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TRANSCRIPT

Online Event

**“Capital Cable #53: Conversation with Rep. Ami Bera
on Korea”**

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FEATURING

Ami Bera

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and Nonproliferation; Co-Chair, Congressional Study Group on Korea*

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INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Mark Lippert: All right. Good afternoon, to everyone in D.C. A little twist, good evening to everyone in Korea. Good day to everyone else around the world. Welcome to the 53rd edition of The Capital Cable. I'm Mark Lippert, your host and moderator.

This week on The Capital Cable, perspectives on the U.S.-ROK alliance from Capitol Hill, our very special guest, perfectly positioned to give us critical insights to these topics and more, Representative Bera. He is the chairman of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and Nonproliferation. That is a mouthful. He is one of the co-chairs of the bipartisan, bicameral Congressional Study Group on Korea. He is vice chair of the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology. I'm having trouble getting through this. Must be because it's in the afternoon after lunch. He is a medical doctor, 20-year career under his belt, proud graduate of UC Irving. Go Anteaters. I also think he's a Dodger's fan. And he is also – this is his second appearance on The Capital Cable. Welcome to the show, Congressman.

Representative
Ami Bera: Thanks for having me on.

Mr. Lippert: All right. We are very, very lucky to have you representative the Seventh District of California. And just around the outskirts of Sacramento – or, anyway, east of Sacramento, I think, if my recollection is correct. All right, quickly turning to our regular panelists. Victor Cha, vice dean at Georgetown, head of the CSIS Korea Chair Program, former NSC. Victor, welcome back to the show.

Victor Cha: Thanks, Mark. It's great to have Congressman Bera on the show again.

Mr. Lippert: It is awesome. Victor, what else is going on? Anything else? I mean, I got a Dodger's reference in there. I thought there'd be sort of a Yankee's snapback recrimination. You know, reading your Twitter feed now, it lurches between, again, Kim Jong-un, North Korea, and anger about sports teams. What's going on there?

Dr. Cha: Anger at sports teams, yeah. Yeah. Well, we're a few days after the New York Giants training camp, so, you know, hope springs eternal.

Mr. Lippert: All right. Already – you're already just onto the next sport. All right. Good deal. All right. (Laughs.)

Sue, Dr. Sue Mi Terry, last but not least, certainly. Head of all Asia programs at the Wilson Center. Former CIA. Former NSC. Former CSIS. Sue, welcome back to the show.

Sue Mi Terry: Thank you. Greetings from Martha's Vineyard.

Mr. Lippert: Oh, nice.

Ms. Terry: I'm changing location every two weeks. (Laughs.)

Mr. Lippert: You are – you are quite the traveler. All right, Sue, I just know what I want to do when I retire. It's become Sue. All right. There we go. All right, Sue, thanks again for being on the show. We're ready to go here.

Let's get into it, as they say. Let's just go to Congressman – the congressman, our special guest here. You are well-known in D.C. and Korea for your expertise on U.S.-ROK relations. You were just in Korea leading a really good-size congressional delegation, a lot of expertise there, really interesting, diverse backgrounds. Can you, just broad strokes, start us off here? Tell us about your trip there, please? What was the atmosphere in Korea? And, again, welcome to the show. The floor is yours.

Rep. Bera: Great. Thanks, Mark. I think it was a great trip. And, you know, this was my ninth trip there, I think, in the last five years. So getting to be a regular on that circuit. And, you know, let me start with maybe framing the new administration, the Yoon administration that came in. I happened to be in Korea for the inauguration as part of the presidential delegation, you know, five, six weeks earlier. And, you know, really that inaugural address set the tone for, I think, what we heard on our visit, you know, a few weeks ago. You know, President Yoon certainly laid out a Korea that was going to look beyond the peninsula, a Korea that really wanted to try to strengthen the trilateral relationship. And, you know, a Korea that, you know, 40 years ago may have been a developing country but now is the 10th leading economy in the world and ready to take the world stage.

Now, that's the framing. We certainly heard a lot of that, the importance of the U.S.-ROK relationship, you know, placing that central to much of

how Korea progresses, both on the peninsula addressing security issues more broadly in the Indo-Pacific. So all the right things were said.

And the other piece, you know, we had great access to President Yoon's cabinet and a lot of these folks are – you know, now that I'm in my fifth term, folks that we know very well, that we've had a chance to work with both as legislators and – so I think on the U.S.-ROK relationship, the conversations that we can have, you know, they've been making frequent trips in the short time period that they – you know, in the transition, as well as while they've been in office, to the United States, so I think that is all good.

You know, the atmosphere in Korea I think is much like the atmosphere all over the world, as it is here, you know. Inflation, you know, high housing prices, a lot of real domestic issues, and, you know, I walk away – I really appreciate the Yoon administration's ambitious agenda. You know, just as President Biden, I think, has run into some headwinds because of domestic concerns, I think that's something that, you know, could potentially plague the Yoon administration. And then, you know, it was an extremely close election, right, and it's divided government, so, you know, we did have a chance to meet with the newly elected speaker of the assembly, the national assembly, and, you know, those conversations also were very, very good. But again, you know, much as our own domestic politics sometimes get in the way of our foreign policy ambitions, you know, it remains to be seen how that plays out in Korea with divided government.

So, you know, I'm cautiously optimistic. I think there are more places that we can work together and certainly I think we want to help the Yoon administration realize its ambitions. But again, just as we face domestic issues here, I think they will face some domestic challenges that may rise to the forefront.

Mr. Lippert:

All right, excellent. Thanks for getting us off to such a good start, Congressman. Let me just take a piece of what you said – in particular, your background and your current vocation – and apply it to a question. How does one juggle the two? I mean, you've got really – you do it every day, right? You've got your constituency, you've got a domestic agenda that is fulsome, but yet you make time and find a lot of space or bandwidth, where seemingly little exists, to engage in this alliance. How

would you go about or how do you think about these governments, especially U.S. allies in Korea, in terms of balancing these two priorities.

Rep. Bera:

Yeah, so, I think we have to do it every day. At the end of the day, being in electoral politics – you know, again, you see this is in some of the polling, you know, President Biden’s popularity, or lack thereof, and some of the polling around, you know, President Yoon and the Yoon administration, which isn’t that dissimilar from where President Biden is. I think that’s a reflection of the general anxiety that I think the public in Korea feels or the public in the United States. We have to acknowledge that and address that. At the same time, we do live in a very changing world right now. We see the aggressiveness coming out of the PRC. I think the Yoon administration very much recognizes that that’s – you know, the threat of China. You know, we know that, you know, there’s a high likelihood that there will be a seventh nuclear test coming out of North Korea, so what does that mean in that context? The realistic desire to get the bilateral relationship with Japan to a better place – I think, you know, that always – you know, internal Japanese or Korean politics always get in the way of some of that. But there’s some urgency, given the North Korean threats as well as the broader Indo-Pacific threats that are taking place.

I think the easy step here is, you know, hopefully this week we will pass the CHIPS Act and send that over to the president’s desk. I think that’s – you know, the economic piece between Korean companies and U.S. companies, the places where we can work together. I think that’s the low-hanging fruit. I actually think that those are the easy things that we can do, you know, working together on, you know, vaccine development, the pharmaceutical space. I think the Koreans are very ready to engage with the rest of the world, and I think, you know, we ought to race full speed ahead on the economic front.

The geopolitical stuff we can talk about and get into greater detail. I think that’s going to be a little bit more difficult because of, you know, the Koreans historically have been focused on peninsular security. And if they’re going to start engaging more broadly in the Indo-Pacific, you know, there may be some – you know, it may not be as easy said as done.

Mr. Lippert:

All right. Excellent.

Just two quick questions. One is in terms of the U.S. side. You know, obviously, you went there. You talked to the Korean side extensively. Saw all of your old friends. Han Duck-soo is back in his iteration again, the ubiquitous prime minister of Korea, who's served in, basically, every position. But you know a lot of old friends on the Korean side.

U.S. side, you are familiar with the U.S. officials as well and USFK and the embassy there. What was the mood there on the U.S. side?

Rep. Bera: Yeah. I think the U.S. side is, certainly, optimistic. I think it meant a lot to the Koreans that President Biden, you know, made – was one of the first foreign dignitaries, if not the first foreign dignitary, to meet with President Yoon. I think that meant a lot.

I think the – you know, how the public feels about the United States is at a real high point right now, and I think in Congress, you know, in a bipartisan, bicameral way there's a lot of appreciation for the importance of the U.S.-ROK relationship both economically and geopolitically and strategically and, again, I think those of us in Congress – and we did have this conversation with the speaker that we really should – you know, in this era of Zoom, we should be having regular interparliamentarian engagement and probably from the legislative branch identify two, maybe three key areas where we could do some foundational work as legislatures to really continue to build and move that relationship forward.

Mr. Lippert: All right. Outstanding.

The last question that I foreshadowed is – and you touched on it a little bit in your previous answer about the low-hanging fruit of what's next – what do you think – where do you see the relationship headed? What's kind of the – on the horizon here in the next couple of months, year, given you've just been there? You've got a fresh inject talking to everyone. What do you see around the corner?

Rep. Bera: Yeah. So, again, I'm cautiously optimistic. We hear the right things coming out of the Senate with regards to the CHIPS Act. I think that's going to be really big for investments, both Samsung Semiconductors, SK Hynix, and others that are really poised to make big investments in the United States.

I think that's going to be really well received here. And vice versa on the vaccine, the global health pharmaceutical front. I think you'll see U.S. companies engaging there. We met with Hyundai and other Korean companies that are, you know, looking at significant investments.

There are a few issues that I hope we can get resolved – you know, visa issues, obviously, the E-4 issues, one we hear a lot about when we're in Korea, and I think that's one, hopefully, in a bipartisan way we can get resolved.

Then, you know, more medium term, you know, we – you know, if we're looking at August and September, I think a lot of us fully expected North Koreans to – you know, all indications are that there'll be a seventh nuclear test coming at some juncture. What tools do we have, you know, at this juncture? Sanctions, the Security Council. Those are probably not functioning tools.

But will that be a forcing mechanism that really gets the U.S.-ROK-Japan relationships? Setting aside historical issues, do we take, you know, a nuclear test, which is a real threat to the region, to say, look, we've got to set the historic issues aside? Keep working on those, but we've got to get past them and really start speaking with one voice on the geopolitical side.

And then how does, you know, China, Russia, you know, respond to that seventh nuclear test. So I think that's, you know, kind of short-term economic. I think we'll have a lot of wins there. And then the geopolitical thing that's on the horizon, really, is if there's another nuclear test, you know, how do we respond to that.

Mr. Lipert: All right. Outstanding. Thanks, Congressman.

I'll let you sit out a couple of plays in the spirit of Victor's sports recriminations here. Well done, and thanks for that last question. You really tied it all together, the different threads in your answers. So thanks for that. Really, I think, informative to the viewers.

Victor, over to you. First, I'll just say, you know, on the E-4 piece, I think, Victor, if you were applying for a visa I'd go O-visa because of your

outstanding tennis game, you know, kind of, you know, akin, you know, the special athletic and artistic visa.

But in all seriousness, can you just pick up on the threads that the congressman laid down in terms of where we are in the relationship, number one; number two, especially the U.S. side; and, number three, the over-the-horizon, kind of the mix of the economic and the geopolitical? Can you tease that out, and add your commentary and analysis to the congressman's excellent lay-down?

Dr. Cha:

Sure. Happy to do it. First, I want to just say that it's great to see Congressman Bera on the show. You know, nine trips to Korea in the last few years. He's really one of the most well-respected voices on Korea and Asia policy broadly, in Korea. His hearings are, you know, very well-covered in Korea. And he's really sort of widely respected as a balanced sort of bipartisan voice on U.S. policy towards the alliance and towards Asia on Capitol Hill. So it's really great to have him on the show, and great that he did this trip to – did this trip to Korea.

So, I mean, I think the way the congressman described things, you know, I think are about right. You know, Yoon does face some domestic headwinds. But at the same time, what he wants to do in terms of the alliance I think, it would be fair to say, is very refreshing and a relief to many alliance managers that saw quite a bit of challenges underneath the surface with the previous administration, to be very frank. And the fact that Yoon is very focused on – you know, obviously focused on the North Korea issue, but focused on expanding Korea's footprint in foreign policy broadly speaking – everything from overseas development assistance to global health to climate, you know, on all these issues – I think is not just a good thing, it's appropriate for Korea given the size of the country and the size of its economy, and its advanced technologies.

You know, clearly the issues on the horizon or around the corner, if you will, are related to things like supply chains. I think he has a very – Yoon has a very ambitious agenda when it comes to doing things like this. They just joined the Mineral Security Partnership – the U.S. Mineral Security Partnership. I mean, the – I don't know where they are in this, but they were very interested not just in producing licensed production of COVID vaccine, but also licensed production of the antiviral drugs. They really want to be a hub for global health in Asia.

And then on issues such as playing a larger role, you know, they went to the NATO summit. They were in Madrid. They did the AP4, the Asia Pacific Four meeting, and I think Korea wants to – I think Yoon wants to play a larger role in terms of Korea as a defender and an example of democracy and freedom around the world. We were saying earlier about how Korea tends to be too peninsular focused. And I don't think that's Yoon's desire at all. I mean, I think he really wants to expand sort of the way Korea operates in the world, and to be a country that's out there helping to support the liberal international order. Which needs a lot of support right now, frankly.

So these are all, I think, positive things. You know, domestic politics always does get in the way of foreign policy. And that's not – that's something that we should just expect. We expect it here in the United States. We should expect it to be the case in Korea. But the signals I think – you know, they're very early on – but the signals, I think, are all right. And we should be supporting the – what they want to do, especially as it pertains to the alliance and to the liberal international order.

Mr. Lippert:

All right, outstanding, Victor. Let me come at you with one follow up, picking up some threads from the congressman's interventions, your interventions. Let me pose the question like this: We have obviously, working in the alliance – which is, I think, very popular in Korea. It's a zero-sum game. Alliance, domestic politics, extremely popular, right? I think there is a myth that we're not popular in Korea. I think it's increasingly being dispelled, but it's still out there. But in any event, we're popular.

The geopolitical activities seem a little more, put it this way, dicey for the Yoon Suk-yeol administration. I think there's more trepidation around that, there's more unknowns. How do you think about those two things that, you know, aren't necessarily mutually exclusive? Because the alliance does want to start working with the Koreans in a much more global sense and a much more geopolitical sense. How should U.S. policymakers be unpacking that set of issues and being, I think, cognizant of the domestic both constraints but also the domestic popularity of the United States as well?

Dr. Cha:

Yeah, it's a fair point. You know, I think part of it is that, you know, the South Korean public, like the American public, like many publics, are not really focused so much on, you know, what's going on outside of their borders. And so when President Zelensky of Ukraine gave his virtual speech in the National Assembly, it wasn't a full house, right? It wasn't a full house when he gave his speech. That's just reflective of that.

I mean, I think there are two things, broadly speaking. The first is on the part of the Yoon government they need to really demonstrate how Korea's role, whether it's in global health or in supply chains or chips, this is something that benefits the South Korean public, right? They need to draw the linkage between what they're doing abroad and what – how it benefits folks at home.

And in a sense, Yoon could take a lesson from President Biden in the way he talks about all of these issues. He always talks about them in terms of how they're good for jobs or things closer to home. When he was in Korea, the first stop he made was to the – you know, the Samsung plant. You know, he talked about it in terms of how this benefits the United States. So that's something I think Yoon has to do, you know. And I don't think Korean presidents are used to doing that, right? It's not sort of part of their go-to repertoire to talk in that – in that way because they just haven't extended themselves in the way that Yoon aspires to do.

And then the second thing on the U.S. side is, for the United States, we need to talk about how this global engagement by Korea is beneficial to the alliance, right? I mean, as you said, Mark, if the alliance is – it's not "if," it is popular broadly in South Korea – then we need to talk about how these issues are not just things that we want Korea to do as a favor, but that they are things that reinforce, broaden the scope, deepen the resilience of the bilateral alliance and turn this from a bilateral alliance into, like, a global – you know, a global alliance. And that, I think, would resonate with the public's general positive views with regard to the long-term nature of the U.S.-Korea partnership.

Mr. Lippert:

All right. Excellent, Victor. Thanks for that.

I'm going to go Sue then back to the congressman. Sue, your thoughts here.

Dr. Terry:

I mean, I agree with all the points made. I think the positive news is that, you know, state of U.S.-ROK alliance is very strong. Atmosphere is very good. You talked about the public support, you know. So when you look at the polls, the support for the alliance is very high. Over 90 percent of the polls consistently say the alliance is necessary, right? Over 80 percent says USFK is necessary. There's pretty high affinity for Biden himself. I think Biden is more popular in Korea than in here. (Laughs.) There is increasing support for the idea of developing U.S.-ROK alliance to include values such as democracy, human rights.

So, you know, and all the thorny issues of recent years have been resolved. We're not talking about bringing troops back home. We're not arguing over, you know, special measures or a cost-sharing agreement and so on. We are also aligned in terms of, you know, if and when and what scale to hold joint exercises; what to do with North Korea, China, Japan.

So there is no doubt that, you know, there's greater alignment with – there's a sense of greater alignment between Washington and Seoul, between the Yoon administration and the Biden administration. Their desire to globalize the U.S.-ROK alliance, we're on the same page. You know, great summit. You know, South Korea joined Quad in summit in May. You know, they said they were joining Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. Yoon participated in the NATO summit. All good news.

And as, Congressman, you brought out, you know, of course there is domestic issues. I think that is a concern because it could always overshadow Yoon administration's goals, right, just as here – of his foreign policy objectives, right, whether there are supply chain issues. It could hamper Yoon's administration – Yoon administration's efforts to be tougher on China or the fact, you know, that Korea – the congressman talked about how Korea is a divided nation. So, you know, that could hamper sort of the Yoon administration's ability to maneuver when the opposition party still controls the, you know, majority of the National Assembly, and the National Assembly election is not until 2024. Or so President Yoon is not popular at home, you know. Congressman also talked about that. The Korean public is upset at economic outlook, high inflation, some of the controversial political appointments of recently, of Yoon's decision to place former prosecutors like himself in key government positions. You know, there are a whole host of issues. I think

his poll approval rating is something like 37 percent. The people – his ruling party is also in disarray, to be honest, right? You know, he has suspended its leader, Lee Jun-seok's membership for six months.

So the point is, I do think – I agree with everything. Atmosphere is good, you know, the Yoon administration is saying all the right things, we're in good ground, but there are domestic challenges, and I think we just have to sort of see. I'm also cautiously optimistic, just like the congressman said, but we do have to see what kind of gap might exist between the rhetoric and the actual policy that has not yet been enacted, sort of detailed policies, right? So all in all, I remain optimistic. I agree with all the points being made. I'm a little bit wary of the domestic political situation.

Mr. Lippert: OK, Sue, excellent. Let's lift and shift. We're at the 25-minute marker. We have about 20 minutes left. I'm going to ask you a question, you one follow-up question, not on the domestic. I want to just pivot into your bread and butter, North Korea, and then I'm coming to the congressman, who's flirted with the North Korea issue in his first intervention, but I'm going to put him on the spot on that. So, Sue, what's going on in North Korea? Congressman, warm up; you're next.

Dr. Terry: So all the indications are the North is still technically prepared for another nuclear test, possibly next-generation tactical nuclear weapons – we discussed this last time in our show – potentially, you know, for smaller warhead that fits into new tactical guided weapon. Kim Jong-un basically needs to say launch and then, you know, there we are. And this is not just Sue Terry's assessment; I think this is U.S.'s assessment, South Korean assessment, IAEA's assessment. Victor can talk about CSIS's assessment. CSIS, you know, own imagery showed last month –

Mr. Lippert: Everybody knows CSIS is a sovereign nation, so, you know, it's got its own vote at – yeah. (Laughs.)

Dr. Terry: Right. But its own imagery, you know, last month, you know, showed work from their east side, a tunnel is complete, third tunnel is complete, and they're ready for some nuclear tests. Now, I'm personally not hopeful for any type of substantive negotiations with Pyongyang anytime soon. You know, some people talk about North Korea's dire economic situation, you know, and possibly the COVID situation is pretty dire. I understand

North Korea just, you know, just bought a thousand – 3,000 to 4,000 more ventilators, so, you know, we're not going by the numbers that North Korea's giving us, so the situation might be pretty bad. And some people think that dire economic situation would give incentive North Korea to return to talks.

That's not my assessment, necessarily. You know, there's drought, there's flood, there's a lot of situation – economic situation not great, but, you know, I don't think we'll return to talks anytime soon. And I don't know what we could do at this point any further than what we've done, right? The Biden administration has already sent specific written proposals about possible talks through the third parties. It's said that – repeatedly – said repeatedly that we're open to dialogue without preconditions. Jake Sullivan said he's been having honest, honest conversation with Chinese counterpart. The Yoon administration, also over the weekend, said that they devised now this new bold plan for North Korea to revive its economy in return for denuclearization, that if North Korea takes big steps towards denuclearization, there will be big rewards, although candidly, this is not all that new or bold to me this idea of offering generous economic assistance and security guarantees, that Victor knows a lot about, to the North in exchange for bold action for them to abandon nuclear arsenal. This kind of reminds me of Lee Myung Bak's sort of 3,000 plan for denuclearization of increasing North Korea's per capita GDP to \$3,000, for example. So, you know, I think we've done what we can to say that we're ready to return to the talks. I have my doubts that this will work. I think for us to return to talks, you heard me say a hundred times, I think it will be after the seventh nuclear test, it will be after North Korea achieves next level of capability that they're seeking, so that if and when we return to talks, they'll have more leverage.

Mr. Lippert:

Great, Sue. Thanks. I'm not a good listener so that's why I make you repeat it more than a hundred times. But anyway, the – Congressman – well done, Sue, well done, Sue; excellent analysis, as always.

Congressman, Sue laid down a lot of interesting facets here and maybe just pick up whichever one you see fit, but I did listen, Sue – seventh nuclear test, miniaturization in terms of nuclear weapons, you've got the COVID situation, the economic piece of this, and all of their machinations in terms of what they may or may not do with the U.S. and/or the South

Koreans. Your thoughts? What did you pick up? And, you know, thanks for the – thanks in advance for the congressional insights on North Korea.

Rep. Bera:

Yeah, so I actually agree with most of Sue's assessment here, that, you know, while we're open to dialogue – and I got the impression that the Yoon administration would be open as well – I don't see any imminent, you know, chance of dialogue occurring at this juncture.

I also agree with her assessment. You know, obviously, a lot of open sources, you know, suggest that, you know, it could be anytime, whenever Kim Jong-un decides he wants to do that seventh nuclear test, you know, it'll happen.

In her assessment that – you know, what tools do we really have at this juncture? You know, Korea for the – or, North Korea for the most part has been self-sanctioning itself throughout COVID. So I don't know that sanctions are going to be effective. You don't really – at this juncture, I wouldn't depend on the U.N. Security Council doing anything either with China and Russia there. So I wouldn't think about that. So the tools that we would have as the United States, the ROK, and others, probably are limited at this juncture.

You know, I think how we're thinking about it and the dialogue we're having is within the Korean public, within the Japanese public, can we use this as a forcing function for the trilateral relationship on the geopolitics, security of the region? And I think that – if we think about it in that juncture, that may be the forcing function to say, OK, you've got to set aside some of these historic issues. And that may be broadly supported by the public in the face of seventh nuclear test, because that threat becomes very real.

I don't – you know, I don't hold out any hope that the Chinese are going to do anything at this juncture, because I think they like the North Korean distraction and, you know, the concerns there. So and, you know, when we talk about denuclearization on the peninsula, let's think about it in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. I think the North Koreans are, you know, seeing the security that their nuclear abilities provide. I don't see disarmament and getting rid of their nuclear capabilities anytime in the immediate future.

So I think we ought to think about it within that context. That doesn't paint a real optimistic picture, other than, you know, maybe that containment strategy and, you know, looking for baby steps that, you know, again, maybe at one point, you know, would provide a path forward. But right now I guess how I'm thinking about it and how I'm talking about it with colleagues is if you see that seventh nuclear test, let's use that as a forcing function to strengthen our trilateral relationship.

Mr. Lippert: Outstanding. It may be a big pessimistic or cloudy, but it's far more sunny than all doom and gloom Sue over there. But I'm joking. Now – (laughs) – well done and brought in a lot of threads. Can I just follow up with maybe just take it a little different direction in terms of just the atmospherics during your trip? Was this a hot topic? Was this at the top of the agenda? It feels like it's cooled a bit, but your thoughts on that.

Rep. Bera: You know, it really wasn't as prominent a topic as, you know, the other economic and, you know, the U.S.-ROK relationship. You know, we haven't even touched on the PRC at this juncture and, you know, what that – you know, how the Yoon administration balances this movement towards the United States and, you know, some of their own desire to increase their own self-defense production and capabilities. You know, how that plays out in the broader dialogue with their, you know, big country to – you know, neighbor China, so.

Mr. Lippert: Well, let's jump in. You guys always run ahead of the test here. You know, I try to, like, run this methodical, disciplined show. And you guys just – you know, it's broken field running. It's, like – you know, it's, like, I don't know, Tony Dorsett, you know, and his 99-yard run. You know, it's all over. Anyway, Congressman, so the question for you then: I would – it sounds like you're – what you're implying is – or, at least, in your – in kind of the penumbras in your statement is that China is a hot topic, how to deal with China, how to deal with that. That's one. And then you have alluded to it several times so let's just put it on the table, the trilateral relationship with Japan. Could you take those pieces in turn and just address those in the context of your trip and how you're thinking about it here at home in Congress?

Rep. Bera: Yeah, so, I mean, China is very much front and present. And, you know, it remains Xi Jinping obviously wasn't pleased with NATO participation and what that means and, you know, a broader ROK role in the world, a

stronger U.S.-ROK relationship, you know. And if the trilateral gets to a stronger place – you know, certainly, the Japanese and now with the Kishida administration kind of consolidating where they are will move into, you know, a greater portion of their GDP going toward self-defense capabilities and, you know, moving in that direction more rapidly. The Yoon administration's alluded to some of that on the Korean side as well with regards to their own self-defense capabilities. And certainly we'll talk about it in the context of North Korea, but I think they also are very aware that the longer-term, you know, strategic threat may not be North Korea; it may be the PRC. And you know, again, how does that play out in this relationship? Because, you know, they've experienced Chinese economic coercion, obviously, with the THAAD batteries, and you know, so how do they balance that economic threat that China clearly has already kind of signaled?

I think that – correct me if I'm wrong, Sue or Victor would know for certain – but I think they put out a public letter that, you know, talked about, hey, here's two critical – 200 critical exports that the Koreans rely on. I don't think they identified what those were. I think that was a thinly veiled threat to Korean industry to say, hey, just be careful here. I would – I would just publicly say, you know, China requires on some critical exports from the United States, so, you know, to the Korean people and the Korean administration, we've got your back here. So, you know, two can play this game, and I think the Chinese have to be really careful here.

Mr. Lippert: Victor, you're nodding in violent agreement. Looks like you want to come in, and then I want to go back to the congressman on the trilateral piece. Victor.

Dr. Cha: Yeah. So I think in particular the last – very last statement that the congressman made that, you know, the United States has your back, Korea, if China does this again, you know, that's – it's a – that's a very important statement because, as you guys know well, when we talk to the Koreans about China and supply chains they always say, you know, in 2017 you left us hanging, right? It was, obviously, a different administration at the time in Washington, but you left us hanging. You left us on an island all by ourselves. And our – many of us, our response is, you know, 2017 is not 2022. It's a completely different situation now.

And the penultimate point that he made about how, you know, this sort of – I mean, not that we want to do this, but this weaponization of economic interdependence that China, you know, prosecutes is not a one-way street, right? I mean, we're doing research right now at CSIS looking at the composition of Korean trade with China, what Korea exports to China, and there are, like, 25 items on that list of which China is more than 80 percent dependent on Korea, right – on Korea – and five or six items where they are a hundred percent dependent on Korea. So it's not that people are advocating starting a trade war, but the notion that other countries can play this game too, and possibly do it as a group, right – possibly do it as a group – again, not to start a trade war, but that sends a deterrent message to China to say, like, don't think you can just do this bilaterally to any country that you want.

So I just wanted to make that point, and let's go back – let's go to trilateralism with the congressman.

Mr. Lippert: Like, who's running the show? I'm running the show. I get to say that. No, the – (laughs) – you own the place, though, so that's unfair.

Anyway, the – no, it's an excellent point. And Congressman, one quick follow up on that. If I'm not mistaken, Congress did ask the administration for a study or a strategy on what to do about economic retaliation. Am I incorrect in making that assertion?

Rep. Bera: You're not, in fact, because that was a bill that we introduced on, you know, better understanding Chinese economic coercion and understanding the tools that we have available to counter that economic coercion, so – and making sure we've got that – those tools ready to go. Because, I think to Victor's point, it is really important that, you know, we have our friends' and allies' back should they encounter that. I think that's important for Korea, but that's also important to the ASEAN nations and to others that have directly experienced some of this – you know, this coercion.

Mr. Lippert: You noticed my leading questions to get a plug in for CSIS and then a plug in for your bill, Congressman, so both/and there. No, all boats float.

I'm going to come one more to you, then to Sue, and then we'll kind of have a speed run here to wrap up. OK, let's get to the trilateral piece,

Congressman. You've alluded to it several times. Your thoughts? You've got the North Korea test you see as a forcing function. What were – what was the Yoon Suk-yeol's disposition -the Yoon Suk-yeol government, rather, disposition on trilateral cooperation when you were there in Korea?

Rep. Bera: You know, I think there's a real desire to and a real recognition that a strong bilateral relationship is important. I think there's, obviously, an understanding of the historic context of some of these challenges as well as, you know, domestic politics sometimes gets in the way.

Now that we're past the Japanese elections, I think it is an area that we can really, you know, start to focus on. Doesn't seem like there's – I don't think there's any pending Korean elections coming up and, you know, you don't have imminent elections in Japan.

So let's move the politics aside and, you know, really think about, you know, what the trilateral could be and how we strengthen that. I think the Biden administration's done a very good job here from early days – you know, the early two-by-twos in the early days of the administration, having both the leaders of Korea and Japan for meetings here in the United States and then, obviously, the president's recent visit to both countries in the region.

So I think the stage is set and, again, you've heard me say this before. If there is that seventh nuclear test, I think that really just elevates the importance of, you know, a strong trilateral relationship speaking with one voice on the geopolitical security issues in the region.

Mr. Lippert: All right. Excellent.

Sue, I see you nodding, too. You want to come in, please? Over to you.

Dr. Terry: Yeah. So, again, I want to bring up the polls, which we talked about before, which just – you know, it's just very important when you look – think about how the Korean public sees this, right. We know that there has been a hardening public opinion against China, right, since 2017 since the retaliation economic relation – its retaliation over that.

But as I talked about earlier, as, you know hugely supportive of alliance, but, as a result, South Koreans are also turning more into U.S. and support security cooperation between U.S., South Korea, and Japan. I think it was some 83 percent in a recent poll that said they strongly support a stronger trilateral relationship.

So I think that is something that's kind of noteworthy when you're talking about public – where the public sees this, that they support increasing cooperation between U.S., South Korea, and Japan. So that's a positive thing.

I think, ultimately, though, you know, where we go from here I think it really depends on how China reacts and then also how Japan reacts. I feel like – I mean, I could be wrong, but I feel like thus far Japan has been somewhat cautious even with, you know, President Yoon saying let's repair relationship.

I feel like Japan's perspective was they're sort of watching this very cautiously. It was kind of – you know, they're not all in, right. So we'll see. I do think Kishida's resounding victory in the Upper House election will, hopefully, give him a little bit more runway to operate. And then, you know, foreign minister of South Korea, Prime Minister Park Jin, just visited Japan and met with Kishida last week. A little bit of momentum there. We'll have to see what happens in the coming weeks.

I like what Congressman is saying about North Korea making seventh nuclear test, or whatever North Korea does, a forcing issue because I think this is the point that I made the last time, which is whenever there is a security crisis that's when there is an opportunity in terms of Korea-Japan relationship, and we talked about, you know, the 1998 one historically.

So I agree with Congressman on that perspective.

Mr. Lippert: All right. Outstanding, Sue.

Victor, one minute to you. Then we're going to go back to the congressman for final words.

Dr. Cha: Yeah. The only thing I would – I agree with everything that was said. The only thing that I would add is that from a U.S. side, you know, if we do get this forcing function we need to be ready with a list of things that we want everybody to be working on.

And not to plug an article of mine but our new Japan chair, Chris Johnstone –

Mr. Lippert: Here we go again. Here we go again. (Laughter.) Keep going. No, sorry.

Dr. Cha: And yours truly actually wrote a piece in Foreign Affairs a little over a week ago that talked about, like, five or six things – homework for the three allies to work on, you know, in the aftermath of the seventh nuclear test.

Over to you.

Mr. Lippert: And that was you and Chris Johnstone, correct? Yes. Absolutely. Great piece, and take a look, all viewers. All seriousness.

All right. Congressman, final word to you. Thanks for coming on the show. Over to you.

Rep. Bera: And I'm sure my staff is quickly getting that article and downloading it so I can read it. (Laughter.)

Mr. Lippert: Well, as a former Senate staffer, I know. Exactly. You know, if the boss is on a show and an article is mentioned, you know, I raced – I was already racing to the copier machine, you know. So, anyway.

Rep. Bera: And as closing comments, I'm cautiously optimistic. I really do think this is a new era for Korea that, you know, recognizes the importance on the world stage. I do think we'll see movement on the economic front. You know, our interest in supply chains and having redundant supply chains. I think the recognition of – you know, the pandemic clearly exposed an overreliance on, you know, a single source, in this case China, for many, you know, critical supply chains. I think that recognition – and it's not just Korea. I think we can work with, you know, Japan, Australia, you know, the Indians and others in the region to build redundant supply chains in a very strategic way. So I think that's all good, and that's all the low-

hanging fruit that, you know, I think you'll see happen and strengthen our relationship.

You know, the geopolitical, you know, the strategic and security concerns in the region are going to be very real. I don't think the PRC is going to change its tack and approach. And I think Xi Jinping's kind of signaled where they're heading. And, you know, that'll – you know, for the countries in the region it's not either/or. You know, Korea's right there in the neighborhood. So how we navigate that and, you know, how we make sure we've got the backs of our allies in the region I think is going to be important.

And then, you know, North Korea's always unpredictable. But as we discussed, you know, I'm not sure there's a ton of tools that we have available at this point. So hopefully that does bring us together and, you know, we'll see where North Korea is post a test, and what their saber rattling looks like, or if there is an opportunity for dialogue.

Mr. Lippert: All right. Outstanding. We're going to go out on a high note there. Thanks, Congressman. Outstanding last word. We're going to leave it there. Thanks for coming on the show. We are indebted. We benefitted, I know I'm speaking for our viewers here, your counsel, your insights, your wisdom. Thank you. Congratulations on a very successful trip, and we look forward to more engagement with you on U.S.-Korea bilateral issues. Thanks, Congressman.

Thanks also to Sue. Sue, thank you. Dr. Terry, thanks for coming on. Great interaction. Victor as well. And this is the last episode of basically the summer. We'll see everybody in September. And the last thing I'll say is, Congressman, you're a big fan of Grigsby. Right over my shoulder is the photo of Grigsby's Vogue – Korea Vogue photoshoot. And I saw him this morning. He wanted to pass on his regards. You know, he's got an agent after that. Head got a little big after. Thank you. See you. Bye-bye.

Rep. Bera: Thank you. Bye-bye.

(END)