

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT
Online Event

**“ROK-U.S. Strategic Forum 2021: The Road Ahead after
the Biden-Moon Summit”**

Welcoming Remarks and Keynote Address

DATE

Monday, November 15, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. EST

WELCOMING REMARKS

John J. Hamre

President and CEO, and Langone Chair in American Leadership, CSIS

Lee Geun

President, The Korea Foundation

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Choi Jong Kun

1st Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea

INTRODUCTION AND MODERATOR

Victor Cha

*Senior Vice President and Korea Chair, CSIS; Vice Dean for Faculty and Graduate Affairs and
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Dr. John J. Hamre:

(Off mic) – very timely and important day that we’re together. Thanks to the generous support of the Korea Foundation, we’re able to hold these annual conferences. Very important that we have this opportunity together. There’s so much, you know, flux right now in our world. Gosh, I mean, everything is upside down here, and of course you’ve got a major election coming in Korea. And so, everything is – in a sense is moving, and there’s some uncertainty about our future, but there’s not any uncertainty about our bilateral relationship. It’s rock solid. It’s very strong. We’ve had some – (laughs) – interesting days in recent years. And, Randy, you were one of the great forces of stability to hold the – hold the alliance together. I will always be grateful for what you did when you were in service. It was crucial, you know. And there were ups and downs and the winds would blow a little bit in funny ways, but we came through it stronger, I believe. It’s a little bit more uncertain what this new world is going to be like. It looks like North Korea’s become – come back to its old playbook, you know, being pugnacious, you know, and making things more challenging. But it doesn’t change the foundation of this relationship. We’re committed to each other because – I’ll just speak from an American point of view – we need Korea. Korea’s vital for us. It’s important not just that you be a security partner, but you be the flag-carrier for democracy in Asia, and you’ve done that. And that’s why we celebrate the opportunity to be together. And even though we’re going to explore a lot of the questions that are in front of us right now, there’s no question about the fundamental commitment we have to each other. And so I’m very grateful for that. It’s my – my role here is ornamental. My wife always laughs when I say that, but my role is ornamental, largely to welcome everybody. And I especially want to say a hearty welcome to President Lee, you know, who is now the president of the Korea Foundation. He’s no stranger to the world of think tanks and to Washington because he’s been, you know, in the – he’s been – he’s run a think tank himself. He’s been in the – in IFANS, you know, the academy. He’s just been a constant leader and figure. And so, we welcome him back. The first time, though, that we can do this conference – because the Korea Foundation’s made it possible for us to do it for six years, but this is the first time that we can be together in person. We’ve been doing it virtually – (laughs) – and with all of its, you know, satisfaction and frustration. Now we can be together, and we’re going to have a very interesting day together. So, I would ask you, with your warm applause, please welcome to the – to the dais President Lee Geun. Thank you. (Applause.)

Lee Geun:

President Hamre is definitely taller than I am, so I need to adjust my microphone. (Laughs.) Thank you very much, President Hamre, for your kind introduction. His speech was so informal and friendly, so I also need to be informal. But in front of so many Korean reporters, I have to be a little bit more formal. So, I’m going to read what I prepared. President of the CSIS Dr. John Hamre, Deputy Assistant to President Biden and Coordinator for Indo-Pacific Affairs at the National Security Council Dr. Kurt Campbell – who is not here yet – and 1st Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Korea Dr. Choi Jong Kun, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good morning in Washington, D.C., and good evening in Seoul. I would like to extend my warmest welcome to all of you to the Sixth Korea Foundation-CSIS ROK-U.S.

Strategic Forum. Let me also express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Kurt Campbell, deputy assistant to President Biden and coordinator for Indo-Pacific affairs at the National Security Council; and Dr. Choi Jong Kun, the 1st vice minister of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Korea, for graciously accepting this invitation despite your busy schedules. I also would like to take note of the presence of former Korean Foreign Minister Dr. Yoon Young-kwan. Thank you very much for making time to join us today. Korea Foundation's warm welcome also go to the panelists and also to the audience watching this livestream from Washington, D.C., Seoul, and all around the world. Last year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were only able to host the forum virtually. Although we are still unable to invite an audience to the CSIS conference room just yet, it is wonderful to actually meet our American colleagues and friends in person in Washington, D.C. I'm so glad to see President Hamre in person this time, as well as Dr. Cha and other American colleagues. I sincerely hope that we will be able to welcome our audience in person as well next year. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Korea Foundation and the 29th year of our partnership with the CSIS. I believe the fact that we have worked with the CSIS since the very establishment of the Korea Foundation reflects how much we value this partnership and what a critical role it has played in the policymaking communities, both in the U.S. and in Korea. Thirty years may not be long enough to evaluate the significance of an organization, and as president of the Korea Foundation I may be a little bit biased; however, I believe that the Korea Foundation has been at the forefront of promoting a better understanding of Korea over the last three decades through a variety of activities such as track-two forums, cultural exchanges, education programs, and next-generation empowerment programs. I really appreciate Dr. Victor Cha's efforts in strengthening the next-generation empowerment programs. And I believe that we have made substantial progress on all these fronts. When the Korea Foundation was first established in 1991, the international community's level of awareness about Korea was quite low. However, after only three decades, people around the globe are now recognizing the progress of Korea in a wide range of fields including academia, economy, entertainment industry, technology, innovation, and even Korea's military capability. And as mentioned during CSIS's event last month on Korea's soft power, Korea has become one of the most dynamic and strongest soft power countries in the world. Of course, I cannot say that this is solely thanks to the work of the Korea Foundation, but I think the Korea Foundation has been quite instrumental as a platform connecting and bridging the people and culture between Korea and the world. Since 2009, the Korea Foundation has been working with our partner institutions to lay a solid foundation for Korea-related research activities in Washington, D.C. and throughout the United States. This is because we believe that in order to strengthen the ROC-U.S. alliance, and maintain and enhance trust between the two countries, it is critical that we have independent and stable platform through which scholars and experts can engage in candid discussions, conduct timely and in-depth research, and communicate with key stakeholders. Among the Korea Foundation's many program pillars, we take great pride in our collaborative work with think tanks in the U.S., and in particular with the CSIS. In 2009, the very first Korea Chair position at a think tank in the

United States was created at the CSIS. We were confident that under the forward-looking leadership of President Hamre, the CSIS would be able to develop a robust Korea Chair program. We are also grateful for Dr. Cha for his leadership and efforts to build a Korea policy studies ecosystem in the United States through various timely research activities and programs. The CSIS Korea Chair celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2019, but on the occasion of Korea Foundation's 30th anniversary this year I want to reemphasize and recognize the leadership efforts and contribution over the past 12 years once again. Considering the tremendous achievements that we have made over the past three decades, we are excited to continue our partnership with CSIS for the next 30 years to come, if not forever. And I hope that we can help the great minds of both Korea and the USA to craft creative and future-oriented policy ideas that will deepen and expand our alliance in the future. Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, recently a number of significant developments have been unfolding in the U.S.-ROK alliance and on the Korean Peninsula, including the unprecedented results of the Korea-U.S. summit meeting between President Moon Jae-in and President Biden in May 2021. President Moon and President Biden reaffirmed that the ROK-U.S. alliance is the linchpin for stability and prosperity in the region and agreed to work closely for a new chapter in our in our partnership. This new chapter entails working with each other in a range of fields, such as climate change, global health, emerging technologies including 5G and 6G, semiconductors, supply chains, chain resilience, quantum technologies, and so on. Needless to say, in order for us to make substantial progress in these new domains, peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and in the Indo-Pacific is a prerequisite. Despite the tireless and sincere efforts made over decades by the governments of both the ROK and the United States, the North Korean nuclear issue still remains as the most pressing challenge we face in the region. At the same time, the complex regional security landscape derived from the U.S.-China relations and their intensifying competition is reshaping the region in an uncertain direction. In order for us to be able to move forward with the future-oriented alliance agenda that our two presidents agreed to during their summit meeting, and to ensure shared security and prosperity for the alliance, enhancing and strengthening trust between the two countries is imperative. It is my honest hope that this forum will provide a platform for trust-building and also for innovative policy discussions for the future of the ROK-U.S. alliance. I also hope that the discussions we exchange today and tomorrow will help us better navigate the new challenges we face and identify the directions we need to take for peace and prosperity of Korea, the USA, and the region. Once again, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to President Hamre and Dr. Cha for their leadership and efforts in building this forum. My thanks also go to the CSIS and Korea Foundation staff for their hard work in arranging this event. I look forward to active and lively discussions. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Victor Cha:

Thank you, President Lee, for that – those very warm and kind remarks about CSIS. We're very gratified to be holding the Sixth ROK-U.S. Strategic Forum in person here at CSIS. I want to welcome all of our participants for joining us, both Americans and also Koreans who've come a long way, as

well as our audience who are joining us online this morning. I want to congratulate Korea Foundation on 30 years. You have done incredible work in the United States and around the world in terms of creating a much better-informed public and scholarly community about the role of Korea in the world and the importance of the U.S.-Korea relationship. Our keynote address today is by one of South Korea's leading foreign policy speakers, Dr. Choi Jong Kun. We're very kind – it's very kind of him to join us today. He has a very busy schedule here in Washington, D.C., both meetings with the United States, as well as trilateral meetings and other bilateral meetings. But he's willing to take time out this morning to join us, and we're very grateful for that. As President Lee stated, Dr. Choi is the first vice foreign minister for the Republic of Korea. He served as secretary to the president for peace planning in the Office of National Security before joining the Foreign Ministry. Dr. Choi was an associate professor of political science and international studies at Yonsei University from February 2009 to July 2017. He was also a member of the Policy Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and a member of the Advisory Board at the Foreign Affairs, Trade and Unification Committee in the National Assembly. He also served as an assistant professor at the University of North Korean Studies from 2008 to 2009. Dr. Choi received his B.A. in political science from the University of Rochester, M.A. in political science from Yonsei University, and his Ph.D. in political science from The Ohio State University. Dr. Choi will join us for some remarks. And after that, provided there is time, we'll have time for maybe a little bit of a question-and-answer session. But not a whole lot of time because, again, his schedule is very busy. So, I'd like to invite to the stage Dr. Choi Jong Kun. (Applause.)

Choi Jung Kun:

Thank you very much, Dr. Cha, for your kind introduction. It's always good to be in Washington, D.C., especially during the fall. Great town. Dr. Lee Geun, president of the Korea Foundation, and Dr. John Hamre, president of CSIS, also Dr. and Minister Yoon Young-kwan of minister of foreign affairs from Roh Moo-hyun government, good morning, distinguished guests joining us here in person and virtually. First of all, thanks for having me here. I am very happy to make a speech here at the CSIS. I guess this is my second time doing so. Last time I was here was about four and a half years ago, serving as secretary to the president for peace and arms control back in 2017 and '18. At the time, I remember I explained why the ROK-U.S. alliance should engage North Korea, and we exchanged views on pressing matters relating to peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. Friends and colleagues, one of the prominent features of our alliance is that we do actually evolve. The ROK-U.S. alliance was first forged as a military alliance during the Korean War. With the noble sacrifice of some 34,000 American soldiers, territory of the Republic of Korea was defended. Korean soldiers have also stood shoulder-to-shoulder with American soldiers in every major war led by the United States since the Korean War, joining the U.S. in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. We do also fight together tirelessly in the Middle East and in Africa and conduct peacemaking missions around the world. The values deeply embedded in our societies are important aspects of our ties. Korea has fostered the values sown by the United States in our own way. Our people have safeguarded democracy and human rights

whenever a shadow was cast over them, be it in the face of colonization, dictatorship, or corruption. Korean people shed their own blood in our own streets for our own democracy and human rights throughout modern history, thereby Korea has become a beacon of democracy and capitalism in East Asia. Now, we are even widening our areas of interest to other parts of the international community in order to uphold our values of democracy, multilateralism, and rule of law, and above all, cosmopolitan culture. The win-win nature of our bonds and the mutual trust grounded on shared values lie at the heart of comprehensive and strategic partnership, which we are now proud to be a part of. The ROK-U.S. leaders joint statement adopted at the summit held last may between President Moon and President Joe Biden showcased how far our alliance has come. Our leaders also committed to advancing our partnership into one that encompasses not only traditional security but also the economic and cultural domains as well. Our two nations have shown the world what an alliance should look like in the 21st century, especially during these pandemic years. Dear friends, in my time serving as the first vice minister of foreign affairs for the last year or so, I have gained even deeper sense that our alliance is no longer dominated by a single issue. You may imagine, my world calendar starts from agenda relating to North Korea and ends with them. To be frank with you, I don't always wake up to worry about North Korea. But if in fact my schedule is always filled with meetings about and travel to other regions, such as Southeast Asia, Central and South America, West Africa, Europe, and the Middle East, including Iran. I have engaged with our partners and friends in these regions on issues ranging from responding to pandemic to enhancing development cooperation, protecting democratic values throughout the world. And paradoxically enough, the more I engage with non-U.S. partners, the more clearly, I realize that Korea's standing in global affairs is higher than we thought, and that Korea and the United States have a vast amount of potential to expand our areas of cooperation even further. Our two countries' respective approaches to Indo-Pacific region are one good example, Korea is a nation which has itself lived through the pain of losing sovereignty, going through state-led development and democratization together at the same time, and achieving a high dynamic economy has been persistent proponent of ASEAN centrality and ASEAN-led regional architecture. Korea has been a vocal advocate of democratic values when it comes to the current situation in Myanmar. Those citizens calling out for democracy in Yangon remind us our people in Gwangju who protested against the military regime 40 years ago. We see yesterday's Gwangju in today's Myanmar. Korea's support for the people of Myanmar will be strong, persistent, and relentless. Our collaborative reach does not stay within Southeast Asian theater. For example, in Central America Korea has long sought mutually beneficial cooperation as a bona fide partner. Korea is the only country in Asia which has free trade agreement with Central America as a group, and the only Asian member of the Central American Bank for Economic Integration, CABI. We are the sixth-largest donor to the Northern Triangle states, contributing around \$35 million annually. Two weeks ago, minister of foreign affairs of the Republic of Korea invited vice ministers of seven Central American countries to Korea. And we had the first Korea-Central American special roundtable to find a way forward for

our partnership. Our role in Central America, for example, is gaining more significance and we help address the root cause of migration to the United States by leading to better standards of living for people and constructing social stability in this region. Our two countries, Korea and the United States, have managed to keep our approach to Iran in tune as well. As the custodian of one of Iran's largest overseas frozen assets, Korea has actively engaged with both Washington and Tehran at the same time. I, myself, visited Iran three times this year. Let me tell you, it wasn't that exciting to begin with. Based on our communication with Tehran, United States, European Union, and E3 nations, our government has expressed its firm intention to render active diplomatic support for reviving the JCPOA, as the keeper of the Iranian frozen funds and a verifier of the potential deal that might happen in Vietnam, hopefully soon. I reaffirm this position whenever the occasion arose to relevant parties in the Iran nuclear deal – my great friend, U.S. special envoy for Iran Dr. Rob Malley and deputy secretary general of the European Union Mr. Mora, just to name a few. Today our alliance has significantly enhanced our global profile. Our two countries are at the very forefront in responding to new challenges. COVID-19 has illustrated that no one is safe until everybody is safe. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, Korea and the United States have helped each other when each of us was in need. We further elevated the level of our cooperation by exploring ways to fundamentally tackle this global challenge through the launch of the ROK-U.S. Global Vaccine Partnership. Our two countries are leading global climate change initiatives. On the occasion of the COP 26 recently, Korea announced upgraded 2030 nationally determined contribution, which is 40 percent reduction of carbon production by 2030, and a plan to put a complete end to coal-fired power generation by 2050. Korea and the U.S. remain committed to strengthening partnership in green technology, as well as making joint efforts in a range of fora, such as the OECD, as we believe in multilateralism. Dear friends, the evolving nature of our relationship is, in fact, only natural when you come to think about the policy that our nations pursue. We believe that foreign policy should serve the needs and the interests of our own citizens. Foreign policy, just like any other domestic policies, must protect and increase the welfare of its citizens. And Korea is no exception. In this light, we have confidence, and I am very personally confident, that our alliance has been adapting itself to serve their pressing demands and respond to the diverse present-day challenge that our people encounter. So, I believe this is a time to ask ourselves whether we are also looking at our bonds from a new angle. At times, we have – we have viewed our alliances through the lens of the very issue that has haunted us for long, North Korea. Peace and security on the Korean Peninsula is still at the core of our alliance. And our alliance, I have to emphasize, is the linchpin of peace, security, and prosperity for Northeast Asia. So, I believe we should diversify areas of our attention and see how interregional interactions affect evolution of our alliance, since we are global partners. Policy communities of both our countries, including experts, scholars, and journalists who are joining this event, should update the narrative of our alliance. You are the opinion leaders, generating ideas and affecting perspectives. What you envision for our relationship does affect how our alliance evolves. As a policymaker and scholar, myself, I say to you that we need to construct a

shared conceptual reference point on our alliance, and to map out its way forward. This will serve to deepen the understanding of our relationship and make discourse more policy-relevant and vibrant during and after the pandemic era. I know the Korea Foundation runs on an excellent next-generation program with the CSIS. And I met many of them whenever they come to Korea, before the pandemic. And I'd love to do some more when they actually come to Seoul – either as position I'm taking now or as professor at Yonsei University, which I really look forward to going back to. (Laughter.) But I hope the next generation of opinion leaders will come together and discuss matters as broad as global green energy initiative, water management in Southeast Asia, development cooperation in Central America, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa, and, of course, Korean issues as well. I look forward to CSIS, as a key element in the U.S. policy circles, playing a full part in such work as well. I also have another hope. I hope that Korea Chair will be recognized as a position that not only examines Korea, the country itself and its very own issues, but also explores and discusses Korea's enlarged horizon of global engagement as well. Distinguished guests, I'm not done yet. I have not talked about the elephant in the room, North Korea. I know once I talk about it, what I said so far about our dynamic alliance and Korea's global engagement will just evaporate. (Laughter.) And media will only cover North Korea issue. I really – I am so used to experiencing that. Out of my 12-page-long speech, I spent about eight pages on our dynamic evolving major alliance. I bet \$100 in my pocket that no one is going to talk about it in the media, but please. We do not share – the alliance is not solely about North Korean issue, but it is a very important issue. And thereby, advanced perspectives on the issue itself is really important. So let me finally come to North Korea. Two more pages. (Laughter.) For a nation which experienced tragic war and is still living in a state of incomplete peace, making sure that ordinary people go about daily lives without fear of war is fundamental responsibility of Korean government. And we, the Korean people, know from experience that peace is never a given, but something that must be earned. Also, for last five years, Korea increased its military spending by 7 percent annually. Our military expenditure accounts for 2.7 percent of our GDP, which is the highest among U.S. allies. Having that in as a backdrop, the Moon Jae-in administration, in close consultation with the United States, has strived tirelessly to advance our goal of achieving denuclearization and establishment of peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. What we have focused on is to establish an enduring structure for engagement with the DPRK. This is the exact line that I used four years ago in this building. As a member of the security team of the Moon Jae-in administration from the summer of 2017, I can say that we have never fantasized about the peace process. The peace process could likely be long, arduous, and even torturous. On the way, North Korea might be tempted to look back and doubt or hesitate to stay the course. In this vein, we need a framework that can keep Pyongyang on track. It is imperative to devise a structure from which no one can easily walk away from the whole process. By presenting North Korea with a clear picture of what it can gain or lose through the process, we may be able to convince them that their best bet is to stick to the process. In 2018, there was a sense of fresh hope that we could establish such a framework and push the peace process forward. We

created a structure with inter-Korean relations and U.S.-DPRK relation proved to be mutually reinforcing, creating a virtuous cycle. But you know what happened. I know that we still have a long way to go, but we never give up. We do never give up. ROK-U.S. summit in May laid a strong diplomatic foundation to make progress again on this ongoing task, which is fundamental responsibility of the Republic of Korea government and also U.S. government at the same time. Our two leaders agreed to the importance of picking up where we had left off and building on what we had brought about through previous agreement with North Korea, such as Singapore Joint Statement and 2018 Panmunjom Declaration. Also, the September 19th Comprehensive Military Agreement, known as CMA, is another advancement reached in 2018. This inter-Korean military agreement has greatly reduced the likelihood of accidental military skirmishes and clashes between the South and the North in the DMZ. This in turn has provided space for both of us to concentrate on the denuclearization dialogue, which is a bigger talk and highly sensitive process that can be undermined by even minor military clashes in the DMZ in the Korean Peninsula. Moreover, the agreement has set a meaningful precedent for future talks with Pyongyang. During the negotiation with North Korean military, I learned a priceless lesson: We can come to an agreement, even in a short time, if we can secure both the political will of the leaders and the working-level negotiations that fill in details – an optimal combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches, I believe. In an effort to revive the dialogue with DPRK, President Moon Jae-in once again proposed an end war declaration at the 76th U.N. General Assembly. By putting an end to the Korean War, our government intends to commence the process of making irreversible progress in denuclearization and turning the abnormally long armistice into peace regime. Long, long way to go. But think about it. Really, do think about it. Who can propose such a bold initiative other than the Republic of Korea? And which country's more qualified to do so? The peace regime will comprise a set of norms and principles that would define the future of the Korean Peninsula, including those regulating the inter-Korean political relationship, military confidence-building measures, and economic and social exchanges. The end of war declaration would mark a meaningful entry point for two Koreas and United States to shape this new order by opening up a venue for denuclearization dialogue and the peace talks. Above all, it is morally right thing to put an end to the war and begin the peace process. So, friends and colleagues, so far I have outlined the new chapter of our alliance that our two countries are opening together. Also briefly touched upon – briefly touched upon North Korea an end of war declaration. I hope that you have found it very useful. And this morning I woke up early because of the jet lag, 3:00 a.m. You know how sentimental you become at 3:00 a.m., you know, especially in Washington, D.C., ahead of this big meeting. So, I jot down a couple of points. This is purely my personal point. These people, first time listening to, you know? (Laughter.) Before I just conclude my speech, I just want to share my personal realization and personal touch, having worked at – having gone through the peace process '17 and 2018, and also you know my background as a scholar, and I will be going back to my original job at Yonsei University. I always think about this “who else” argument. Korea, we go through a lot of difficulties, challenges, living next door to, you know, a rising power. But I

come to think of this term, who else? In other words, every time we come to face difficulties of stumbles and hurdles, it is our friends in the United States consulting with us, giving advice, and exchanging views, and sometimes debating very harshly behind the doors. But who else can we do that with? That's what I realized. The United States, people say, is the only ally – only treaty ally of the Republic of Korea. Yeah, this, it is true. But I think it's beyond that. Sort of who else argument, you know? Whenever we have a problem, especially during this pandemic, who else did we talk to? We didn't go to Beijing. We didn't go to Tokyo. We didn't go elsewhere. We went to and came to Washington, D.C. I think that speaks to a lot of facts, a lot of traditions, a lot of reality that we have. I think that we have a very strong – (inaudible) – community between Seoul and Washington, and Korea and the United States as a whole. I really do hope that this gets really expanded, this gets really evolved, as I just spoke about how on global stage Republic of Korea is doing our own parts, tackling global agendas, and also tackling, resolving peace problem on the Korean Peninsula. So, with that, I wish you could explore further how our alliance can grow more through this constructive dialogue. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Mr. Cha: Well, thank you very much, Vice Foreign Minister. That was a wonderful set of remarks, and also very personal in many ways. And we're very grateful that you would share that with us, and that you'd take the time. Again, I know that your schedule's very busy, and we did want to set aside at least a little bit of time for questions. If you – anyone here, if you'd like to ask a question there is a mic over here on the far end of the stage, and we'd be happy to take – I don't know how many we can take – but if you could just like up there. And while folks are thinking about their questions, Vice Foreign Minister, if I could ask you: You know, I agree with you – (laughs) – that your tour de force with regard to the alliance is both important and well-deserved. I mean, your administration has done an incredible job of reestablishing and expanding the importance of the U.S.-Korea alliance for both countries and for the world. But you're right, the press will focus on just what you said on North Korea. But my question isn't about North Korea, even though that takes up a lot of our time and the headlines. The bigger and broader question for the alliance in China. And there I guess I wanted to just get your views on how, in your – in your mind, Korea navigates this new environment in which there is a lot more competition between the U.S. and China than Korea arguably has been used to. And from your perspective, again, as one of the people in the South Korean government that has to conceptualize and think about Korea's path, if you could offer us some thoughts on that, that would be great.

Mr. Choi: Yeah. I did not say anything directly about China in my speech, reasonably because we have a good working relationship with the government in Beijing. They're our strategic partners. And just – as I said in my speech, just like any other domestic policies, foreign policy also should serve the needs and interests of Korean citizens, namely middle-income class. The trade volume of – trade volume of Korea-China is larger than our trade volume with the United States and Japan put together, and we make money out of it. We make big surplus out of it. And who enjoys the surplus down in

the market? Our citizens, ranging from the small to medium entrepreneurs to big, you know, conglomerates. We cannot ignore that. At the same time, we are also worried about supply-chain resilience, meaning that – overdependence on, you know, many parts and components coming from China. And that is not only our problem also; that is also problem for, I guess, everybody as we all are getting much more interdependent or otherwise dependent on Chinese. So, we realized issues are there and coming up, but at the same time seeing interaction between Beijing and Washington. As it gets more competitive, then we get really high tension within our foreign policy communities. Because first of all, our area of caution is something like this: What kinds of impact it will have on our exporters, our market actors? What kinds of strategic constraint it will have on our foreign policy arrays? And what kinds of impact it will have on our Korean Peninsula as a whole? But as I mentioned, our government is trying to be – make peace on the Korean Peninsula and create a structure. We cannot do it without, obviously, support and backup and consent and consultation from our friends in Washington, but also realistically speaking we also need partnership from Beijing as well. That's strategic theater that we belong to. Whether we like it or not, that's a reality of our policy as well. So why we are trying to be – so we're trying to be really having – forming a good working relationship with China. After all, we are – we are the country that lives right next door to. At the same time, we're trying to diversify our market shares. In other words, our very strong, aggressive approach to our friends in Southeast Asia under the name of New Southern Policies, our engagement with our European partners. We are the – we are the – we are the only country that has free-trade agreement with the European Union market, America, and at the same time China. So, we want to become a so-called porous nation in trading states. After all, we have many identities as a nation, but most of all we are enjoying our trading-nation identity as well. So we're trying to be really pragmatic about it. I also want to – I also want to toss a rhetorical question, something that we can also think about: For the interest of the United States which one is better, South Korea having a really bad relationship with China or South Korea having good working relationship with China? Which one would be good for the interest of the United States? I don't have a clear answer. It's something that really arising in my mind these days. And that's my answer, I guess.

Mr. Cha: Thank you very much, Vice Foreign Minister, for that response. I mean, Korea does really have one of the most complex relationships with China of all U.S. allies and partners. I know that – again, I know you have to go, but if you'd allow me to ask just one other question –

Mr. Choi: I can stay. (Laughter.)

Mr. Cha: If you could ask me just – answer just one other question, and it is about – it is about North Korea. There's a lot of attention now and talk and debate and discussion here in Washington about the end-of-war declaration. And one of the questions that I often get – which I don't have an answer to, so maybe you can answer it – is, the U.S. and the Republic of Korea are working very

hard on thinking about this, but in these discussions is there any sense that there is actually going to be a positive reception from the North with regard to this framework – this broader framework that you proposed in your speech for a peace process on the peninsula and denuclearization?

Mr. Choi:

It's hard to predict. I mean, think about what happened back in 2017 and compare that with 2018. You know, back in 2017 every weekend, especially, North Korea fire a lot of missiles. And I was in the Situation Room in the Blue House, and I was really mad with the fact that they especially fired on Friday night. (Laughter.) And then, 29th of November, with the lofted launch of a(n) ICBM, they certainly declared they complete everything, and then we move into a so-called peace Winter Olympics season, transferring the – transforming the whole nature. And we had a really highway ride in 2019, and sometimes it went really fast and then we had Hanoi. I know I can say because on that day when Hanoi summit crumbled, a lot of people drank a lot of soju in Seoul – (laughter) – and I'm not – I am one of them, to be honest with you. I know this is on live and I can't say something like this, but after all, I'm a professor. (Laughter.) But we never gave up, though. Second of all, we never thought that North Korea is an easy partner, but we saw a glimpse of possibility with the very strong partnership between Washington and Seoul, without any daylight, we could – we could have pushed a little bit harder on engagement and we could have crossed that threshold, but we couldn't – maybe because of a lot of reasons, but I'm not going to linger on the reasons. What I'm telling you is that with very strong coordination and cooperation between two allies, I think we could push and begin anew and open the door and bring North Korea into this, as I said, long, arduous, and tortuous process that nobody can walk away. And I believe that end-of-war declaration is a good ticket to the peace process, as well. My government – Moon Jae-in government, as you all know, has about six months in power. We do not – we do not aim to achieve everything at once. We do not push this in any hurry. As I told you and told to friends here, we want to create a structure and roadmap so that we can update, adapting to different circumstances and environments. And we believe that end-of-war declaration is one good example. As my capacity as presidential secretary for peace planning, my – one of my job portfolio was monitoring sanction regime. And I can surely tell you that we have very fierce sanction implementation. I cannot say any in detail, but other than any other nation in our theater we are actually doer – implementer of the sanction. So, sanctions still there, but also we need to give an idea about how creative we can be in sustaining this process when it actually begins, because at the end of the day this essentially semantic analogy, it's like standing in the very shallow river but with the very high – high whatchamacallit – streams. Unless you go against the tide, you will just fall back. In other words, there is no status quo when you deal with North Korea. Either you have to engage and try to create a structure to bring North Korea into out of, I guess dungeon – and I don't have the exact answers. We've tried it. We never give up. And my president took a very bold initiative to put out this, his – what he believes is a very viable option and go from there. So it's very doable. And whether North Korea take it or not, we will have to wait and see. I can't speak for North Korea at this juncture in the public.

Mr. Cha: Well, thank you. That's actually a very interesting expression, there is no status quo on North Korea. That's actually a very interesting way to think of it. We're out of time. I would like to, first of all, thank you for your service and for all that you've done to – for the Republic of Korea and for the alliance. You mentioned several times in your talk that you're looking forward to going back to being a professor at Yonsei. What will you look forward to the most when you return to campus?

Mr. Choi: Summer vacation and winter vacation. (Laughter.)

Mr. Cha: Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm round of applause for the vice foreign minister. (Applause.)