

EAI-Brookings Conference

The Future of Alliances, Partnerships, and the Indo-Pacific Regional Order

November 22nd, 2024 9:00AM – 11:30AM
Falk Auditorium, The Brookings Institution

Full Transcript

Opening Remarks

■ Suzanne Maloney (Vice President and Director of Foreign Policy, Brookings Institution)

■ Yul Sohn (President, EAI; Professor, Yonsei University)

■ **Suzanne Maloney:** Good morning. I'm Suzanne Maloney, Vice President and Director of the Foreign Policy Program here at the Brookings Institution, and I'm delighted to welcome you and our distinguished guests to our program today on the Future of Alliances, Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific Regional Order held in partnership with the East Asia Institute based in Seoul, South Korea.

Over the past four years, we've seen a revitalization of U.S. alliances and partnerships across the Indo-Pacific, including those with South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Australia, Taiwan, and India that have expanded coordination on shared economic and security challenges. However, ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine, along with potential flashpoints in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea demonstrate the growing risks and uncertainties in the current world order. With preparations underway for a leadership transition here in the United States, today's discussion will help us explore and better understand the challenges and opportunities facing America and its allies in the Indo-Pacific region. We hope that our conversation between Brookings and EAI scholars and affiliates will help shape discussions in the public discourse on how U.S. allies can collaborate in a second Trump administration to ensure regional security and prosperity. I turn the floor over to Dr. Sohn, the President of the East Asia Institute.

■ **Yul Sohn:** Good morning, I am Yul Sohn. On behalf of EAI and as an old friend and follower of Brookings Institution, I am honored and pleased to co-host today's conference. I'd like to thank Susan, Mireya, and Andrew for arranging this event, as well as for your friendship and continuing support for the Brookings-EAI collaboration. I'd like to thank all the distinguished panelists and guests for participating in the conference.

EAI and the Center for Asia Policy Studies of Brookings have collaborated for more than a decade. The first joint event goes back to 2008, when the two discussed the theme, "Soft Power in East Asia and the United States." That was at the time when the global financial crisis spread. Since then, we've held meetings and conferences, and the most recent joint conference was exactly four years ago, a week after Trump lost. As the title, "Prospects for U.S.-ROK Cooperation in the Age of U.S.-China Strategic Competition" reveals, we discussed how both countries cooperate in dealing with the China challenge. Four years later, weeks after Trump, the theme of today's conference is "the Future of Alliances, Partnerships, and the Order in the Indo-Pacific". Now, attention has shifted to the new U.S. leadership and asks how the two countries come to terms with a waning hegemonic leadership.

EAI has taken a series of joint conferences as an opportunity to search for South Korea's new identity as a rising middle power. Through the prism of the U.S.-ROK relationship, EAI scholars explored how to build soft power in an interdependent world and then how to define its role as a pivotal power in the period of U.S.-China strategic competition. This time, it will be a great deal of soul-searching conversation that addresses the ways in which a rising middle power or a group of middle powers interact with a declining hegemon. So, I'm very excited and look forward to our discussion. Thank you very much.

Session 1:

U.S. Priorities in the Indo-Pacific Region

■ **Participants:** Chaesung Chun (Chair of National Security Research Center, EAI; Professor, Seoul National University), Kuyoun Chung (Professor, Kangwon National University), Ryan Hass (Director of John L. Thornton China Center, Brookings Institution), Lynn Kuok (Lee Kuan Yew Chair in Southeast Asia Studies, Brookings Institution)

■ **Moderator:** Patricia Kim (Fellow at Center for Asia Policy Studies, Brookings Institution)

■ **Patricia Kim:** My name is Patricia Kim. I'm a fellow at Brookings with a joint appointment to the Center for Asia Policy Studies and the China Center. Welcome to our first panel of the day, where we'll be looking at continuity and change in the Indo-Pacific in light of the U.S. presidential elections and developments in the region.

I'm going to jump right into our first question and turn to Chaesung, who will get us started by sharing his thoughts on what President Trump's return to the White House portends for the Indo-Pacific region. Neither the Indo-Pacific nor China or Korea featured very prominently in the U.S. presidential elections. The focus was largely on domestic issues here at home. And to the extent that foreign policy issues really came up, it was about Ukraine and the Middle East. I was wondering if you could get us started by talking about whether you expect the Indo-Pacific to remain a focus of the second Trump administration and if you anticipate any significant changes to the regional order.

■ **Chaesung Chun:** I think the Indo-Pacific strategy is very important not just to South Korea but also to the United States. What we achieved during the last four years under the Biden administration was that we institutionalized various aspects of the Indo-Pacific strategy, basically in three key pillars: security, economy and development. In security, it went beyond the hub and spoke type of alliance structure. There is a closer connection between spokes making minilateral or multilateral security arrangements coming from U.S.-Japan-ROK trilateral to Quad, AUKUS, and other multi-layered security arrangements to cope with revisionist attempts in this region, which would serve as a backbone of liberal international order in terms of security. We also built IPEF, which is a successor to TPP, and there was some emphasis on global development to engage with the Global South. So we expect that this kind of achievement will last because in the Pacific, the security and stability will be critical to South Korea's future vision.

But what I heard this week is that maybe IPEF will face the same fate as TPP on day one. It will probably be undermined or sidelined, and we don't know how the next President Trump will deal with China and other alliance partners because there's too much emphasis on bilateral and transactional approaches in dealing with both China and the alliance. So probably he will start by

putting pressure on China in terms of tariff and economic matters. So, there will be a bipolar competition. In dealing with security arrangements, he will put less emphasis on multilateral, minilateral arrangements like trilateral South Korea and Japan and dealing with the alliance partners on a bilateral basis to have to maximize its U.S. interests.

So that's a big concern because China has its own vision and plan to run this region with many initiatives. We are all aware of the security initiatives, the development and civilization initiatives. The contents are still very abstract, but they have their own vision, and U.S.-China competition is not just about competition between two powers; bipolar confrontation that's too narrow concept to South Koreans. It's by order competition. China has their own ideas about orders, how to build the Indo Pacific region according to their own designs, traditional ideas, all those things. So if you U.S. retreats and retrenches from the Indo-Pacific region, the vacuum will be occupied by the Chinese vision, and the Global South states, like the swing states- if they vote for the American type of liberal order or the Chinese order, then there will be less engagement with the Global South.

However, the real question is, will this trend continue over the next four years or even after? There are many interpretations about the elections this month, and I see a big tide towards some isolationist sentiment in the U.S. public, which is reflected in the leadership. And I understand if you look back at the history academically, U.S. leadership had ups and downs after considerable economic hardships and too much entanglement with global affairs. There is some period of disentanglement or retrenchment, as we saw in the Nixon era, but they returned as a global leader with new ideas. So, there are stages of evolving liberal international order. We expect that after this period of readjustment of American retrenchment relatively, there will be another comeback of the U.S. leadership to build the liberal international order again.

But this time, it's different because the leadership of the Trump administration emphasizes more isolation as the trend. If that continues, should we expect that after four years or even during the Trump administration, the U.S. will resume international leadership to revive the liberal international order in the Pacific?

■ **Patricia Kim:** Kuyoun, I want to turn to you in light of these shifting dynamics that were just described. How is the Northeast Asian region reacting to and preparing for a second Trump administration? What risks and opportunities do countries see in this subregion, and how might things be different from perhaps the first Trump administration?

■ **Kuyoun Chung:** Northeast Asia is a region where the United States has huge stakes, not only in the security domain but also in the economic domain. However, U.S. commitment to the Indo-Pacific region might be reduced. Northeast Asia is a region where the United States faces strong competition with China, and there are a number of U.S. allies who actually have the capability to counter China. I think Northeast Asia still remains a foreign policy priority for the U.S., even though the Trump administration, or Trump himself, is oriented towards retrenchment or isolation.

However, all the risks and opportunities come out from the contradictory foreign policy elements that Trump suggested during the campaign trail. He mentions the importance of countering China as a priority of the United States. At the same time, he mentions the control crisis escalation, which we can see in the cases in Ukraine. Also, at the same time, most figures at the Trump camps tend to emphasize the mismatch between military strategy and the budget. All of this factors into a question: what is the end state of the United States' foreign policy, and what is the actual goal here? Is it primacy or just a balance of power? The ambiguity creates uncertainty, leading up to opportunities and risks that Northeast Asian countries are confronting these days.

In Northeast Asia, there are three different types of actors. We have partners, competitors, and enemies, including North Korea as well. Each group of countries, exhibits different kinds of responses. They are still facing uncertainty, but at the same time, they are showing converging behaviors as we are leading up to the inauguration in January. The situation of allies, I think, is pretty interesting. Allies are more concerned about the return of Trump than their own enemies or competitors. We are worrying about what Trump actually said during the campaign trail, which is about burden-sharing and a reduced commitment in the region.

I keep talking about the U.S. withdrawal of military forces from the Korean peninsula, Japanese or any other territories. Trump also didn't really mention the U.S. commitment to defend Taiwan as well. That attitude of retrenchment or restraint simultaneously creates a huge risk in designing foreign policy for allies and how we coordinate further actions in terms of contingency in the regions. Just as Professor Chun mentioned earlier, during the Biden administration, South Korea developed a whole lot of economic architecture via IPEF and supply chain. South Korea also invested hugely in the United States to build factories and provide jobs. But all the things will be kind of redundant. I'm not sure as the kind of policy will be made by the Trump administration is changing every day. But this uncertainty provide all the economic actors in East Asia with real risk. What things we can expect or predict remains unsure..

Another point that is pretty new is the deregulation. When it comes to emerging technologies like AI, advent of Elon Musk in the political stage provides another kind of uncertainty. Biden administration initially put a lot of effort in building AI governance or emerging technology governance to make a use of a safe way. Currently, he's talking more about deregulations and expanding market as well. That area could be an area of competition in the future as well.

So, when it comes to enemy, North Korea is more aligned with Russia. We will talk about this later. But that provides a whole different strategic environment in Northeast Asia as well, which will be a challenge for the United States to deal with Russia, China and North Korea itself as well. We're going to talk more about this later. But all the turbulent strategic environment is different from that of the first administration. But, from South Korea and allies' perspective, what we are more pessimistic about this situation is the changing nature of U.S. voters.

It's not just about Trump, but the U.S. voters have become more nationalist, given that their preference, and Trump is utilizing the voter's preference to strengthen his legitimacy. This is another concern for the long-lasting effect.

■ **Patricia Kim:** On voters, I would love to hear if we have time your thoughts on how South Korean voters are thinking, how dynamics may be changing there, and what implications that might have for the Indo-Pacific Order in the coming decades.

But first, I'd like to turn to Lynn to ask the same question but for Southeast Asia. So how are Southeast Asian states preparing for Trump 2.0? What are the opportunities and risks for this region, and what are some of the differences you think about this time around?

■ **Lynn Kuok:** I think the first point to note is that Southeast Asian governments are very pragmatic, possibly even more pragmatic than Mr. Trump, and they will work with whoever's in power. They will work with the Trump administration. I think their perception is that they have worked with President Trump and the Trump administration before and they will do so again in terms of risks and opportunities.

Let me first focus on risks and opportunities in the realm of security. So, in terms of risks, I think the main risk in their minds is that the Trump administration will be unnecessarily confrontational towards China, particularly if a trade deal is not reached or offered by China to the United States that Mr. Trump thinks is a win for the United States. I think if you remember that in his first administration, Trump greatly soured on China after a trade deal wasn't reached, and he also blamed China for the COVID pandemic, which lost him a second term.

I think some analysts in the region suggest that countries like the Philippines and Vietnam would actually benefit from a more confrontational approach towards China. But I think even the Philippines, which is on the front line of the battle with China in the South China Sea, would not want a U.S.-China confrontation that would destabilize the region. And I think we see this in its actions in response to the United States and China in the South China Sea. There have been various skirmishes and clashes between the Philippines and China. It's particularly around Second Thomas Shoal as well as other features in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone. And the United States has actually offered operational support in the South China Sea, which the Philippines has turned down.

Another thing that came to light earlier this week is that we hosted the Indo-Pacific commander at Brookings, and he clarified that the four additional enhanced defense cooperation agreement sites that were offered to the United States last year are a sign of stronger relations between the U.S. security relations between the United States and the Philippines. Of those four, I mean these four are currently still being used for humanitarian operations rather than military operations. So, I think the Philippines has been quite careful in its approach towards the United States and China in terms of opportunities that are a little bit harder to clean.

But if we want to look at the silver lining behind every cloud, one might say that although Mr. Trump is often accused of being disdainful towards alliances and partnerships, I would say that's probably not true. I think it's very likely, in fact, that we will see a more hawkish second Trump administration seek to bolster alliances and partnerships, which it deems important to counter China.

So, of course, the question then becomes which alliances and partnerships in the region can benefit from this. And I think the onus must at least partly lie with countries in the region to demonstrate that they are important to U.S. national security interests. So that's an opportunity for them to demonstrate that they are important and that they are pulling their weight in any alliance or partnership with the United States. And I would say that in any event, many in the region have already begun preparing for a United States that might be more transactional and might, in some respects, turn inwards. And I think we've seen countries in Southeast Asia seek to bolster both the strategic as well as economic ties with countries from outside the region as well as with China.

So, I think if we look at countries that come out or regions that come out top in the list of regions or countries that Southeast Asia is seeking to bolster ties with, that's number one, the EU. According to a survey that asked respondents in the region about who they would most like to partner with, apart from the U.S. or China, it would be the EU coming out on top European countries, as well as the EU as an institution as well as Japan. So those two partners come out on top, and South Korea has improved in terms of standing, but still only about 6 percent have selected South Korea.

And I would say that ultimately, the differences between a second Trump administration and the Biden administration before that, at least in the security realm, are probably less significant than some hand ringing might suggest. It was under the first Trump administration that the United States began to focus on countering China, framing the region as the Indo-Pacific, and bringing in India more as a major security partner. It was also under the first Trump administration that we saw the United States resurrect the quadrilateral security dialogue. Under the first Trump administration, we also saw the United States clarify the U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty, wherein the United States confirmed that the Mutual Defense Treaty covered the South China Sea as well and would also extend to cover the Philippines Coast Guard.

And finally, I would say that while Mr. Trump has often been accused of writing roughshod over international law, and it's certainly a valid criticism in some respects, it was under the first Trump administration that we saw the United States confirm that it accepted the merits of the tribunal's award in the Philippines' case against China. Under the Obama administration, it had merely called on both parties to adhere to the award rather than confirming the merits.

So let me close by just saying that although the second Trump administration might well stay the course in the security realm, I think some of its threatened actions in the economic realm might well impact the willingness and ability of countries in the region to work more closely with the United States in the security realm as well. But I'd be happy to touch on some of the risen opportunities in the economic domain later. Thank you.

■ **Patricia Kim:** We are going to finally turn to Ryan to ask him about how China is reacting to and preparing for a second Trump administration. I'm sure China sees plenty of risks in Trump's return, but does it see any opportunities, and what sort of areas of continuity as well as change do you expect in U.S. policy towards China in the next four years?

■ **Ryan Hass:** I'll try to tackle it, but before I do, let me just thank my friends from the East Asia Institute for coming across the Pacific Ocean to enrich our conversations in Washington. It's really, really valuable to hear your perspectives, and on that, I want to try to address a concern that I heard from our friends about retrenchment, isolationism, and retreat, which are words that seem to come up.

It's true that President Trump has a unique set of views related to Asia, related to alliances. But President Trump is not Kim Jong Un. He does not decide by fiat what the United States is or where the United States is going. President Trump is in his final term, he is elderly, and as we saw yesterday, his ability to impose his will upon Congress is limited. He had an attorney general that he had nominated who was morally compromised, and despite President Trump's strong view that he would be the best candidate, he was not, and he ultimately was forced to withdraw his name from consideration. I mentioned that because President Trump's views on alliances are also out of sync with the views of many members of Congress related to alliances, if you think of Senator Hagerty, Senator Rubio, Senator Risch, and we can keep on going down the line, Senator Sullivan, they feel very strongly. These are all Republicans who feel very strongly about the importance of alliances. And so I just encourage us to keep that in front of mind as we sort of conduct this thought experiment about what the next four years are going to look like because President Trump's views will not be the sole defining feature of American foreign policy going forward.

Now, to the question about China, I hear some friends suggest that China sees an opportunity with President Trump's return to power. I think the logic is that that President Trump will create divisions at home inside the United States as well as distance between the United States and its allies. And this will open up space and opportunities for China to advance its goals and objectives.

I'm not sure I'm confident of that assessment. For the Chinese that I have listened to and met with and spoken with and watched, I think they see more risks than opportunities with President Trump's return to power in large part because he's so unpredictable. They have a hard time anticipating the way that President Trump and his administration are going to approach China, and that's discomfiting, I think, especially to a leadership that values predictability and stability. And so I am of the view that the Chinese are more concerned than they are optimistic about President Trump's return to power.

There are two things that I am confident about. One is that China also has its own domestic politics. President Xi cares deeply about his image inside China, and I don't think that he's interested in being perceived as a punching bag of Donald Trump. The second thing I'm confident about is that China cares a lot about its relationships with other major powers as well and doesn't want to be perceived as being pushed around by anyone, including the United States.

Where does this all lead? I think what it suggests is that China will probably take a wait-and-see approach. They will wait to see how President Trump approaches the relationship before they decide how they're going to respond. I don't think that they want to get out ahead of the United States. They want to be seen as responsible, stable, steady actors. If there is a change in the relationship, a change for the worse, they want the United States to be perceived as the actor that had instigated that downward pressure on the relationship.

How is China going to respond? I will stop with this final point and turn it back to you. I think that they are going to take a variety of steps to try to brace themselves for impact. The first is to hedge by strengthening their relationships with other countries, BRICS members, and Global South partners to sort of provide a bit of bulwark and steadiness to the pressure that they expect that they will face in the United States.

I think that they will also continue to invest very significantly in their own defense. I think that they will spend a lot of money on domestic security as well as external security. At the same time, I think that they will be prepared to engage with President Trump when and where he is interested in engaging. And I think that President Trump will probably want to engage directly with President Xi, and the leader-to-leader interaction will color and inform the agenda and the tone of the relationship going forward.

■ **Patricia Kim:** Thank you, Ryan. Turning to Kuyoun, a challenge that the incoming Trump administration will face immediately is the tightening alignment between Russia and North Korea. There's been recent news that North Korean troops have died on the Ukrainian battlefield, and there's been a lot of speculation about the types of military and technological cooperation that may be happening between Russia and North Korea. And so, I'd like to ask, you know, how is the region and ROK, in particular, interpret and react to these developments? And to what extent is this renewed North Korea-Russia alignment shifting longer-term dynamics in the region?

■ **Kuyoun Chung:** I think that's a very important question, and I believe it all depends on the durability of the two countries' relationship, whether it will end after the Ukraine war or continue even after the war. But all the indicators show that they are more than just wartime alliances. I think they are exchanging technology, as well as food and oil supplies, which violate several UN sanction systems.

From South Korea's perspective, there are two red lines when it comes to the two countries' relationship. The first one is regarding the mutual defense treaty, which they already signed, and sending military forces to Ukraine, which they already did. So, it constitutes a kind of change in the entire calculation of South Korea's policy towards North Korea, as well as Russia. As a IP4 member, we are already supporting humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, but we are raising our leverage against Russia by showing our willingness to increase our support to Ukraine.

But at the same time, the entire picture shows that by having North Korea in the calculus, the Ukraine war has protracted more casualties, and European partners became the casualty because of

North Korea. I mentioned earlier that UN sanction system is weakening because of Russia's support for North Korea. So that's the initial concern for South Korea, but at the same time it's a concern for the United States, and Japan as well, because we are kind of working on this UN sanctions system after the UN Security Council suspended this panel of expert committee earlier.

This geopolitical kind of transformations provides not only South Korea but also the United States a hard time. For South Korea, another concern is that North Korea declared this kind of two-state claims, defining the relationship between South Korea and North Korea as hostile, showing that the two Koreas are divided and are not pursuing unification in the future. However, South Korea has a moral duty to pursue the unification and we are willing to accomplish such in a peaceful manner.

So, these competing strategic goals create another concern. And I believe that the unification agenda might be in peril if Trump would be willing to initiate a dialogue with North Korea as well, because North Korea obviously does not want to talk about unification anymore, especially with South Korea, even though the agenda is a priority for South Korea when it comes to North Korean policy. And if the United States is willing to initiate a dialogue with North Korea for denuclearization, I think they will have to provide or kind of raise the stake beyond the first summitry in the Hanoi at the first administration. And that is not possible, I think, given that the current situations and even the Trump administration, even Kim Jong Un cannot satisfy with the previous stakes and negotiation deals that they used to adopt in the first round of summitry. So, if that's the case, all these political transformations, not only for the Ukraine war, but also for the Korean peninsula, this transformation is challenging for every country in the region.

■ **Patricia Kim:** I want to turn to Chaesung to dig a little bit deeper into the prospects for another Trump-Kim summit or interaction. As we all know, a distinguishing feature of President Trump is that he's not an ideologue. He has no qualms about reaching out to dictators. In fact, he has boasted of his friendship with Kim Jong Un, also with Putin and Xi, and so I think this opens up some unique opportunities as well as risks. So how will Seoul assess this potential in the next four years? And so, if you could just share your thoughts on that, that would be great.

■ **Chaesung Chun:** Yes, it's a big question. Why President Trump prefers a top-down summit meeting rather than a prepared a different type of approach. Well, there might be some personal psychological explanation, but from a theoretical perspective, in negotiation, if you are dealing with dictators and authoritarian leaders, the counterpart has a lot of leeway to negotiate with the other counterparts. So, they have a relatively broader win-set, the possible zone of agreement.

If President Trump has a negotiation with dictators, authoritarian leaders, there could be some relatively swift process of implementing the results of the negotiations. So, the result will be direct and in short-term. President Trump can make a lot out of that deal. In dealing with North Korea as well, President Trump might have a quicker negotiation with dictators like Kim Jong Un.

But the real issue is whether the diplomacy is coming back from this perspective. If President Trump make a deal to exclude other parties, such as third party stakeholders like South Korea, in dealing with Kim Jong Un in North Korean nuclear matters, then there will be a serious blowback as we saw in 2019 Hanoi failure. North Korea is also aware of this. So, after the Hanoi failure, North Korean leaders say that they have dealt with President Trump quite effectively. However, now we realize that we must deal with the United States as a whole, so that we could reach towards a sustainable agreement to guarantee North Korea's survival and better relations with the United States. So, even though there might be short-term direct results from a top down level of negotiation, if we want to sustain and have a long-term effect, there should be a more bottom-up and comprehensive deal to deal with many issues.

When we talk about the complete denuclearization of North Korea, maybe we can deal with the freezing of North Korean nuclear materials and missile development. However, what North Korea wants foremost is the guarantee of its survival. Kim Jong Un was born in 1984, so he's very young and he thinks that he might rule North Korea maybe for the next three or four decades. So, North Korea need economic support, which is impossible under the international sanctions system. It wants to have a long-term beneficial relations with South Korea and the United States; however, right now, Kim Jong Un defines this situation as the new Cold War. So, Kim might think that he can survive without having any negotiations with South Korea just by having closely interdependent relations with Russia and China, which Kuyoun just told.

After South Korea shows North Korea that there will be no possibility of North Korea's revival only by having relations with China and Russia, North Korea will come back to the negotiation table with South Korea and the United States. And we have to talk to President Trump that the negotiation should be very painful and long to deal with many issues, not just about nuclear weapons and missiles. So, we have to prepare for the whole peace structure of the Korean Peninsula.

■ **Patricia Kim:** Well, turning to another hotspot, or potential hotspot, in the region, Taiwan. Ryan, you know, as we all know, President Trump also has some unconventional views when it comes to Taiwan compared to, let's say, the Republican establishment or even those in his orbit. President Trump has also talked about Taiwan as an economic competitor. He demands that they pay more for U.S. "protection". So, what can we expect from a second Trump administration in terms of its policy towards Taiwan, and what impacts might this have on broader sort of regional views of the United States' broader regional security arrangements?

■ **Ryan Hass:** Well, when President Trump talks about Taiwan, he doesn't talk about Taiwan publicly very often, but when he does, he always focuses on three things. The first is that Taiwan is really far away from the United States, 9000 miles away from the United States, and 90 miles away from China. What are we doing? The second thing he focuses on is that Taiwan, as Patty says, doesn't pay enough for its defense. He treats Taiwan like an insurance company would treat a holder who isn't paying

enough for its insurance claim. The third thing that he focuses on is that Taiwan has ripped the United States off and taken away its semiconductor industry, and that's not fair. So this is a pretty good insight, given the repetition with which he focuses on these points. It's a pretty good insight into how he thinks about Taiwan as an issue.

But this is also how he thought about Taiwan as an issue the first time he was president, and during that time, the U.S.-Taiwan relationship grew, but it did not retreat. And so what that should tell us something and what it tells us I think, is that if he is not focused on Taiwan, he is surrounded by advisers who care deeply about Taiwan and who will take certain personal risk and professional risks to try to advance the U.S.-Taiwan relationship. And so long as Taiwan stays below the presidential sideline. So, if it's not on Fox News in the morning, it's not on the front page of the Wall Street Journal, there is a lot of space for people who work for President Trump to advance the U.S.-Taiwan relationship. And if we look at the people he has appointed thus far, Senator Rubio and Congressman Waltz, they are very passionate about their support and defense of Taiwan.

And so, we'll have to see how things develop, how prominent of an issue Taiwan is, and how much direct presidential involvement there is in Taiwan over the coming years. That will tell us something about the nature of U.S.-Taiwan relations going forward. However, if you accept as a proposition that Taiwan may not be an issue that demands presidential attention on a daily basis, there should be a fair amount of space for people who care about Taiwan to advance the relationship.

And the two issues that are going to be, I think, the definitional issues for the U.S.-Taiwan relationship in the coming years will be first on how to strengthen Taiwan's resilience, domestic societal resilience, and then two, how to increase Taiwan's international profile. These two things, I think, will be sort of the central elements of the U.S.-Taiwan relationship. And I think that there should be a fair amount of space to push those two initiatives forward.

■ **Patricia Kim:** Great. Turning to Lynn, another key area of concern is, of course, economic policies and how the Trump administration's economic policies will impact the region. President Trump has famously said he'll impose a 10 percent tariff on all countries and a 60 percent tariff on China. And this is going to have major impacts on trade flows and on economic and political consequences in the region. And so, how are Indo-Pacific states sort of thinking about what's coming down the pike? How are they preparing for a more potentially confrontational U.S.-China economic relationship? And what are some of the long-term impacts you foresee from these policies?

■ **Lynn Kuok:** Thank you, Patty. So, I think the fact that a second Trump administration might impose tariffs on the region that are relatively less than that he imposes that which he imposes on China. This might mean that, in the short-term, Southeast Asian countries could benefit by positioning themselves as alternatives to China. But I think that sort of benefit might be short-lived, particularly for countries that already have large or significant trade surpluses with the United States, as they might well soon come under fire from Mr. Trump in terms of pressure to reduce trade surpluses or face further tariffs.

So I think that would be one of the main concerns and is the main concern of countries in the region at the moment.

There is also a second concern that a more confrontational U.S.-China approach might well lead to greater scrutiny of Chinese investments in Southeast Asia. And I think that is probably also in terms of, like they're probably also thinking about that right now and what would they do if they came under pressure to limit Chinese investments in various strategic sectors, say manufacturing or digital infrastructure, and of course we could see what is deemed strategic sectors increase as time goes on as well.

And I think the third concern that countries in the region are facing in the economic domain is that if a second Trump administration goes ahead to pull out of IPEF, which is already a watered-down version of the TPP or now the CBPP, I would say that countries already have been preparing in some respects for a United States that's adopting more nationalistic economic policies a United States that is no longer the champion of free trade than it used to be. Nonetheless, I think they are expecting some destabilizing and concerning effects. And what they are doing, of course, as I mentioned earlier, is to expand their economic as well as strategic ties with third countries. However, they are also expanding and deepening ties with China. Although the United States remains the largest investor in the region, I think we are seeing economic ties with China intensify day by day and this has been ongoing for many years now.

In the latest poll of Southeast Asia, when asked which country they considered to be the most influential economic power, China came up on top, with 60 percent selecting China as the most influential economic power. One might think that perhaps the United States came in second at, say 40 percent, but the United States trailed far behind just 14 percent. I think this could hurt the United States' drive for greater strategic influence in the region. And this is particularly so given that for the region economics equals security.

As I mentioned earlier, I think countries might be less willing or able to work with the United States in the strategic realm if the United States starts imposing some of these economic policies and distances itself more and more from the region in terms of economic engagement. So, I would say that, in short, Trump's threatened economic policies should worry not just the region but the United States as well, given its potential impact on U.S. strategic influence in the region.

■ **Patricia Kim:** Okay. Thank you, Lynn. The issue of American voters came up earlier on the panel, and how American voters seem to be feeling less interested in being internationally involved, less interested in alliances, you know—I don't know if we have survey data to back that up, but that seems to be sort of the sentiment. And I was curious, you know, since we have our colleagues here from Korea, if you could share with us sort of how South Korean voters are thinking and feeling these days. How are they thinking about the U.S.-ROK alliance?

There was a lot of turbulence during the first Trump administration, and the alliance survived. If anything, it became stronger because of the many initiatives during the Biden administration. And

from what I understand, public support is high for the U.S.-ROK alliance. And so if you could just sort of share how voters might be thinking, how that might impact the alliance going forward, that would be great for either of you or both.

■ **Chaesung Chun:** There was a very strong support for the U.S.-ROK alliance, as you can imagine, under the Biden administration, even though economic relation had been conflictual to some extent. However, there was a general recognition that South Korea is protected by the United States under the extended nuclear deterrence. So, the U.S. is perceived as generally providing security public goods. In return, South Korea is willing to share burdens. And the past 30 years of American unipolarity have put too much burden on America's shoulders. So, there is some understanding of what we should do to reduce the burden in terms of security.

However, there is also a shared understanding about making some adjustments in burden-sharing. We can do that, but without some general, principled agreement between the U.S. and the ROK that we share the same threat perception and purposes in security areas when dealing with threats from North Korea and China, focusing solely on burden-sharing issues—primarily fiscal considerations—could weaken the foundation of the alliance. If there is an economic conflict between ROK and U.S., maybe in the upcoming administration, and there is no consensus on a general future vision of the security cooperation between the two countries, then there might be some critics inside South Korea questioning why South Korea should continue the alliance.

And also, the last thing is about extended nuclear deterrence, which we might deal with in the second session. There is a really, really mounting North Korean nuclear threat. They changed the constitution, changed the operational doctrines so that they can, in any time, attack South Korea as a target, because North Korea now regards South Korea as a foreign country, so they can use nuclear weapons towards South Korea without any hesitation. Without the extended deterrence from the United States, we are exposed to a very high level of nuclear threats. Hence, we should do something. And after the Washington Declaration and with the establishment of nuclear consultative group, there is a heightened emphasis on the extended deterrence. South Korea wishes to continue this ongoing emphasis. So we'll see if the Trump administration will inherit this momentum..

■ **Kuyoun Chung:** Adding on about several other aspects about South Korea's public opinions, as Professor Chun mentioned, South Korean public support for the ROK-U.S. alliances is shown in a bipartisan manners, either progressive and conservative. We prefer to have a better relationship with the United States. And when it comes to security provisions like nuclear deterrence, as well as kind of joint exercises, all of these activities has been well-received by the South Korean public. Even for the trilateral cooperation with Japan, South Korean people, as you all know, have kind of historical issues and textbook disputes with Japan. So, at the personal level, there still remains grievances about Japanese public.

At the same time, there's an increasing understanding that this kind of trilateral cooperation is necessary from the strategic perspective. So, it's a diverging trend in the South Korean public that they're beginning to understand this strategy imperative of having this cooperation with the U.S. and even with Japan as well.

■ **Patricia Kim:** I'm glad you brought up trilateral cooperation between the U.S.-ROK-Japan as well as bilateral cooperation between ROK and Japan. There was actually a question that was submitted in advance. It came from Alexander Lipke of the European Council on Foreign Relations, and he asked about this very question a lot. You know, there was obviously effort made by all parties to make this trilateral and bilateral cooperation happen. But it is true that the Biden administration did play a big part in sort of bringing the two parties together and institutionalizing that. So, do you, if there isn't as much attention or interest in the Trump administration and sort of carrying forward what's been achieved in the trilateral space, do you expect this to continue? I guess the question is, do you expect Seoul and Tokyo to continue forward on their own?

■ **Kuyoun Chung:** From South Korea's perspective, we have a huge interest in maintaining this trilateral cooperation, because when you think about the origins of this trilateral, it is based on the understanding that we have had a some kind of minilateral cooperation to discuss North Korea issue in 20 years ago, and now we are finally assembled and actually we achieved a lot of implementations and exercises and cooperation and even we are cooperating over emerging technology as well. So, I think South Korea has a huge incentive to maintain the current momentum, and I believe, of course Japan has a domestic challenges still do not have incentive to disengage from this momentum. It's not like an increasing momentum but both ROK and Japan wouldn't seem disengaged from it.

But the thing is, the United States is the uncertainty we have from South Korea's perspective. If we look at the trilateral cooperation as a kind of platform to maintain deterrence in the Northeast Asia, the United States has no reason to disengage from it, because not only is it kind of a stabilizer for the Korean Peninsula, but it could serve as a stabilizer for Northeast Asia. But I'm not sure. Trump might prefer being more transactional and putting more emphasis on burden-sharing over stability. We will see how it works.

■ **Ryan Hass:** So, I'm going to be irresponsibly speculative for a second and suggest that I think President Trump is unlikely to want to put himself in the role in the middle of Seoul and Tokyo in the first term. He also didn't really feel comfortable being a matchmaker or marriage counselor, I think, as he referred to it. That's probably where he will end up, but that doesn't mean that his entire administration needs to end up in the same place. And so much as the quad sort of developed at the, the level below the president before the Biden administration.

I hope that the U.S.-Japan-South Korea trilateral relationship can continue to flourish below the presidential level for the coming four years as well because if you think about it, you know it

wasn't until the Obama administration that there really was this trilateral mechanism that sort of came into being. It went into abeyance for four years during the Trump administration, and then during the Biden administration, it has really developed, grown, and flourished. And so the trajectory is positive. We just need to keep it alive for the coming period.

■ **Patricia Kim:** Great, all right, well, we're going to open up now for audience Q&A. If you have a question, please raise your hand, and a microphone will come to you if you could briefly introduce who you are, where you're from and then ask your question. That would be great. We have a shy crowd.

Well, as you guys are thinking about questions, I'm going to take one more from the pre-submitted questions that came through email. And this one comes from Carol Silver of Rockville, Maryland, and she asks, I think this would be a good question for Ryan, but others feel free to jump in. Do you think China will take advantage of the Trump presidency to try to take over Taiwan?

■ **Ryan Hass:** It's another big question. I wish I knew. I don't know, but I don't think so. I think that it's very clear what China would like to do. China would like to unify Taiwan with the mainland, which is not in dispute, but there is no deadline. There is no preset date at which an invasion will occur. Some people have said 2027, some people have said 2024, some people have said 2025. I don't believe any of that. I don't think that any leader in the world has an invasion date circled on a calendar in his office. I think it'll be guided by the situation, by circumstances. And if it looks like Taiwan is at risk of permanently separating, then I think that Beijing would be willing to take extraordinary risks to try to prevent that outcome. If it looks like it could achieve its goals at a low cost and risk to itself, then Beijing may try to seize that opportunity as well. But I don't think that we're close to either of those poles right now. I think we're very much in the middle, and I expect that we will be for the coming period as well.

Session 2:

Next Steps for U.S. Alliances, Partnerships, and Minilaterals

■ **Participants:** Mireya Solís (Director, Center for Asia Policy Studies; Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, Center for Asia Policy Studies, Philip Knight Chair in Japan Studies), Sang-Yoon Ma (Professor, Catholic University of Korea), Andrew Yeo (Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, Center for Asia Policy Studies, SK-Korea Foundation Chair in Korea Studies), Jiyoung Ko (Associate Professor, Korea University)

■ **Moderator:** Yul Sohn (President, East Asia Institute; Professor, Yonsei University)

■ **Yul Sohn:** The second session will discuss key mechanisms that operate in the Indo-Pacific, including alliances, partnerships, minilateral and multilateral arrangements.

Let me ask quickly, Mireya. With Trump's return, we encounter a tremendous level of uncertainty over the Trump administration's policy towards East Asia. Particularly within East Asia, South Korea and Japan are facing so-called decoupling pressures. One source of decoupling pressures that U.S. allies have already experienced is the United States itself. The Biden administration pushes them to decouple from China economically in sectors that develop dual-use technologies or emerging technology sectors.

Another pressure that we expect from the Trump administration is tariffs that are to be applied to Chinese exports by 60 percent or more. Such decoupling will most likely push China to dump its exports to other destinations, including Korea and Japan. Decoupling will negatively affect the already stricken Chinese markets, on which Korea and Japan depend so much for their exports. What are your thoughts?

■ **Mireya Solís:** Thank you very much. We really appreciate the partnership with the East Asia Institute. I'm happy that we're having this iteration again. Thank you all for joining us. And, as you've heard, we are the second act. So, I'll try to keep it punctual and deal with this very important question of what happens next when it comes to the economic agenda. There are two elements to your question, Yul, and I'll take them in reverse order. I'll start with tariffs; then, I'll talk about the competition in technology. And they're both critical.

I would start by saying that from the point of view of U.S. allies and partners, the return of a president who believes that the most beautiful word in the dictionary is tariffs presents its challenges. I also want to emphasize that President-elect Trump talks about tariffs as a mechanism to obtain concessions on a broad set of issues. It's not just on the economic agenda. He can use them to apply pressure elsewhere. So, we might be seeing a lot of tariff action. We already have some sense of how he'll move forward because we've already experienced his first term, and that was a period when the United States and China veered into a trade war. There were punitive tariffs applied on a very substantial share of bilateral trade flows.

And, of course, because we live in a globalized world where we have sprawling supply chains, we know that this does not remain a bilateral affair, but that trade war also had important consequences

on countries like Japan and South Korea, which have invested deeply in the China market which has operations connecting throughout the region. And we can expect, therefore, that the return of a potential trade war would have big implications.

Now, interestingly, these tariffs never really went away, and the Biden administration has largely retained them. More recently, President Biden added to those tariffs by imposing higher tariffs on electric vehicles, solar panels, and so forth. So, there's already a fair number of tariffs built into the situation.

President-elect Trump is talking about an expanded set of goals. As you mentioned, Yul, Trump has mentioned adding a 60 percent tariff on all imports from China and perhaps even removing China's most favored nation trading status. These obviously would have much larger implications than anything that we've experienced so far because the 60 percent tariff is indeed prohibitive. Therefore, what effects would that have on trade flows is important to think about.

Now, I would say that there's a lot of clarity—even though we usually don't say this about how we think where the U.S. might be going—in the tool of choice, and we know that tariffs are a favorite of the elected president. But I would say that there is less clarity on the very important questions of strategy and tactics.

So, what is the overriding goal we would ask about imposing a massive 60 percent tariff upon China? There are a number of possibilities here. One is that you want China to change; this would be a way in which you would apply leverage to China to undertake structural reforms and reform its top-down economic system. Now, this would imply that we could perhaps see a stage two U.S.-China trade agreement because it was already in the first Trump administration when such an agreement was signed, but I would say that it's not very realistic to expect that China today is really thinking about moving away from its current economic system. If anything, the direction of travel seems to be very different, with more intervention in the economy, with the dual circulation philosophy and pursuit of technological hegemony leaning more on its existing model. So, I don't believe that China would be amenable, and I don't think that would be a realistic goal.

The other potential objective of this 60 percent tariff would be to go back to what we saw in the first Trump administration, which is a managed trade approach. And the idea is that you're pressuring China to buy more from us. That's actually what the first U.S.-China trade agreement delivered in writing, but it never really delivered in practice. China agreed to buy 200 billion dollars' worth of U.S. products; it never really happened. So again, we could engage in that negotiation. I imagine China knows precisely what it wants to do. It'll probably come up already with some kind of trade deal, and the more they draw out of the Trump administration while trying to negotiate something that may never really be implemented, I think they would probably perhaps see that as a win.

But again, this would just be a repeat of what was done in the first administration. Now, an additional goal—perhaps where we're getting towards—is that perhaps we're thinking about, or the Trump administration is thinking about, whole scale or a strategic decoupling. In particular, we've heard from some surrogates and people from the Trump orbit that they're thinking along the lines of strategic decoupling or using tariffs to try to reshore production to the United States.

Now, whether tariffs are the right instrument to accomplish is a big question for me. That seems like a very blunt instrument. And if anything, what we saw for the first time when the Trump administration went all out with the trade war with China was very little reassuring. Actually, what we saw was ‘rerouting.’ What we saw was ‘diversification,’ with many companies going to Southeast Asia or closer to Mexico but not to the United States.

We saw more investment in the United States during the Biden administration when incentives for that kind of production were provided. But now, we find ourselves with a bit of uncertainty because although the Trump administration will likely apply tariffs to try to bring reshoring back, they’re also saying that they are not sure whether they’ll continue with the subsidies of the CHIPS Act. And it’s not clear what happens to some of the tax incentives for electric vehicles and other features of the IRA. The uncertainty also plays against the idea that you can reshore.

And finally, because I’m taking a lot of time on just tariffs, let me make the other point that it’s not just what happens between the United States, China, and the 60 percent tariff. As you mentioned, Yul, there is another idea of having a universal tariff applied of between, say, 10 or 20 percent on all countries, perhaps. And again, here I find that there’s no clarity on strategy or tactics. Are we thinking that we’ll see a replay of the Nixon shock of 1971 when you had a president applying a 10 percent tariff across the board? The economy today is completely different, and the objective has not been articulated. Nixon had a very clear objective for doing that, and that lasted for four months after that objective was met. I’m not certain if I see it here. Or will the Trump administration decide that they’re not going to go for that 10, 20 percent tariff because it will make them exceedingly unpopular if inflation and the cost of living go up?

But I’m going to focus on those countries that have trade surpluses with the United States. If that’s the case, I would say that the Indo-Pacific region has a lot to worry about because Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan are all partners that have trade surpluses vis-à-vis the United States. Now, when it comes to—which I think will bring a lot of tension, perhaps—the discussions that, say, Japan and South Korea will have with the Trump administration, it will not only be about how you deal with the threat of a tariff coming your way. But—as the previous panel, I think, also mentioned—there’s going to be bigger tasks when it comes to burden-sharing.

I just returned from Japan, and some of the items that were being discussed are that even though Japan has agreed to increase its defense expenditure to 2 percent of its GDP, the Trump administration will likely say, ‘That’s not enough. Let’s talk 3 percent or more.’ Those are things that will, perhaps, bring friction into the relationship that the United States has with these important allies. And that would also, perhaps, make it harder to coordinate the technology restrictions and the economic security agenda. That is where, I think, should be the target of our focus, not so much on the tariffs.

Now, the final point here is how the decoupling pressures will work out when it comes to the technology competition angle. I would say that again, the Trump administration, in many ways, started by adding, say, emerging technologies to the export control of our discipline by using the entity lists in a very different way by strengthening the national security of foreign direct investment. And what the Biden

administration did was that it followed the direction of travel, systematized these policies, and then sought to have greater input from partners. So, I think that we can expect this track to continue.

However, to me, the areas of uncertainty are the following. One is that during the first Trump administration, President Trump frequently interjected himself in the discussion and, at some point, interceded on behalf of a Chinese tech company like ZTE. Could he be interfering again? And certainly, he'll be interfering more on the tariff front; that's one area where he thinks he probably knows best, and there will be little delegation. How it will happen with the economic security agenda remains to be seen.

The other question that I think many of our partners in the region have is whether we'll see more use of unilateral measures or whether there will still be an attempt to have the origins of a plurilateral export control regime. And that gets to the question of whether we can go from the bilateral—which would be more limited in its reach and effectiveness—to a more plurilateral approach, or not. And I think those would be the elements to watch while going forward.

■ **Yul Sohn:** Thank you very much for your thoughtful remarks. I'll get back to you again later for the second round with follow-up questions. Next is Sangyoon. My question is about the alliance. Given the decline in American prestige in the region, particularly with Trump's America First approach, South Korea expects many challenges in the ROK-U.S. alliance. What are your expected challenges that Washington would bring in? What are the top one or two major challenges, and why do you think that is the case?

■ **Sangyoon Ma:** I'm thinking of two tasks, or risks, that South Korea may have to face when the Trump administration starts its pressure on us. The first one is defense burden sharing, and the second might be the denuclearization of North Korea.

Regarding defense burden sharing, during the campaign, President-elect Trump called South Korea a money machine and said that had he been the President in the past four years, he would have increased South Korea's defense burden sharing tenfold. The South Korean government, in anticipation of Trump's election or the possibility of Trump's return, already concluded the Special Measures Agreement (SMA) last month. Well, the period for the SMA agreement covers from 2026 to 2030. But when President-elect Trump is not really satisfied with that agreement, perhaps we may have to renegotiate it.

Well, what really worries me, however, is that Trump's demand for an excessively large contribution from South Korea may cause Korean public resentment. Public opinion may rise in favor of, for example, the development of South Korea's own nuclear weapons. As of now, South Korea is relying on the nuclear umbrella from the United States, and extended deterrence is a key component of our alliance. So, without the American nuclear umbrella, South Korean defense and security may not be secure. With that understanding, perhaps the South Korean public would demand that we may develop our own, so that we may not rely too much on the American security provision.

Also, we see a rise in anti-American sentiment, which had somehow made our lives very difficult back in 2010 or even earlier. So, we do not want to repeat that kind of difficulty. However, in terms of timing, fortunately, it does not appear that a new special measures agreement negotiation with South Korea will start immediately. Well, as I told you, we have already concluded the 12th SMA agreement in October, and South Korea will have a little bit more time because Japan will have to start with an SMA agreement with the United States under the new administration. So, depending on the outcome of the negotiation with Japan, perhaps South Korea may respond with more leisure and more time to think about it.

The second risk or burden that we are having is the denuclearization of North Korea. North Korean nuclear threat is South Korea's biggest security challenge, and it is not easy this time to predict how the new president in the U.S. will approach this matter. On the one hand, the Trump administration's pursuit of dealmaking with Pyongyang could seriously undermine South Korean security interests. If the Trump administration effectively condones North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons and attempts to negotiate the disarmament of North Korea on the premise, it would eliminate the possibility of the denuclearization of North Korea, which would be quite unacceptable for South Korean security interests. Moreover, if the United States weakens its deterrence against North Korea while making concessions to North Korea, South Korean security will be directly affected. On the other hand, if the Trump administration does not pay much attention to North Korea and takes a bystander stance, this will also be a problem for us. North Korea will continue developing its nuclear arsenal and delivery systems while international sanctions against North Korea have been loosened already, thanks to the Russian role in the United Nations and others. In such cases, there's no way to control North Korea, which I think is a kind of nightmarish scenario for us. Thank you.

■ **Yul Sohn:** Andrew, do you want to add to the challenges of the alliance? And what would be the desirable responses from Seoul in dealing with these challenges?

■ **Andrew Yeo:** I might throw in the tariffs as well, but before I list what the specific challenges are, I think more broadly for alliances in the Indo-Pacific, it is the difficulty that we've had four years of a rather consistent policy.

I know Biden talked a lot about values-based diplomacy. Whether you think foreign policy was guided by values or not, that's a whole other question. But the fact that the Biden administration was very keen on building this network, this latticework of alliances, partnerships, minilaterals, and multilaterals was clear. And so now we're going to have to go back to an approach that's going to be much more transactional, and I think that's something that all alliances will have to contend with.

And so, we're going back from something that's values-based—or at least, it was based on a particular principle about strengthening allies and partners in the region—to one where, you know, President-elect Trump may bring. I don't think he's going to disavow alliances, but he's going to be more critical in some places he might work well together, particularly on the security front when it comes to addressing threats from China.

But then, in other cases, like alliance burden sharing, he may make the lives of allies difficult. So that's what we'll have to look at on the terrorist front. I know Mireya touched a little bit on this, but it's not just about the tariffs, and I checked the numbers for South Korea in 2018. So, under Trump, the trade deficit was 18 billion between the U.S. and South Korea trade in 2023. It's 50 billion dollars, so it's not moving in the right direction. I don't know if that's going to raise alarm bells with Trump, but I think for South Korea, the last in 34 years, there's been 113 billion dollars in Korean investment in the U.S. If suddenly the U.S. is slapping 10 to 20 percent tariffs, how is that going to affect, you know, investments?

Now, my personal view is that I think there are clear benefits to investment for American workers, such as creating jobs. I think it addresses national security concerns related to things like semiconductor supply chains. Can the U.S. manufacture a sufficient number of semiconductors and chips without support from allies? So, there are a lot of ramifications for putting up these tariffs, but it is going to happen again, and I think it will be a bit of a headache for allies if these things come up.

Well, let me end on a positive note. I know that we're all focused on challenges with a new administration coming, and this would be true of any change in government, I think, but it's particularly true because we've seen how President Trump has operated the first time and on his campaign. He, as Sangyoon mentioned, called South Korea a money machine, and he repeatedly said that South Korea and Japan are not doing enough and that they're not paying enough.

But at the same time, I think the United States as a whole understands that we're in an era of great power competition, that China and Russia are still a concern, and, frankly, that the United States can neither confront nor meet the China challenge without allies and partners. And we don't know what direction that policy will take, but we've seen some signs. We've seen the selection of Marco Rubio as secretary of state and Mike Waltz as a national security adviser. So that suggests, at least, that Trump is aware of the China threat or the challenge. For those reasons, even if Trump is saying in public that allies need to pay more and do more, I think he also recognizes that U.S. force presence is also an important aspect of addressing this China challenge. So, I think I'm a bit more optimistic than others about what this change in administration could portend. Back to you.

■ **Yul Sohn:** Thank you. Another topic for discussion is the U.S.-Japan-ROK trilateral. The question has been around in South Korea and Japan as well of whether Trump will endorse the Camp David agreements or not. Together, we witnessed that the domestic political conditions changed not only in the United States but also in both Korea and Japan; domestic support for an improved Korea-Japan relationship seems to be weakening. So, Jiyoung, how do you view the fate of trilateral relations?

■ **Jiyoung Ko:** The Camp David summit last year really marked unprecedented commitments to trilateral relationship. It basically solidified it as a key strategic interest for the United States in the Pacific. And then the summit actually made two important progresses. One is institutionalizing consultation mechanisms posted at the working level, the ministerial, and the higher leadership level as well. And the second progress was solidifying more serious security cooperation between these three countries. So, the

three countries started to conduct joint military exercises, like the Freedom Edge Exercises that happened this month. And they have also been involved in more serious information sharing not only in conventional issues but also in more new threats, such as cyber threats.

Of course, the question is whether this unprecedented level of cooperation will last or not. And in my personal opinion, I believe that there are post-challenges and opportunities for deepened trilateral cooperation. And then, when it comes to challenges, I believe they exist on all three fronts: South Korea, Japan, and the United States. And they mostly stem from domestic political dynamics and leadership.

So, on the South Korean side, President Yoon has been very actively pursuing this trilateral cooperation. Unfortunately, however, I don't think that there is broad bipartisan support or strong public support for this trilateral cooperation. It's true that people see the strategic need for trilateral cooperation but, especially at the public level, there is a strong distrust against Japan. I mean, the South Korean public opinion towards Japan has been improving over the years. If we see the opinion poll done by EAI, it shows that the portion of the South Korean public that has a favorable attitude towards Japan receives around 40 percent. That's definitely an improvement compared to when the bilateral relationship hit its lowest point.

But the problem is that if you look at why the South Korean public has had a traditionally colder attitude towards Japan, the underlying cause is actually nationalism. And if we take a look at where this nationalism comes from, it is related to historical grievances and Japan's previous colonial rule. Then, there is the territorial dispute between the two countries over Dokdo or the Takeshima islands. All those underlying issues are not addressed, and they can come up in the future again. So, essentially, if they want, South Korean leaders can weaken or walk away from this trilateral cooperation with public backing. So, if there's diplomatic tension between South Korea and Japan again, then the public can easily turn against this trilateral cooperation based on distrust towards Japan.

And if we look at the Japanese side, we can see that it's not just a possibility, because the new Japanese Prime Minister Ishiba is more open to revising the Peace Constitution. And then, a couple of days ago, Japan's Prime Minister Ishiba was reported to have sent an offering to the Yasukuni Shrine, and that has already created controversy in South Korea. If Japan moves more toward that direction, it can create more regional tensions and feed suspicions among South Korean nationalists, which would definitely have a negative impact on deepening trilateral cooperation.

And then, on the U.S. side, as we know, President Trump has a very transactional approach to alliances. That suggests that even under the second Trump administration, the U.S. may prioritize the existing bilateral framework because it will mean it will be seen as a quicker and more beneficial way to secure short-term US national interests, especially in terms of all lines like burden sharing. And, if Trump ended up pursuing an 'anything but Biden' policy, there would be a really good motivation to weaken this trilateral partnership.

But there are also opportunities to strengthen this trilateral cooperation, and that mainly comes from the external security environment. As we know, the competition between China and then the United States will become more intense in the second Trump administration.

And then we know that North Korea has also strengthened its strategic partnership with Russia. And if there will be greater collusion between these authoritarian regimes in the region, the U.S. and its allies would need to form a more united front to deal with regional issues, including traditional issues like North Korea, nuclear issues, and the rise of China. So, there is definitely optimism for trilateral cooperation as well.

And then, this trilateral partnership has some unique importance. In the first Trump administration, the U.S. only emphasized a more transactional approach, and an emphasis on democratic values was completely missing in the alliance rhetoric. However, emphasizing democratic values can actually increase the credibility of US commitments. So, this trilateral partnership is definitely a symbol of democratic values and partnerships. In that sense, it can have a unique advantage, and it also has a really strong implementation mechanism, unlike other minilaterals in the region. So, the success of this partnership will have more positive effects for the region.

■ **Yul Sohn:** Let's do a quick second round and then open the floor. This question goes to Andrew again—particularly after Trump's win, there's increasing voices from the right, and also from the left, that South Korea needs to take a more independent foreign policy approach, one that finds ways to de-risk from China and from Trump's America as well. Then, one strand is going nuclear, making the country secure by self-help. The other is going to the Indo-Pacific, broadening strategic spaces to ASEAN, India, Australia, and others, leveraging middle power coalitions. So, what's your take on such move from South Korea?

■ **Andrew Yeo:** There was this perception in the past that South Korea is somehow lagging behind other allies in terms of its commitment to the Indo-Pacific. It has to do with South Korea's own, I think, grand strategy when it comes to autonomy, and so I don't think it's a stark choice between autonomy versus alliance with the US, but that is one of the debates that it's central to a South Korean grand strategy.

President Yoon made it very clear from his campaign and day one in office that the United States and the U.S.-South Korea alliance would be at the center of his foreign policy strategy. And I think that's the critique that we've heard, especially from the political left, that he's banked everything on the US. Now, it worked well because the Biden administration was also trying to strengthen alliances and partnerships. And then we saw President Yoon unveil what he calls the Indo-Pacific strategy and the 'global pivotal state.'

So even though it centers on the South Korean alliance, that would be a platform to strengthen things like the U.S.-Japan-Korea trilateral. For a while, they tried to join the QUAD, but that wasn't going to happen. But there's the AUKUS and its two pillars, and then we saw South Korea also strengthening ties with Europe. So there's South Korea's ties with NATO, and there's the Indo-Pacific foreign NATO. So there are these different frameworks and minilaterals that South Korea, under the Yoon administration, has really expanded. So on one hand, I think it would be a big blow if alliances were to rupture because President Yoon had staked so much in the U.S.-South Korea alliance.

But, on the other hand, because South Korea has been moving in this direction where it wants to expand its strategic partnerships, where it wants to expand its own involvement in the region with minilaterals with other multilateral institutions, they have, in some ways, diversified their foreign policy. So, even if the alliance were to rupture, I think South Korea has other options, other choices, and other partners that they can work with. In that sense, I think the strategy of the ‘global pivotal state’ has worked well in this case. I wouldn’t say pivoting away from the United States, but it just has more options out there.

■ **Yul Sohn:** Sangyoon, I think this question is related to the previous question. The Korean public and the academic community are generally supportive of a broadened alliance, which means that it’s not just to defend South Korea from the North, but also to increase the alliance’s role in the region. But when it comes to China issues, the public is very cautious, particularly as in the case of the Chips Act that restrains South Korean chip makers from making a state-of-art investment in their facilities in China. 50 percent of the Korean public is critical of the US stance on that issue. If Trump 2.0 will continue or even push harder in that direction, joining anti-China efforts, what would be the desirable responses from Korea?

■ **Sangyoon Ma:** Well, I think that’s a major uncertainty that we are facing with the new Trump administration. What’s the nature of the Trump administration’s policy toward China? We need some time to see the essence and nature of it, but I think there are some indications already, such as in the nominations of Mark Rubio for State Department Secretary and Mike Waltz for national security advisor. It seems to indicate the new Trump administration will have a hardline policy toward China. Yet, I think it is quite unclear what President-elect Trump himself really thinks about. Well, based on his America First policy, he strongly believes that the United States should no longer be economically ripped off or exploited by China, but it isn’t clear whether he sees China as a security threat or just an economic harm.

In both cases, of course, South Korea could suffer very severe economic blows from Trump’s America First policy economy in the economic war against China. This is because South Korea maintains a very significant trade relationship with China. Although its share is declining, China is still South Korea’s largest trading partner. In recent years, imports of intermediate goods from China have increased significantly. There is a high dependence within Korea on China for critical minerals and rare earth, and imports of car manufacturing-related parts such as batteries for EVs have increased significantly recently. If U.S. restrictions on access to the U.S. market for these items well, when those restrictions are tightened, South Korea will be very significantly affected.

What is of concern in the security relationship is the possibility of South Korea’s entrapment, for example, in the case of a contingency in the Taiwan Strait. For example, if the United States intensifies its military competition with China in the Taiwan Strait or in the South China Sea, and the likelihood of military conflict increases there, Washington might ask for South Korea’s expanded role. However, that could reduce South Korea’s capacity to focus on North Korea’s threat, which is ever-increasing now, and in addition, turning China into a potential adversary. It’s a very serious burden for South Korea because Korea is geographically adjacent to China. Then how should South Korea respond?

I think it is necessary for Korea to convince the new administration in the U.S. that the response to the North Korean threat and China cannot be done separately. It is necessary to come up with a more comprehensive policy plan or blueprint that encompasses China and North Korea altogether, rather than symptomatic prescription on a case-by-case basis, in talks with the United States. I think this is quite important at an earlier stage of the new administration in the United States. If we understand South Korea's role in the division of labor within the larger framework of security cooperation in the region between the United States, Japan, and South Korea, then I think for South Korea, a focus on North Korea will be understood in a much larger security framework, which is beneficial not only for South Korea but also for other allies and partners in the region.

■ **Yul Sohn:** One last question for Mireya. In your book, you wrote that “CPTPP was the prelude of the burst of middle power diplomacy towards the rules-based order against protectionism.” We might expect rampant protectionism next year. Then, do you foresee coalitional efforts made by the middle powers in the region without Trump?

■ **Mireya Solís:** I think there'll be a different number of responses. Bilaterally, I think it'll be a desire pragmatically to engage with the Trump administration because the economic and security stakes are so high that none of these countries wants turbulence or friction in their relationship with the United States. So, they'll speak the language of Trump quite frankly. They've done it in the past, they'll do it again. And now they'll talk about, you know, how their technology and their capital is essential to build advanced manufacturing in the United States. They'll talk about buying more energy, perhaps LNG from the United States. So that's one set of responses. But the other one, I think, goes to the heart of your question. Will they move on without the United States? And would the CPTPP, this trade agreement, be the right vehicle to do so? And in some ways, yes. Actually, my biggest question mark is: what will Korea do in this case?

Because, you know, if you look at the evolution of the CPTPP, it's an agreement that has had many lives. It began really as a U.S.-led project with high ambition on standards liberalization. And then, under the first Trump administration, the U.S. left, and that then gave way to the reinvention, and that's when the CPTPP name was adopted. And that really was what you referred to as this initiative of middle powers to decide to protect the rules-based structure to give them more predictability, given the choppy waters of U.S. protectionism, while still keeping a seat warm in case the United States wanted to come back. I think the most recent election and the return of the Trump administration is the loudest message you can get that the United States is not returning to the CPTPP.

So, what should we do next? Interestingly, the CPTPP was negotiated almost a decade ago, and before, we saw great power competition really taking on as intensely as it has before. We saw the economic security agenda thrive the way it has now. And the CPTPP, interestingly, is about or is in the early stages of the first general review where the idea is that this is supposed to be a living agreement. So, we should update it and invite new members. I think it will be very important to see if the CPTPP can be more durable than IPEF in bringing in a supply chain resilience agenda to the agreement in updating the digital provisions,

which are already a decade old, perhaps incorporating something on economic coercion or technology cooperation. Those are issues that were not part of the CPTPP and, therefore, are important to update.

But for me, the biggest question is: where is South Korea in all of this? Because, as we heard, domestic politics continues to be challenging. I always thought that once you had Japan and South Korea rapprochement, the logical step would have been for South Korea to join the CPTPP because that would have taken care of that potential obstacle. That did not happen. What I heard at the time in South Korea was that the focus was on IPEF because South Korea could be a member there. Also, because every country has its own domestic politics and there's some opposition in South Korea about the CPTPP well, the situation is more dire today.

I did not have a chance to emphasize before that if you look at the accumulation of Trump's tariff proposals, there's one other idea, the 'Reciprocal Trade Agreement,' which would basically match and raise US tariffs to match the tariffs of our counterparts. We're really talking about undermining the WTO system. And given that, I think the stakes are higher now for South Korea perhaps to reconsider and join the CPTPP. And I think that would then elevate the significance of this agreement. ■