

IMPACT PLAYERS

Eric G. John

By Andy Sau Ngai Lim

Who is he?

Ambassador Eric G. John is the new Senior Advisor for Security Negotiations, the head of the U.S. delegation for the special measures agreement (SMA) negotiations with South Korea. Prior to his appointment in late May 2013, he served as the Foreign Policy Adviser to the Air Force Chief of Staff, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, Washington, D.C.

Ambassador John is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, with 30+ years of service. His diplomatic career began in 1983 and has focused primarily in East Asia, with a notable three tours in Korea, most recently serving as the Minister Counselor for Political Affairs at the U.S. embassy in Seoul (2002-2005). He served as the Ambassador to Thailand from 2007 to 2010, and previously as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Southeast Asia from 2005 to 2007. His other notable assignments included serving as the Deputy Director of Korean Affairs in Washington, D.C. (1998-1999), as well as tours that brought him to Vietnam, Thailand and Tanzania. Ambassador John earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Foreign Service from the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and a graduate degree in National Security Studies from the National War College.

**Why has he been in the news?**

Ambassador John participated in the first round of talks for the 9th SMA negotiations on July 2 in Washington, where both sides got to know each other in the initial meeting. The next round is expected to be held in late July, with a common goal of reaching a new agreement by October 2013. The SMA agreement covers the burden-sharing costs of maintaining the 28,500 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea, with the negotiations this year expected to be tougher than ever given budgetary problems back home in the U.S. and growing desires for the ROK to contribute more.

What can we expect from him?

A pressing issue for Ambassador John in the SMA negotiations are the effects of the sequester back home, meaning he is expected to ask the ROK to contribute a higher share of burden-sharing in order to cope with spending cuts in the U.S. defense budget. Such sentiments received strong backing in two reports released this April. The first was the 2013 Senate Armed Services Committee report on the Department of Defense's overseas spending which found that "South Korea's SMA contributions have not kept pace with U.S. costs." The report also revealed that while U.S. non-personnel costs has increased by more than \$500 million since 2008, it has been reciprocated by only an increase of \$42 million in ROK contributions. The second was a CRS report that called for South Korea to increase its share of contributions to at least 50%. Furthermore, the Yongsan Relocation Plan and the Land Partnership Plan, designed to restructure US forces on the peninsula, are priced at \$7 billion and \$3.2 billion each.

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