead to some adjustments and some changes, I think, in priorities.

That said, you know, since 1987 the political, you know, spectrum has – or the pendulum has swung back and forth in Korea between progressives in power and conservatives in power. And again, those words, for anyone who knows Korea – and I think everyone on this – on this call probably knows pretty well – doesn't really capture, I think, the positions of these parties.

So I would say if conservatives came to power, they tend to say that they're the ones who can better manage the alliance. But conservative – previous conservative presidents have also been very eager to see if something's possible with North Korea, so – and they will still be dealing with the challenges of China and how to – how to balance, how to – how to adapt,

and so on and so forth. So I don't think the agenda changes that much. And I actually do think that there is a broader kind of spectrum of – or, you know, on the Venn diagram between conservatives and progressives, where they're going to kind of emphasize in terms of their strategies with the United States, and it is maintaining the alliance although adapting it in some ways, managing China, trying to get a breakthrough with North Korea.

Mr. Cha: Great. Thanks. Thanks, Kathy.

The next set of questions I'd like to go to Wendy. There are some questions in the Q&A and in the chat about, you know, possible areas – Wendy, you talked a lot about sort of rulemaking and ways in which the U.S. and Korea could cooperate, and there are some questions in the chat about what are some of these areas where the U.S. and Korea can work together, whether it's in technology or in cyber or in big data. Do you want to sort of expand a little bit on some of the discussions we had in the commission about this? As well, climate was another one, of course, so.

Ms. Cutler: Sure. So particularly with respect to digital and data and technologies, I think there's a lot of scope for cooperation between the U.S. and China. We're both extremely innovative economies and have done a lot in these areas. And it's interesting, I mean, Korea through the KORUS FTA early on agreed to a very ambitious e-commerce chapter in that agreement with the United States, and it was really on the cutting edge. But that was about 15 years ago, and so there's a lot more that we could be doing in this space. And it's interesting that Korea now is negotiating a bilateral digital deal with Singapore, and the Singapore-centric deals in the digital space closely resemble U.S. efforts in this space with Canada, Mexico, and Japan.

So this gets back to kind of my hope is that the United States, working with Korea and others, can find a way to weave all of these agreements together, and that Korea won't be on the outside but it could really be on the inside at the early stages. So I think that's a great area.

And then, frankly, when we look at the need to set standards for new technologies, I mean, this is the time, and it's a time where countries with similar views on standards get together and jointly come up with standards so the Chinese standards don't become by default the leading standards in these technologies. And so this is an area where we really need to kind of light a fire under everyone – (laughs) – under a lot of folks, including Seoul, to work actively and cooperatively with us and others.

Mr. Cha: Thanks, Wendy.

The next question I'd like to go to General Brooks and the – if there are other commission members who want to weigh in on this as well, because I know we talked about this in our meetings. The question is from Maeil Business newspaper. And the question is: Some politicians argue that

South Korea should also have its own nuclear armament. In the past the U.S. government opposed it, fearing proliferation of nuclear weapons in Northeast Asia. The question is, is there any change in the Biden administration? But also, General Brooks, your own views on this, given all of your experience on the extended deterrence side during your time in South Korea.

Gen. Brooks: Yeah. Thanks, Victor.

This is a question that comes up regularly, sometimes from within South Korea's body politic. It tends to be a perspective that some conservatives in South Korea bring forth and also some progressives. So really, both sides of the political spectrum are contemplating this. It tends to be tied to a sense of full control over individual destiny as opposed to what extended deterrence addresses, and that is about shared destiny and shared responsibility for responses to threats. My opinion is that it – the provision of nuclear weapons in South Korea would not be helpful.

First, in the North-South relationship, I think that it would further solidify North Korea's lock-in on their nuclear weapons, which they may be reticent to yield in the first place – to give up in the first place. How do you then resolve the fact that South Korea has them and that South Korea was allowed to have them?

Secondly, it changes the geopolitical dynamics, especially with Japan. How would Japan see a nuclear South Korea and North Korea who are pursuing efforts to achieve a normalization of relations, if not actual reunification? How does China view that? And what is the purpose of South Korea having nuclear weapons if it is not limited to solely North Korea?

So it begins to open a number of questions that I think will become a more tangled Gordian knot for South Korea than it may anticipate. And my counsel to them has always been: Trust the extended deterrence. Come, we'll show you. We'll take you aboard a nuclear submarine if you need that reassurance. And that always did provide reassurance, but it doesn't become universal reassurance. It's for the few policymakers who are actually able to be exposed to it, and we hope that they would provide a contrarian voice to those who would seek to pursue their own nuclear capability in South Korea.

Mr. Cha: Thank you. Thank you, Vince.

For the next question I'd like to go to Katrin. And the second part of the question was another question is the difference between the terms "denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" and "denuclearization of North Korea." How does this relate to the Biden administration's North Korea strategy? And do you see a – do you see a difference between those two terms, and is it significant?

Ms. Katz: Thank you, Victor.

There is a difference between the two terms. On the U.S. side, as Korea watchers will know, we have used both. We have had “denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” in several statements. The Biden administration, to my knowledge, has also used both.

And the sensitivity of this issue area comes back to some of my earlier points on inter-Korean relations. On the South Korean side, the preference, certainly under the Moon administration, is to use the “Korean Peninsula” term. Of course, this was also in the Trump administration’s Singapore statement in 2018. Why? Because that is North Korea’s preferred statement. It is – it is one that is ambiguous, and in my – since I’m not in government, I can say personally in a troubling sense ambiguous, insofar as the U.S. can see it as – you know, and has in the past seen it as – oh, sure, in 1991 we removed tactical nuclear – tactical nuclear weapons, it’s denuclearized, and we can move forward on that basis. But no, North Korea sees this – a broader definition of the nuclear state of the Korean Peninsula because the U.S. as a part – an important part of extended deterrence has a nuclear umbrella over the peninsula.

So working towards this goal, the Korean Peninsula goal, again, for reasons – understandable reasons, the United States has used this term to move forward, but it’s always been a sticking point to get more specific about what we mean about denuclearization. So I think at this point it would be very helpful to clarify that. It probably will be another sticking point. But, you know, the more specific we can get, the better – my personal view – knowing full well how difficult that is. But again, on a silver lining note, with broader kind of areas of cooperation, close coordination, at least between the allies – the U.S. and South Korea – hopefully, we can work toward that goal.

So brief answer, yes, there’s a difference. And it will be an area – watch this space. This will be an area of close attention moving forward.

Mr. Cha: Thanks.

Mike, you wanted to weigh in on this as well?

Mr. Green: Yeah. I think Katrin characterized that exactly right. There is a big difference.

I would maybe go a little further, though, and say that there’s not a lot of ambiguity about what North Korea means when it says denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Or to the extent there’s ambiguity, the way that Pyongyang will use this is unambiguously bad for us.

So, you know, I've been, like you, Victor, in negotiations with the North Koreans. It was some time ago, but when this came up it was very clear that Pyongyang defined denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in talks we had as an end to the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent, not just the removal of nuclear weapons – and, therefore, the removal of U.S. troops. And that has come up in negotiations. And if you look at some of what the North Koreans have said about denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, they use it as a starting point for, you know, quote/unquote, “mutual arms control negotiations” with the U.S.

So one thing that the North Korean definition of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is unambiguously not is not what we negotiated in the joint statement in the Six-Party Talks. It is not what North and South Korea agreed to in the North-South denuclearization and basic agreements. It is not removal of North Korean nuclear weapons and the end of that capability. In the North Korean version, it is tied to American policy – and not just nuclear weapons policy on the Korean Peninsula, but more broadly extended deterrence. It's tied in ways that is meant to ensure North Korea never has to implement it.

So I actually think Katrin is right that it's very different, but actually I would – I would just go a little bit further, perhaps. I know Katrin knows this. It's problematic that we're embracing the North Korean rhetoric on this. It's diplomatically easier because they've said it, but I think it does nothing to get us further towards actual denuclearization. And the question is excellent because the difference is really very significant.

Mr. Cha:

Great. Thanks.

I want to – there are other questions in the chat that I'd like to get to on some other topics, but since we're on this thread I wanted to go to General Brooks again. Another question with regard to North Korea and extended deterrence. The question is – it's from Korea, so thank you for staying up so late in the – in the evening in Korea. But the question is: If it is confirmed that North Korea has developed intercontinental ballistic missiles, what are the Northeast Asian strategies that the United States can take? If North Korea threatens the United States with those weapons, how should the U.S. respond?

Gen. Brooks:

Well, Victor, there has to be a balancing of recognizing rhetorical statements that are made using signals like the development of weapons and intentional behaviors that might not reflect the same. In other words, there may be actions that North Korea's pursuing that aren't reflective of what is visible to the United States or to the world.

North Korea has to always be viewed as a two-sided coin. And it's the underside of the coin, the side not showing, that is where progress can actually be made. The upper side of the coin, the visible side of the coin,

will be things like weapons development, even testing – which we haven't seen much of recently, thankfully, but that could resume at any time North Korea chooses to. They should be viewed as signals for something else, that North Korea's trying to change the power relationship and the pressure relationship so that they can pursue some other end.

So I would first say that what the United States can do with regard to its Northeast Asian approaches is maintain some solidity – especially among the United States, Japan, and South Korea – to not overreact, to not escalate in such a way that only one side of the coin is responded to. And at the same time, every action like that by North Korea should have a consequence that hinders North Korea's pursuit of its actual objectives. If they want greater assurances, then maybe those assurances are at greater risk. There's some consequence – the international relationships with North Korea; the effects of sanctions could be further expanded or tightened. They're pretty broad right now, but they could be further expanded or tightened with greater precision on individuals and individual accounts. The promises of fulfillment of economic development. The promises of security in other categories, economic and military. All of those things can be discussed when North Korea demonstrates a behavior that is contrary to that. And North Korea may respond to us, too.

The last point is that we should always remember that North Korea is also seeking to deter and is also seeking to create leverage, and this is part of the dance.

So that's my counsel: Don't overreact to it. Don't be impressed by it. Begin to maneuver from it.

Mr. Cha:

Great. Thanks. Terrific, terrific answer there, Vince.

So I'd like to – there are – there are a few other topics in the – in the questions, and I'd like to see if we can get to them all before the end of the time. The first, I guess more broadly – and it's a subtext to a number – a number of different questions – is the role of China in ROK thinking and how it impacts the alliance. Again, there are some more questions in the chat about Korea and whether it should join the Quad. What are the obstacles to Korea joining the Quad? Still questions about how much Korean behavior towards the alliance is impacted by the memory of THAAD.

So this is a question, I guess, more broadly to the group. It's not to anyone in particular. And you can just put your hand up. I mean, anybody want to talk or reflect on how we thought about or talked about the whole issue of China in the U.S.-Korea alliance and to what extent China is affecting how – (sound of phone ringing) – sorry about that – is affecting how the South Koreans look at the alliance?

Mr. Green: Well, I'll start, Victor.

I think this task force's motto is gachi gayo. We're going all do this together, but I'll go first, if that's all right.

Mr. Cha: OK.

Mr. Green: You know, the surveys you and I have done, including our most recent survey of thought leaders around the world about China – our most recent survey is on the CSIS website, and we published it late last year – these show a pretty clear threat perception of China from the Korean people and Korean elites; actually, not that much different from Japan, Australia, or some other U.S. allies in Asia.

And that clearly increased because of the THAAD boycott, which cost billions of dollars for Lotte and other – and other companies. And so – and as I mentioned earlier, in these surveys there is no appetite at all among Korean thought leaders for a Chinese-led order in Asia. And interestingly, in our survey, Korean thought leaders have the highest confidence in the U.S. military's ability to deal with China of any U.S. ally, probably because they know us intimately.

So from that perspective, the concern about China is high. That's obvious. The reliance on the U.S. alliance is strong. Confidence in the U.S. is actually quite strong in Korea, support for the alliance. But, you know, THAAD, the boycott happened. And we didn't do much as an ally about that. We really didn't. Now Australia is under a similar boycott from China. And the Australians are asking for more help. And the Australia participation in the Quad is a big part of that.

So I think you're going to find that more U.S. allies and partners are looking for ways to dissuade China from that kind of mercantilist coercion, and Korea will not be alone. The problem with THAAD was it was Korea all alone with the U.S. I think now you're going to see many other countries that are starting to look for ways to counter that kind of coercion. And that relates to my earlier point about Korean participation in the Quad – not joining the Quad, but participation.

Korea will be one of a number of middle powers and democracies that are dealing with this problem. And I think – I'm optimistic that will give Seoul more options and more cover to deal with the challenge from China that all the surveys show the Korean public and thought leaders recognize fully well. They just have a tough geographic challenge and economic challenge dealing with it.

Mr. Cha: Yeah. I mean, I would just add that we – in the commission we talked about how the – and a number of the commissioners mentioned this – about how this discussion should not – should certainly not be framed as an anti-China

discussion within the alliance. It should be framed in much more positive terms, just as the Quad was framed in, you know, very specific deliverables about things that matter to everybody and was not explicitly about China.

And so there are many areas of cooperation for the U.S. and Korea that would again, you know, frankly, pull Korea back more into the region. I mean, there is a trend right now where a lot of these coalitions are being formed, whether it's on clean networks or supply chains or development assistance or the Quad, where there are stronger and stronger tethers among many of the democracies in Asia – the United States, Japan, India, Australia. And Korea is increasingly less networked into that grouping.

And as a trend, that's not a positive trend. That's a very concerning trend. And you try to understand why. And, you know, clearly one of the reasons has to do with China, because of the fear of Chinese retaliation but also because of the desire to keep China onside when it comes to North Korea. So we talked quite a bit in the commission about how best to approach that in a way that is positive and proactive rather than in a very negative way.

There are several other questions in the chat, but I wanted to see if anybody else wanted to weigh in on the China question. Yes, Katrin. You're mute, Katrin.

Ms. Katz:

I wanted to note kind of in a broad sense, and I agree with everything Mike just said. But just to kind of back up, one of the, you know, overarching principles of this commission – and to echo Professor Nye's great point at the very start, is that this is a report on a success story. And why is that? Well, it's not because this alliance hasn't weathered geopolitical transitions in the past. We're nearing the 70th decade of this – of this relationship that remains, you know, as we've said in the report in bold, the best tool – the best means at our disposal to address the pressing geopolitical challenges of the day. And those have not remained constant. It's weathered the end of the Cold War. It's weathered similar divides over North Korea policy issues. But, again, coming together because the U.S. and South Korea, as well as our regional partners, care very much about denuclearizing North Korea.

And so to Mike's point, there are a number of kind of low hanging kind of fruit ripe for cooperation issues areas, where we can now just move forward. It's, you know, arguably something that, you know, there will be budget concerns in other areas, certainly, with increased needs to spend, OK? But a lot of these cooperation areas are just a matter of connecting with partners in the region. And that can – you know, we have – we have the means already to address those issues. And it'll make the alliance stronger in addressing this current very serious geopolitical challenge with regard to China, again to echo Mike, that South Korea also shares with us, as shown by the surveys. So I'll just make that point of an overarching kind of impression that I had from this report.

John J. Hamre: So, Victor, could I jump in here?

Mr. Cha: Please.

Mr. Hamre: You know, obviously, China becomes a defining dimension for both of us – both countries, looking forward. I think, you know, in recent years America's made a big mistake. I think this was a mistake we saw quite a bit in the last administration, of America saying to friends in Asia: You either have to be with us or you're with China. You know, you can't – you got to pick. And of course, no country in Asia can choose to be hostile to China. And we make a mistake when we made that kind of a condition for working with us. And so I think that part of it's something we have to learn about how everybody in the region wants to work with us. And we have to think about that.

I would say for Korea, you know, Korea has to transform itself so it's just not preoccupied with its own neighborhood, its own geographical boundaries, and its immediate neighborhood in Northeast Asia. I mean, Korea's the 10th-largest economy in the world now. But it shouldn't be acting like it's just a small, vulnerable, regional actor. And kind of the vulnerability to intimidation comes from being too small in your – in Korea's imaginations. You know, so I think there are things that both of us need to do to be able to say there needs to be a new footing for us to deal with this very crucial question about how we're going to, together, define how we're going to work with China. And it has to be a much more sophisticated approach than we've had so far.

Mr. Cha: Great. And, John, while you have the floor would you like to offer any closing comments overall?

Mr. Hamre: (Laughs.) Oh, sure. Yeah, thanks, Victor. Well, let me – let me just – a couple of thank-yous, first, before – I do want to say thank you to all of my fellow commissioners. My goodness, it's been a real privilege to have this intellectual opportunity with all of you. It's been – it's really been wonderful. And, of course, very special thanks to you, Victor, to Katrin, and to Dana for all the hard work in pulling it together. It was really, really valuable.

You know, our inspiration for this effort drew – came from seeing the remarkable importance that the Armitage-Nye, Nye-Armitage studies had in – that dealt with U.S.-Japan relations. And we said, look, Korea's just as vital, you know, to us as Japan. Why is there no Korea study, or project, commission? So that was the inspiration for it. Now, you know, Americans have, you know, kind of a bad reputation for telling everybody else in the world what they ought to do. This commission report, if you read it, is very much about what we, the United States, should be doing.

We need to rediscover the crucial value of the alliance for our interests. You know, we're not – you know, it's a little bit unfortunate implication over the last several years that somehow we were in this alliance as a gift. Well, it was not a gift to Korea. It was something we were doing for our own interests. And we share that. And so the content of this report is really a group of Americans that all have a deep, passionate commitment to the – you know, the safety, the security, the prosperity of Korea, for us to join together to think about this next phase of this alliance, where we're going. And that's the purpose of this – of this commission report.

I would ask people to read it with that spirit in mind, that this is not America lecturing Korea. This is America talking, you know, directly and constructively with one of our most important partners in the world, with Korea, and asking for us together to continue a dialogue because it's our – both of our interests to get this – to be – to revitalize and refresh this alliance. So, Victor, thank you. I'll turn it back to you.

Mr. Cha:

Well, thanks. That's terrific, John. We really appreciate it.

So the report will be available on the CSIS website and the Korea Chair website. I want to, again, thank Dr. Hamre and Dr. Nye for leading us – leading the commission and this report. We hope it will serve well both governments and also for alliance managers and experts who are looking at Korea and looking at the alliance. Special thanks to Dr. Katz and to Dana Kim for all their work on the project and putting it together. We couldn't have done it without them. And then, of course, to all of our commission members – Rich Armitage, Vince Brooks, Wendy Cutler, Mike Green, Mark Lippert, Randy Schriver, Kathy Stephens, and Sue Terry. I hope I didn't leave out anybody. I think I got everybody.

Thanks so much for doing all of the meetings, sometimes early in the morning or late at night when we were talking with our Korean colleagues. We really appreciate it. And hopefully this will – this won't just be the only, but it'll be the first of future reports that we'll do on the – on the alliance. So thanks to our audience for tuning in from all over the world. And thank you to the commission members. With this, we are adjourned. Thank you very much.

Mr. Hamre:

Thanks, Victor.

(END)