TRANSCRIPT

Online Event

ROK-U.S. Strategic Forum 2022

Keynote Address by Daniel J. Kritenbrink

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Victor Cha

OK. Welcome back, everyone, from our very short break. For our second keynote speaker, Daniel Kritenbrink, from the State Department.

Again, welcome to our audience online. To everybody in the room, good morning, good evening. My name is Victor Cha, senior vice president for Asia and Korea chair here at CSIS, a professor at Georgetown.

Our next session will be very a special one with Daniel Kritenbrink, who is the assistant secretary of state for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, formerly also ambassador to Vietnam, long distinguished career in the Department of State. I first met him when we were doing six-party talks, and –

Daniel J. Kritenbrink

Way back in the day.

Dr. Cha

Yeah, way back in the day when Daniel was at the embassy in Beijing.

And this conversation will be moderated by our very good friend Mark Lippert – Ambassador Mark Lippert, executive vice president at Samsung, former U.S. ambassador to Korea, and of course, most famously known as host of the CSIS YouTube show Capital Cable.

So, let me turn it over to these two very distinguished gentlemen, and we look forward to a very interesting discussion.

So, first, Ambassador Kritenbrink. (Applause.)

Amb. Kritenbrink

Good morning, everyone. I’m Dan Kritenbrink, the assistant secretary of state for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, and I’m truly honored to be here with you this morning at CIS – CSIS.

Thank you to my good friend, Dr. Victor Cha, for inviting me and for including me. Thanks for everything that you do and for what you've done for our country.

It’s great to be here this morning. I’m back from just not even two weeks ago having had the honor of accompanying President Biden to the Republic of Korea for his very successful and very important visit, and I want to talk a little bit about that this morning, of course.

First, I’d like, again, to thank all of our friends here at CSIS and at The Korea Foundation – particularly President John Hamre, Dr. Victor Cha, President Lee, thank you very much for hosting this seventh ROK-U.S. strategic dialogue.

Again, having just come back from the visit to the Republic of Korea, I’m particularly delighted to be here. I think the Biden-Harris administration has made clear that our foreign policy is predicated on revitalizing our relationships with our allies, partners, and friends. Absolutely delighted to see that our alliance with the ROK is stronger than ever. That is, of course, the result of decades’ worth of work, including some stellar work by my friend, Ambassador Mark Lippert, and Mark, it’s great to see here you this morning and look forward to our conversation.
But the fact is that for nearly seven decades the U.S.-ROK alliance has been the linchpin – the linchpin of peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and across the globe. We’re proud to have such close ties at every level, and I think that has been demonstrated and shown by the friendship between the American and Korean people and the incredibly warm welcome and hospitality that President Yoon offered to President Biden just 10 days after President Yoon had taken office.

The relationship between the United States and the Republic of Korea is built on many things, but it is also built on our shared values: our commitment to democracy, transparency, and responsive governance; our common grounding in the protection of human rights; our shared vision of maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region; strengthening and upholding the rules-based international order; and advancing peace and prosperity for our nations and for people everywhere.

Today, many of those values, of course, are being challenged by authoritarian leaders who seek to undermine and reshape the rules-based international order for their own purposes, and that’s why it’s crucial that the United States, the Republic of Korea, Japan, many other partners and allies around the world stand together and work together not only to address the challenges that we face, but also to show just how our strong democracies, like ours, can deliver.

And we’re doing just that. We’ve worked together to respond to Russian President Vladimir Putin’s premeditated, unprovoked, unjustified, and utterly horrific war against Ukraine. Since Putin launched his full-scale invasion in February, the Republic of Korea has coordinated sanctions and export controls alongside the United States and other allies and partners around the world.

And the ROK has taken steps to help stabilize energy markets, and it has offered significant economic and humanitarian support for the government and people of Ukraine, and we’re incredibly grateful to our South Korean allies for the steps that they’ve taken.

Good to see my friend Rob Rapson here as well. You know, of course, and were involved in much of the work in building this alliance as well, and it’s great to see you here this morning.

The United States and the Republic of Korea are committed to strengthening our close engagement, as we work to take on a range of other important and difficult challenges of the 21st century. But it’s important at the outset to also underscore that the U.S. commitment to the defense of the Republic of Korea and strengthening our combined defense posture, consistent with the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty, is ironclad, including the U.S. extended deterrence commitment to the ROK using the full range of U.S. defense capabilities.

But beyond traditional security challenges, we’re expanding our cooperation on a regional and international cyber policy. We’re working together to deter cyber adversaries, strengthen the cybersecurity of critical infrastructure, combat cybercrime, secure cryptocurrency and blockchain applications, undertake capacity
building in cyber exercises, and increase information sharing, and military-to-military cyber cooperation.

We also welcome the Republic of Korea’s increasing dialogue and practical cooperation with NATO alongside NATO’s other Indo-Pacific partners – Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. The ROK and NATO can offer each other valuable perspectives and experiences. We seek to promote cooperative security and support the rules-based international order across the globe.

However, as everyone in this room knows, our alliance is not defined solely by defense ties. Increasingly, it is also defined by our strategic economic and technology partnership. Much of what happens in the coming decades will depend on how well governments harness innovation – and especially the transformations afoot in clean energy and digital and tech sectors – while improving the resilience of our economies.

We have a strong history of partnership with the ROK in APEC, for example, which the United States is excited and honored to be hosting in 2023, and we were delighted that the ROK joined us in launching the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework in Tokyo on May 23.

Through these and other platforms we’re deepening our cooperation on critical and emerging technologies, economic and energy security, pandemic response, and addressing the climate crisis, among a host of other issues.

The foundation of our economic relationship is the KORUS U.S. Free Trade Agreement, which celebrated its 10th anniversary earlier this year. The United States is the second largest investor in the ROK, and ROK foreign direct investment in the United States continues to grow – more than tripling in the last decade from $19.7 billion to $62.4 billion. The ROK is now the second largest Asian source of foreign direct investment into the United States, truly remarkable.

While in Seoul, I had the pleasure of witnessing the manifestation of our close economic ties. President Biden and President Yoon together highlighted our forward-looking economic partnership. For example, during their visit to Samsung’s Pyeongtaek facility, which is essentially the same facility that Samsung is building in Taylor, Texas, and that will create 3,000 high-paying U.S. jobs, our two presidents showcased how Korean and American innovation are working in tandem to produce the most advanced semiconductors in the world.

During the president’s visit, Hyundai Motor Corporation also announced more than $11 billion in new investment in American manufacturing, including a new commitment of $5.7 billion for Advanced Automotive Technology and a $5.5 billion investment to open a new electrical – electric vehicle and battery manufacturing facility in Savannah, and that facility will create more than 8,000 jobs.

Clean energy investments like this have the double benefit of helping both of us reach our climate goals while creating good jobs that will benefit American workers and businesses. Investments like these are bringing our two countries even closer
together, and these increased connections will help strengthen our supply chains, secure them against shocks, and give both of our economies a competitive edge.

We believe that our already strong economic relationship will only grow stronger in the days ahead. Now, alongside our economic ties, we’re also working to tackle the most pressing challenges of today and tomorrow. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been steadfast bilateral partners, as evidenced through the U.S. government’s donation of vaccines to the ROK, which the Korean people then paid for through their own vaccine donations to other countries.

Our two governments and our private sectors are working to combat the COVID-19 pandemic globally, including through the COVID-19 Global Action Plan. President Biden’s and President Yoon’s participation in the May 12 COVID-19 Summit demonstrated our countries’ resolve in our fight against COVID-19, and we thank the ROK for announcing an additional $300 million commitment to this fight, truly impressive.

Now, I hope that the length of my remarks are demonstrating the breadth and the depth of our global partnership and our alliance, an alliance – and I apologize I have just a few more minutes to highlight the incredible work that we’re doing together, and then, I’ll look forward to diving in with Ambassador Lippert to hopefully take some questions.

So, again, the United States and the ROK are working together to strengthen multilateral efforts to prevent, prepare for and respond to future infectious disease threats. And we’re accelerating our cooperation and innovation in cancer research, cutting edge cancer treatments, mental health research, early detection and treatment of mental health disorders.

Yet, another area in which the United States and ROK are working to strengthen our cooperation is in response to the climate crisis. During President Biden’s recent trip to Seoul, he and President Yoon reaffirmed our respective commitments to our nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement, and we’re implementing strong efforts to align policies across all sectors.

The two presidents committed to enhanced collaboration to address global methane emissions and to strengthen cooperation in clean energy fields, including hydrogen, clean shipping, accelerated deployment of zero-emission vehicles, and aligning international financial flows with the achievement of global net zero emissions by 2050.

Both of our countries have also benefitted greatly from an open, free, global interoperable, reliable, and secure internet, and we are committed to working together to combat the rising threats posed by digital authoritarianism, defend human rights, and foster an open network of networks that ensures the free flow of information, globally.

We’re also working together to develop open, transparent, and secure 5G and 6G network devices and architectures using Open RAN approaches both at home and abroad. The United States and the Republic of Korea are also working to align our
respective approaches to promote our shared vision for the Indo-Pacific region. That includes basic principles like preventing barriers to lawful commerce and respecting international law governing the freedom of navigation and overflight, and it includes as well preserving peace and stability everywhere, including across the Taiwan Strait.

In order to promote this shared vision for the Indo-Pacific, we must also have a robust and effective trilateral relationship between and among the United States, the Republic of Korea, and Japan. Together, we are building a positive, forward-looking agenda, including: trilateral security cooperation; defending and promoting human rights, gender equity and the international rules-based order, while also addressing economic security and energy security, supply chain resiliency, the climate crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

And I think, as many of you have seen, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman is now in Seoul, where over the next couple of days she’ll be carrying out a very important bilateral program with our Republic of Korea allies, and then, we’ll hold an important trilateral meeting with her Korean and Japanese counterparts. And I’m confident that they will make significant progress there.

Of course, it’s hard for me to give a speech on the U.S.-ROK alliance and not say something about the DPRK. So, let me make a few brief comments.

The United States, the ROK, and Japan continue to be in full alignment on our approach to countering the threat posed by the DPRK. Our goal remains the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Unfortunately, the DPRK has increased, significantly, the pace and scale of its ballistic missile launches over the last year, and even over the last few days.

These provocative launches are violations of multiple U.N. security council resolutions, and they threaten the peace and security of the Indo-Pacific region and the entire international community. That is why Secretary Blinken, along with ROK Foreign Minister Park Jin, and Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi issued a statement on May 27 condemning the DPRK’s recent ballistic missile launches and calling on it to abandon its unlawful weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs, and instead engage in diplomacy.

The secretary, together with the G-7 foreign ministers, and the EU high representative also issued a statement last week condemning the DPRK’s continued illicit activity. In addition, the United States has been leading efforts in the United Nations to rally the world in responding to the DPRK’s repeated violations of international law.

We do, however, continue to believe that we can find a peaceful and diplomatic resolution with the DPRK. We have a practical, calibrated approach. The United States harbors no hostile intent towards the DPRK, and the path to dialogue remains open.

We urge the DPRK to take that path, to commit to serious and sustained diplomacy, and to refrain from pursuing further destabilizing activities. However, I want to be
absolutely clear. We should make no mistake: our commitment to upholding our security commitments remains – as I said at the top – absolutely iron clad. We remain absolutely focused on defending the United States, the Republic of Korea, Japan, and other allies and partners in the region from security threats, including those posed by the DPRK’s missile and nuclear programs.

We are also gravely concerned by the serious outbreak of COVID-19 underway in the DPRK right now and how it may affect the health and wellbeing of the North Korean people. We continue to support efforts to provide humanitarian assistance and COVID-19 vaccines to the DPRK. We see this humanitarian crisis as separate from making progress on denuclearization, and we do not and will not link the two.

Before I conclude, I would like to note that none of the cooperation – the long list of cooperation that I’ve outlined here this morning – could take place between the United States and Republic of Korea without the deep and abiding people-to-people ties of the American and Korean peoples. Since 1955, more than 1.7 million Korean students have enrolled in secondary institutions in the United States. During the 2020 and ’21 academic year, nearly 40,000 Korean students came to the United States placing the ROK as one of the top centers of international students to the United States on a per capital basis outpacing, again on a per capita basis, both the PRC and India. In addition, more than 10,000 U.S. and ROK citizens have participated in U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs over the years.

So, in closing, I would like to reiterate that today the U.S.-ROK alliance has matured and evolved into a global comprehensive strategic alliance, as President Biden and President Yoon announced in their joint statement of May 21. Through close ties between our two dynamic populations, our extensive economic and investment links, and a shared commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rules-based international order, I’m confident that the United States and the Republic of Korea together can and will meet any challenges and seize the opportunities presented before us across the Indo-Pacific and around the world.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Mark Lippert
Well done.

Amb. Kritenbrink
What do you think, Mark? You think it was OK?

Amb. Lippert
Yeah, A-plus. Paekjong, as they say. Perfect. I know we got, like, about five minutes.

Amb. Kritenbrink
I’m yours for as long as you like.

Amb. Lippert
No, no, five minutes. We’ve got to keep you on time. You’re doing the nation’s business here, you know. Can’t monopolize you at CSIS.

Amb. Kritenbrink
It’s really, really great to see you. Thanks, again. It’s great to see so many friends here. Thanks for organizing this, and what an amazing agenda. I wish I could stay for the whole thing.
If I had one minor quibble with the agenda I saw, though, I think the next session is focusing on what the United States and the ROK can do together regionally. I would probably say what can we do together regionally and globally because the case that I’ve outlined we fully embrace a global Korea. And it’s really extraordinary what Korea has achieved, and we are so excited that together as allies and partners we can do so many tremendous things together.

Amb. Lippert
No, it’s well put, Dan, and –

Amb. Kritenbrink
And by the way, thanks for everything you’ve done as well for this relationship, for our country, truly extraordinary.

Amb. Lippert
No, thanks – no, absolutely, and thanks for a great tour de force. I’m moderating the next panel, so I’m going to take those as notes, and we’re good to go. (Laughter.)

Victor, take a note, too, right, so. But thanks for really a tremendous speech. Thanks for your service. It’s been a – I know a long road for you, in terms of DCM and Beijing, NSC, ambassador in Vietnam, and now this job – these are hard jobs, and we appreciate your service.

Amb. Kritenbrink
Thank you. Thank you. It’s an honor.

Amb. Lippert
There’s just a few minutes left, and again, we want to keep you on time here, Dan. So, I just think – the question that I think is – that is on everybody’s minds is the summit, and you were there. You were behind the scenes. I saw you. You looked like you had no sleep. I could tell –

Amb. Kritenbrink
(Laughs.) You know how these trips go – no sleep.

Amb. Lippert
I could tell.

Amb. Kritenbrink
But you run on adrenaline because it’s so exciting to be there. It truly, truly was an honor.

Amb. Lippert
And so, talk – just walk us through a little bit about the summit. You’ve got this sweeping agenda – how did we accomplish it, and then sort of priorities moving forward between the two sides?

Amb. Kritenbrink
Thank you. Fantastic questions, Mark.

Look, I think the thing that jumped out at me the most was our Korean allies were kind enough to invite President Biden to visit Seoul just 10 days after President Yoon’s inauguration, and I think the thing I was most impressed by and most pleased by, was to see the development of the relationship between our two presidents.

And I think President Yoon went out of his way to show tremendous hospitality to President Biden, which was deeply appreciated. I don’t know if – I assume this
crowd you saw many of the visuals. You saw the different events that were designed
to demonstrate, again the strength and breadth of this alliance, right, from these
amazing investment events with Samsung and Hyundai, to the joint visit to the Air
Operations Command Center at Osan, to the state dinner, the important bilateral
events and all of that.

But the thing that stood out to me the most, again, was the development of that
relationship between our two presidents. I think it’s fair to say that President Yoon
and President Biden found a lot of common ground. I think they connected at a
personal and a leader-to-leader level, and I think that they discovered to no
surprise that they share a very similar outlook, I think, on the world – the kind of
world and region in which we want to live, the principles and values that we hold
dear, that we think are so vital to our shared peace and prosperity.

So I think, again, the way that they bonded and the in-depth exchange that they had
I thought was maybe, to my mind, the single most important outcome of the entire
summit.

Amb. Lippert And it seemed genuine in terms of – I had a glimpse at Pyeongtaek, right? I was
there –

Amb. Kritenbrink Of course.

Amb. Lippert – sleeplessly.

Amb. Kritenbrink Right. Well, thank you for –

Amb. Lippert (Laughs.)

Amb. Kritenbrink Now, I know how you noticed by sleeplessness because you were so up close and
personal. Thanks, by the way, that was a – that was a brilliant event.

And by the way, I wasn’t exactly sure when I was at the Samsung event – if you see
it, it was just extraordinary – they had these live pictures of American workers in
Samsung factories, Ukraine workers as well.

Amb. Lippert Yes.

Amb. Kritenbrink Now, is that really live? Is that really – it was really live.

Amb. Lippert That was really live. Yes, it was.

Amb. Kritenbrink And just amazing.

Amb. Lippert No, absolutely. And I would just say that the two leaders started talking just
impromptu, right, almost like, which is great?
Amb. Kritenbrink: Yeah, you know, it is interesting because, you know, we rolled in on Air Force One and went right to that event, and so, this was actually the first occasion for the two presidents to meet.

And I think from the beginning they really hit it off, and when we rolled into formal meetings next day, they went – they went well beyond what they were scheduled, including a lengthy one-on-one session. So, I think they really bonded and really, as I said, discovered they have a very similar outlook on the world.

Amb. Lippert: Absolutely. And last – really last question. Let's get you out of here. So then how – you know, just dovetailing with your experience – you're a Chinese speaker, you're a Mandarin speaker, you were DCM there, you were the NSC senior director dealing with a lot of issues on China. In your current job –

Amb. Kritenbrink: That’s when we worked together.

Amb. Lippert: That’s right – sadly.

Amb. Kritenbrink: (Laughs.)

Amb. Lippert: The – for you. The question is then, how – the elephant in the room is always about China, right, in terms of how we work on this together. The outcome in and around our shared outlook on handling or engaging Beijing. You heard the Blue House senior secretary for economics had put out some – or economic security – put out some guideposts. Your thoughts on how the alliance will deal with this, and then, we’ll let you get on with your day.


Yeah, look, I think, you know, the opportunities and challenges posed by the People’s Republic of China, you know, are important to all of us in the region. So, it’s no surprise that this would be important to the United States and the Republic of Korea as well.

I think what I would do is I would refer you to Secretary Blinken’s speech on China really just a few days ago, and he outlined our framework. And maybe just a couple of key highlights there.

The framework that he announced, the conceptual way that we like to describe our approach to the PRC is invest, align, and compete. The United States of America will continue to make investments in our own competitiveness and our strength here at home. We will align closely with our allies, partners, and friends, including the Republic of Korea, around the world. And then, we will compete, and we intend to win in the key areas of competition between the United States and China going forward. But, of course, we are cooperating in a range of areas where our interests dictate, and we remain open to that.

I think in the context of the president’s visit and our important alliance with Korea, what I would say is when we talk about China, I’d like to focus on what our affirmative vision is and what we stand for. What do we stand for? We stand for a
free and open Indo-Pacific region. We stand for region and a world in which disputes are governed and resolved peacefully and in accordance with international law – where large countries don’t bully the weak, where countries can trade and travel freely, where all countries remain the capacity – maintain and retain the capacity and the ability to make their own decisions regarding their sovereignty, free of coercion.

Those are the things that we proactively stand for. I’m confident that we’ve never been more aligned on those issues than we are today with the Republic of Korea. So, that’s where I’d like to maintain our focus, and I’m confident that’s where it is. And I think on virtually every issue across the board, Washington and Seoul see eye to eye, and, I would argue, that’s the case with China as well.

Now, all of us have important but complex relationships with the People’s Republic of China. We are not asking countries to choose between Washington and Beijing. What we’re focused on is making sure all countries have a choice, and again, can make their own decisions free of coercion.

I think as long as we remain focused on that positive agenda and what we stand for, not what we stand against, I’m confident we’ll find our way forward.

Amb. Lippert

All right. Outstanding, Dan. I was going to say you beat me to the punch on my follow-up, which is – it sounds like there’s a lot of common ground on the ROK approach of mutual benefit, mutual respect, equality, in terms of their dealings with Beijing and the U.S. approach outlined in Secretary Blinken’s speech.

So, with that, the get off the stage question is, you know, you are famous in Vietnam for a music video that went viral on YouTube. Anymore video plans in the future?

Amb. Kritenbrink

(Laughs.) Definitely not. Well, you never say never, but I’m pretty confident that I’m a one-hit wonder. (Laughter.) I’ll also say, Mark, that I spend most days having forgotten about that rap video.

Amb. Lippert

(Laughs.)

Amb. Kritenbrink

But there’s rarely a day that goes by that I’m not reminded of it.

But can I say, it was such a pleasure to do. I do think it says something about how far we’ve come with another key partner, and that’s with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, where an American ambassador thought was a good idea to do a rap, to do part of it in Vietnamese and to do it in celebrating the Tet holiday in Vietnam; and that we thought it would play well with the Vietnamese audience. And it did, and that says something about, I think, our friendship and partnership that we’ve grown there as well.

But, no, I don’t – I don’t think you’ll see me doing too many other videos. But you never say never.

Amb. Lippert

Well, I – but – yeah, I was just going to say I did work for YouTube so I’m going to claim the residual rights. (Laughter.)
Amb. Kritenbrink  (Laughs.) It's a deal.

Amb. Lippert  Dan, thanks again for the tour de force.

Amb. Kritenbrink  Thank you.

Ambassador Mark Lippert, Dr. Victor Cha, all of our friends here at CSIS, thank you so much for having me here today.

Amb. Lippert  All right. Thanks. Great speech. Thanks, Dan. Appreciate it.

Amb. Kritenbrink  Thank you. Appreciate it. (Applause.)