



**Testing Resolve:  
The US-ROK Alliance at a Crossroads**

**The Fifth US-ROK Strategic Dialogue**

By  
Brad Glosserman and David Santoro

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## **Pacific Forum CSIS**

Based in Honolulu, the Pacific Forum CSIS ([www.pacforum.org](http://www.pacforum.org)) operates as the autonomous Asia-Pacific arm of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC. The Forum's programs encompass current and emerging political, security, economic, business, and oceans policy issues through analysis and dialogue undertaken with the region's leaders in the academic, government, and corporate areas. Founded in 1975, it collaborates with a broad network of research institutes from around the Pacific Rim, drawing on Asian perspectives and disseminating project findings and recommendations to opinion leaders, governments, and members of the public throughout the region.

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## Key Findings/Recommendations

The Pacific Forum CSIS, with support from the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, held the Fifth US-ROK Strategic Dialogue on Maui, Hawaii on Feb. 4-5, 2013. Twenty-five experts and officials and nine Pacific Forum Young Leaders attended, all in their private capacities. They examined the impact of the 2012 elections in both countries on their relationships and the alliance, compared assessments of China and North Korea, and focused on ways to strengthen extended deterrence. While the dialogue enjoyed its usual candor, ROK participants in some cases seemed hesitant to get too far out in front of their new incoming government. Key findings from this meeting include:

- There was general agreement that the 2012 elections in the US and ROK will have little, if any, significant impact on the bilateral relationship, which remains strong. Some participants suggested that the ROK may want to carve out a “more independent” role for itself under incoming President Park, but the alliance would still be central to her foreign policy outlook.
- ROK participants suggested that the US and ROK negotiate upcoming key issues (nuclear cooperation agreement, host nation support, missile defense cooperation, etc.) in a basket. When US participants countered that this would be difficult, it was recommended that, even if negotiated separately, they be presented to the ROK public together, so that “losses” in one area would be offset by gains in another. The US-ROK Bilateral Nuclear Cooperation Agreement is of particular concern since it has been framed as a test for the alliance or a "trust issue" by the ROK. This negotiation represents an immediate challenge for the relationship.
- ROK participants expressed concerns about the impact of the US rebalance to Asia on China. They evidenced great sensitivity to Chinese anxieties, fearing that they might be asked to choose between the US and China, that China might overreact to US moves, or that it might foreclose options to deal with Pyongyang via Beijing.
- All participants agreed that US extended deterrence works at the macro level. The US defense commitment to the ROK has been and will continue to be sufficient to dissuade Pyongyang from trying to reunify the Peninsula by force and America’s overwhelming military superiority will deter Pyongyang from invading the South or using its nuclear weapons. Nonetheless, some questioned whether US declaratory policy was sufficient going forward and argued for a more explicit nuclear commitment from the US; e.g., a consensus statement on when the US would use its weapons to protect the ROK. Americans argued that some ambiguity was essential on this issue.
- Unlike last year, there was no mention of the need for the ROK to develop nuclear weapons and/or for the US to reintroduce tactical nuclear weapons on ROK territory. Concerns remain, however, about “nuclear blackmail” or about DPRK isolated acts of provocation which fall below the extended deterrence threshold.

- There is great frustration among ROK participants (and among their domestic population) about Seoul's inability to respond to provocations. Some believe their country needs to exert "dominance" over North Korea. Related to this is a belief that the US is preventing them from acquiring necessary military capabilities.
- There remain significant uncertainties and misunderstandings about the ROK's "Proactive Deterrence" doctrine, how it has been integrated into the country's national security policy, and how it can be coupled with alliance mechanisms. Some still worry that "proactive" really means "preemptive." One reassuring ROK definition focused on "proactive" merely entailing the identification of "proportionate, appropriate responses to a variety of contingencies" to ensure that the response to future North Korean provocations would be swift but not troubling to the US.
- ROK elites and the public must be better prepared to deal with crises; ROK participants worried that reactions to an immediate crisis might undermine long-term strategies. As the ROK's power grows, a strong effort is needed to educate the public about the ROK role and place in the region and beyond; more information should also be made available about US plans and purpose on the Peninsula.
- Although there was little agreement over how best to deal with North Korea, all agreed that denuclearization is unlikely in the near future. At issue, notably, is Pyongyang's insisting on normalization of relations with the US as a precondition of talks on denuclearization, which is totally unacceptable. Few, if any, saw an early resumption of the Six-Party Talks and all doubted that Pyongyang could be deterred from conducting its threatened third nuclear test (although all believed we – and Beijing – should still try).
- There was general agreement that a new policy toward North Korea is needed. Some participants feared that "strategic patience" allows the North to develop its nuclear weapons, gives China more influence in Pyongyang, and contributes to a sense of drift. On the other hand, no one supported rushing into dialogue with the North and all recognized that the anticipated nuclear test, if conducted, will make it difficult for either Washington or Seoul to make new overtures toward Pyongyang. North Korea policy should not be allowed to drive a wedge between the US and South Korea.
- China's response to a third DPRK nuclear test will reveal a lot about Beijing's assessment of North Korean behavior. Efforts should be made to reinforce the growing belief in China that its current coddling of the North is damaging China's national security interests and will hurt Beijing both in the near and long-term.
- Koreans saw little value added in joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and preferred to focus on pursuing economic agreements with China and Japan, both bilaterally and trilaterally. Americans believed that a ROK expression of interest in TPP would compel Japan to join but Koreans were doubtful Japan would join regardless. If Japan were to join, however, the ROK might reconsider.

- In theory, ROK participants recognize the need for trilateral cooperation with Japan and the US to better address a range of national security issues. Growing resentment of Japan (as a result of territorial issues and nationalism, notably) prevents this, however.



## Conference Report

Historians may well remember 2012 as a critical juncture for the US-ROK alliance. In that year, US President Barack Obama settled into the White House for a second term and Park Geun-hye took the Blue House in Seoul. Another conservative president in Seoul augured well for the alliance, despite worrying developments in North Korea. How the alliance, arguably the strongest one in Asia today, will evolve in the face of the North Korean challenge and how it will manage relations with China, Japan, and others will only become clear over the next few years.

In an attempt to shed light on these developments and reflect on the prospects for the future and their implications for nuclear and other security policies, the Pacific Forum CSIS, with support from the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) through the Naval Postgraduate School's Project on Advanced Systems and Concepts for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (PASCC), held the Fifth US-ROK Strategic Dialogue on Maui, Hawaii in February 2013. Twenty-five Korean and American experts and officials and nine Pacific Forum CSIS Young Leaders attended, all in their private capacities. Over a period of two days, they examined the impact of the 2012 elections in both countries on their relationships, the alliance, security perspectives, and attitudes regarding nuclear policy and reassurance; compared national assessments of China and North Korea; focused on ways to strengthen extended deterrence while assessing Korean and regional confidence in the US security umbrella; and examined the potential and limits of using the US-ROK alliance as a stepping stone to engage third countries, notably Japan. While the dialogue enjoyed its usual candor, ROK participants in some cases seemed hesitant to get too far out in front of the incoming Park government.

### **Security Policy after the Elections**

Our dialogue began with a comparison of US and ROK assessments of the regional and international security environments. A US speaker kicked off the discussion by analyzing the US Defense Strategic Guidance. Published in January 2012, this document describes a number of initiatives underway to strengthen and modernizing US forces. Our speaker stressed that the Guidance was meant to provide reassurance regarding US military commitment to the Asia-Pacific region. That said, the United States is facing deep budget cuts. Although the impact of these cuts on military commitments in the ROK will likely be relatively low, a period of adjustments is upon us. Thus, it will be important to guard against misperceptions and exaggerations.

Our speaker laid out five drivers of Northeast Asian security, in ascending order of importance. First was history, nationalism, and territory, which place considerable constraints on security decision-making and often frame issues in unhelpful ways; particularly concerning is that no country believes that it can afford to compromise first or even show flexibility, however legitimate its claims might be. The second driver is North Korean nuclear and missile development and its military adventurism, which require continued concerted attention by the United States and the ROK. The third driver

is Chinese military modernization and growing assertiveness, which serve as one of the most significant long-term sources of strategic discontinuity in the Asia-Pacific; the challenge in adapting to this particular driver, our speaker argued, is to avoid creating a self-fulfilling prophecy in terms of a military competition. The fourth driver is economic integration and interdependence, which are growing and have spillover effects on the security realm, demanding increasing trilateral cooperation among the United States, the ROK, and Japan. Finally, the fifth driver is linked to the US rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region and the fact that perceptions and realities about what it is (and is not) may not be the same for US allies and China, which could engender potential strategic miscalculations and mistakes.

Compared to a year ago, our speaker concluded that the region is much less stable today. Concluding that the 2012 elections in both countries have not had a negative impact on the US-ROK alliance and that the bilateral relationship is likely to remain strong for the foreseeable future, he explained that the key question for both countries is: What does stability today cost us tomorrow? He also stressed that long-term stability is likely to require a somewhat elevated level of tolerance against provocations over the short- to mid-terms and a more nuanced understanding of what extended deterrence is aimed at deterring.

Our ROK speaker concurred with his US counterpart, stressing that the strategic situation is much more unstable today than a year ago. He explained that Northeast Asia is experiencing a significant military build-up and insisted that while the ROK welcomes the US rebalance to Asia and remains confident over the viability of the US security umbrella, Seoul is concerned about its sustainability over the long-term (notably in the current US fiscal environment) and, significantly, about its potential to impact negatively on US-China relations and the Asia-Pacific region more generally.

While regional security policy discussions tend to focus on the implications of China's rise and the relative decline of the United States, our speaker stressed that another important development will be the impact of emerging powers such as the ROK, which are not going to be as accommodating as in the past. The ROK will want to play a more independent role in the world. Yet with regard to the US-ROK alliance, our speaker insisted that its foundations are unlikely to be affected: the alliance will remain strong.

Our speaker contended that the ROK is deeply concerned about North Korea's nuclear and missile developments. In this connection, continued work to strengthen extended deterrence through the Extended Deterrence Policy Committee is critical because there are questions whether the United States and the ROK have done sufficient coordination and planning, notably when it comes to the decision to use force. In addition to being concerned about North Korea, the ROK is worried about the evolution of the domestic political situation in Japan. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's revisionist view of history is problematic because it creates great constraints on the trilateral cooperation needed to respond to a North Korean contingency, for instance.

The ROK speaker also argued that Seoul recognizes the need to take on more responsibilities. A key test for the US-ROK alliance will be how the command structure post-OPCON transfer will be handled and presented to the public. Given the strong foundations of the US-ROK alliance, the future is not grim. Consistent and ongoing policy coordination, however, will be critical in such an uncertain environment.

During the discussion, there was general agreement among US and ROK participants that the 2012 elections in the United States and the ROK will have little, if any, negative impact on the bilateral relationship. The US-ROK relationship has solid foundations and remains strong. This is despite the ROK's stated intention to carve out a more independent role for itself under President Park. Most participants recognized that this will not shake the foundations of the US-ROK bilateral relationship because President Park will continue to regard the alliance with the United States as central to her foreign policy. There are grounds for concern, however. While the two countries have shared national interests, some participants identified divergences among the allies when dealing with North Korea: ROK participants worried that while they focus on North Korean provocations, the United States is more concerned about stability and denuclearization more generally on the Peninsula.

The so-called "rebalance" was another focus of discussion. Most Americans seemed to rue the terminology used to describe the policy and argued it represented less of a shift than many believed. It is, argued one American, an attempt to restore the traditional balance in US foreign policy after an excessive concentration on the Middle East and Central Asia. Most Americans agreed that US strategic communications regarding the policy was poor. Yet even if the policy itself was more symbol than substance – a dispute that has not been resolved – then Americans must be aware that symbolism still matters in Asia. Americans should be identifying how US policy will change as a result of the "rebalance." ROK participants suggested that the change in the US foreign policy team could change US foreign policy priorities, even though US participants insisted that the rebalance was tailored to US national interests and emanated from the White House; Obama's re-election ensured that Washington's emphasis on Asia will continue, regardless of who is implementing it.

ROK participants suggested that elites and the public must be better prepared to handle crises, particularly in view of the increasing number of provocations and threats from Pyongyang. At the same time, ROK participants expressed concerns that reactions to an immediate crisis might undermine long-term strategies. All agreed that as Seoul's power grows, a strong effort is needed to educate the public about the ROK role and place in the region and in the world. In this connection, more information should also be made available about US plans and purpose on the Peninsula. And, as one US participant reminded the group, a core element of that message should be that the ROK is a partner for the United States in ways that it has never been before.

Finally, one ROK participant reminded US counterparts that they should not be surprised by the flaring of tensions among Northeast Asian nations, especially over history and territorial issues. The causes of friction have long existed, as have the triggers

for the recent controversy. If Americans are surprised, he said, it is because they have not paid attention. US participants bristled at the suggestion, but the message is important: these are important, emotional issues and signs that the US isn't prepared for them or doesn't think they are important sends negative signals about credibility and seriousness.

### **China's Role in Northeast Asia**

This discussion of US-ROK security policy considerations provided the framework for a more thorough look at the balance of power in the region and the role played by China in particular, which was the topic of our second session. Our ROK speaker began by describing the state of the US-China relationship in the global order and the Northeast Asian security environment. He stressed that the United States and China are competing and debating over regional networks and power projection. While China is increasing its military capabilities, some regional governments feel ambivalent or uneasy about these developments because of the potential for increased competition in the region. While China is manipulating exchange rates and costs, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) are unlikely to lead to tangible outcomes in the near future. China's surging demand for oil and natural gas is also raising concerns about its impact on the energy market; significantly, Beijing's concerns about ensuring stable access to energy sources may act as a powerful incentive for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to expand its power projection capabilities.

In Northeast Asia, our speaker sees growing nationalism and competition. More immediately worrisome, however, is North Korea. The problem is that regional governments have different senses of urgency regarding this threat. Under these circumstances, it is important to try and enhance cooperation between the ROK and Japan to address this issue. Also critical is persuading China to weigh in on North Korea, however unlikely it may be; our speaker explained that Seoul recognizes that Beijing appears increasingly fed up with Pyongyang but continues to believe that it can delay the collapse of the regime by providing aid and other goods. In the meantime, the new ROK administration will seek to engage North Korea through humanitarian assistance and try to develop a "trust process" with Pyongyang. Although this may be laudable, our ROK speaker argued that there was little evidence to suggest that this would bear fruit.

Our American speaker returned to the theme of change and instability. Japan is awaiting the Upper House Elections of July. The ROK is awaiting the inauguration of President Park. And China is completing its leadership transition. All this is taking place in a time of important economic instability.

Despite growing nationalism, our speaker suggested that China is likely to remain risk-averse on the international stage and mainly concerned with maintaining economic growth. Beijing is also likely to take environmental concerns more seriously. Meanwhile, the budget and capabilities of the PLA will continue to grow (including its nuclear forces), and with it the PLA's confidence. Thus, it is possible, although not unavoidable, that Beijing will adopt an increasingly assertive position on maritime disputes. Our

American speaker also stressed that despite obvious signals of impatience, Beijing is likely to continue to provide tacit support to North Korea, which remains an unpredictable actor in the region.

As ROK President Park takes office, our US speaker insisted that she has the opportunity to develop a smooth relationship with China. She is the first ROK president to have visited North Korea before taking office and may be able to build trust with Pyongyang. Meanwhile, the US-ROK alliance is facing important challenges, notably the negotiation of a US-ROK nuclear cooperation agreement and the forthcoming OPCON transfer, which seems to be finally on track.

Turning to Japan, our speaker explained the new Abe government is facing significant domestic problems, namely weak economic growth, bad demographics, and a weakening yen. This is to add to growing nationalism in Japan and to difficult relationships with its neighbors, the ROK in particular.

All these challenges are taking place as the United States is paralyzed by political gridlock and further hampered by forthcoming budget cuts. Uncertainty, therefore, is the best word to describe the region's future, particularly in view of North Korea's recent nuclear and missile developments.

During the discussion, ROK participants again returned to the rebalance and expressed deep concerns about its impact on China. They evidenced great sensitivity to Chinese anxieties, fearing that they might be asked to choose between the United States and China and that China might overreact to US moves. US participants countered by stressing that the rebalance is not directed against China, but that it is an attempt to tie the United States more closely to the most dynamic region of the world. They also insisted that Washington would not ask the ROK to take sides between the United States and China.

ROK participants also worried that the US rebalance might foreclose options to deal with Pyongyang. They explained that President Park seeks to develop a "trust process" with Pyongyang, but after the failure of the Lee Myung Bak administration to make progress in North-South relations, she may be obliged to go through Beijing to get to Pyongyang. That will require her to maintain good relations with China and may appear to put Seoul between China and the United States. Our Korean participants stressed that this was not a repeat of the Roh Moo-hyun administration's effort to "balance" between Washington and Beijing.

An American participant cautioned, however, that China is now looking at every major security issue in the region through the lens of the "rebalance," even to the point where it is willing to act against its own interest to fight the US policy. As a result, Beijing is even less willing to work with the United States. It is also eager to see and exploit tensions between other US allies and partners in the region.

Several participants argued that China's new president, Xi Jinping, brings a particularly challenging mindset to this problem. As a son of a revolutionary leader, he is rooted in anti-Japan lore and there are fears that a deeply entrenched nationalism will drive his thinking. His repeated emphasis on the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, the China dream, and the exultation of Chinese national power bodes ill for the United States and other neighboring countries that seek some compromises with China in the management of regional affairs. This is not a uniquely US perspective but Americans must be careful in voicing this opinion – no matter how accurate – as it appears to close off opportunities for dialogue that South Korea seeks.

### **Views of North Korea**

This focus on the balance of power gave way to a discussion on North Korea in our third session. Our American speaker began by stressing that Pyongyang's recent success in testing an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) is significant in that it has moved the Hermit Kingdom closer to a credible missile capability to be combined, eventually, with a deliverable nuclear warhead. He reminded the group that Pyongyang recently restated its determination to strengthen further its ballistic missile and nuclear programs, made clear that it is no longer interested in denuclearization talks, and even threatened both the United States and the ROK with military action.

Our speaker also explained that North Korea's new leader has consolidated his rule, demonstrating a level of command and authority that belies his youth and inexperience. Aware of his father's shortcomings, Kim Jong-un wrapped himself in his grandfather's mantle, trying to foster an atmosphere of modernism and hope, including the possible introduction of reforms. It is possible to envision in the not-too-distant future a North Korea that is more stable, more economically viable, has solid Chinese support, and that possesses an increasingly credible nuclear strike capability.

Our US speaker argued that the incoming ROK leadership's interest in reopening North-South dialogue was driven by domestic politics and a desire to reduce tensions on the Peninsula by jump-starting cooperation. It is questionable whether such an effort will produce results, particularly given North Korea's reaction to the imminent inauguration of the new ROK president, which included threats of war and a nuclear test.

Denuclearization of North Korea is out of reach and more thought needs to be given on how to engage Pyongyang. Also important is thinking about an approach that targets the regime's stability and longevity. In this connection, our speaker suggested that North Korea's banking system and the regime's links with the international financial system are a target of choice. But he also stressed that as long as China continues to provide diplomatic cover for Pyongyang the effectiveness of these efforts will remain limited.

Our ROK speaker opened up his presentation by stressing that there remains much uncertainty about Kim Jong-un's power base: even after a year in power, the stability of the regime is still in question. The stature of the military may also be

considerably weaker than in the past. As a result, we can expect North Korea to resort to brinksmanship, including testing a nuclear device.

The implications of a third nuclear test would not be trivial. Our speaker insisted that this test would be an important challenge and a “test of resolve” for the new US and ROK administrations. It may force the Park administration to significantly revise its planned engagement initiatives toward Pyongyang even before they have a chance of being implemented. It would also force President Obama to rethink his North Korea policy as he begins his second term in office.

A third North Korean nuclear test would also raise questions about China's role. If China's response remains unsubstantial, indecisive, and hesitant as in the past, our ROK speaker believes that Pyongyang will feel free to continue to develop its nuclear and missile capabilities. If North Korea believes that it has China's tacit yet unconditional support, it is likely to exercise brinksmanship tactics.

During the discussion, although there was little agreement over how best to deal with North Korea, all participants agreed that denuclearization is unlikely in the near future. At issue, notably, is Pyongyang's insisting on normalization of relations with the United States as a precondition of talks on denuclearization, which is unacceptable. Few, if any, anticipated an early resumption of the Six-Party Talks and all doubted that Pyongyang could be deterred from conducting its threatened third nuclear test; significantly, most ROK participants suggested that China and the United States should nonetheless try their best to prevent a test.

There was general agreement among participants that a new policy toward North Korea is needed. Some feared that “strategic patience” allows Pyongyang to develop its nuclear weapons, gives China more influence in North Korea, and contributes to a sense of drift. At the same time, no one supported rushing into negotiations with North Korea and all recognized that the anticipated nuclear test, if conducted, will make it difficult for either Washington or Seoul to make new overtures toward Pyongyang, at least in the near term. But, as one US participant cautioned, engagement can't just be sanctions. There must be some acknowledgement of North Korean objectives and goals: one participant called for pursuit of denuclearization and a peace treaty simultaneously, rather than conditioning one upon the other. All agreed North Korea policy should not be allowed to drive a wedge between the United States and the ROK; on the contrary, it should be a catalyst for strong alliance coordination and cooperation. As a first step, both sides must be sure of the expectations they have each other in the event of a North Korean crisis.

All participants recognized that China's response to a third North Korean nuclear test will reveal a lot about Beijing's assessment of Pyongyang's behavior. Efforts should be made to reinforce the growing belief in China that coddling North Korea is damaging China's national security interests and will hurt Beijing in the near and long-term. Both Washington and Seoul should endeavor to change Beijing's incentives, either positively – offering cooperation with China – or negatively – by holding out the prospect of closer coordination between the United States, the ROK, and Japan.

## Extended Deterrence

In our fourth session, we homed in on the role of extended deterrence in the region, including how it is applicable in different scenarios. Our ROK speaker stressed that full-scale discussion on US extended deterrence began in 2009 in the ROK and has continued with the establishment of the Extended Deterrence Policy Committee. [NOTE: The Pacific Forum dialogue series preceded the track one talks, helped to stimulate them, and continues to feed and inform this process.] The speaker explained that most people in the ROK regard US extended deterrence, which includes the so-called “nuclear umbrella,” missile defense capabilities, and conventional forces, as an upgraded package. He insisted, however, that close cooperation and more detailed discussion on the specifics of extended deterrence, including its operation and applicability, is urgently needed if it is to work effectively.

As North Korea continues to develop nuclear and missile capabilities, our speaker argued that the US nuclear umbrella will grow in importance relative to the two other components of extended deterrence. He explained that the ROK should demand more information from the United States about when and under what circumstances Washington would use nuclear weapons against North Korea. Moreover, preparations should be made in case public opinion in the ROK favored the reintroduction of US tactical nuclear weapons on the Peninsula.

Although our ROK speaker stressed that US extended deterrence is applicable both in the East and South China Sea contexts, he suggested that Washington needs to exercise caution, since extended deterrence could undermine US-China cooperation in other areas and, significantly, may give Beijing reasons to pursue and even accelerate the development of anti-access and area denial capabilities.

Our US speaker explained that the security environment in East Asia is complicated because regional countries have different expectations of the United States. Japan is predominantly concerned with North Korea but it is also increasingly wary of China because of Beijing's increasingly assertive posture in the region and, specifically, because of the dispute over the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. While the ROK is also concerned about North Korea, it is much less worried about China and it even seems that, for Seoul, concerns about Japan are likely to trump concerns about China.

In evaluating extended deterrence in East Asia, our speaker suggested that there are two reference points: North Korea and China. With regard to North Korea, it appears that deterrence of *major* aggression from Pyongyang is working. Deterrence of lower-level provocations, however, is not absolute and it is not clear when extended deterrence is supposed to kick in, leading to possible misunderstandings and disenchantment with the alliance. In response to Pyongyang's nuclear and missile advances, the United States is reaffirming its commitments to the security of its allies in the region by increasing alliance coordination to include bilateral and multilateral exercises and operations to increase interoperability and information sharing.

Our American speaker also explained that extended deterrence in the region is further complicated by the increasingly tense territorial disputes between China and Japan over the Senkaku Islands. Notwithstanding its pledge to honor Article 5 of the US-Japan Mutual Defense Treaty, which calls for the United States to defend Japan in the event of conflict over territories under Japanese administration, Washington wants to maintain neutrality on the issue and would be reluctant to be drawn into any confrontation with China over the Senkaku Islands because they have no strategic value. The problem is that some Chinese military officers have gone as far as to call for "short, sharp wars" to teach lessons and assert Chinese sovereignty, reasoning that the odds of a US response is low and China is thus likely to prevail. Also worrisome is the dispute between the ROK and Japan over Dokdo Island, as well as between China and several others in the South China Sea.

Our speaker concluded by stressing that the most effective way to bolster extended deterrence is to increase cooperation, coordination, military dialogue, and interoperability of the US-ROK and US-Japan alliances. To put it plainly, the more integrated the alliances, the more credible US deterrent threats and reassurances. Our speaker concluded his presentation by raising a number of important questions. With regard to North Korea, where is the threshold for extended deterrence to kick in? If the US homeland becomes vulnerable to North Korean nuclear and missile capabilities, how will this affect the credibility of extended deterrence? In these circumstances, what are the prospects for cross-alliance connections and coordination between the ROK and Japan? What effect, if any, does the Dokdo issue have on extended deterrence?

During the discussion, all participants agreed that US extended deterrence functions well at the macro level. The US defense commitment to the ROK has been and will continue to be sufficient to dissuade Pyongyang from trying to reunify the Peninsula by force and America's overwhelming military superiority will deter Pyongyang from invading the South or using nuclear weapons.

Nonetheless, some ROK participants questioned whether US declaratory policy was sufficient and argued for a more explicit nuclear commitment from the United States. Specifically, they stressed that there was a need for a consensus statement on when the United States would use its weapons to protect the ROK. While recognizing the need for greater coordination and cooperation (particularly to address the North Korean problem), American participants countered that such a document would be problematic because some ambiguity was essential on this issue. No ally would get a concrete pledge on when and how the United States would use its nuclear weapons. The key is ensuring that North Korea understands that it will be punished for its actions. An American pointed out that Pyongyang's protests and complaints about the US military suggest that it gets that point.

Significantly, unlike last year's dialogue, there was little specific mention of the need for the ROK to develop nuclear weapons and/or for the United States to reintroduce tactical nuclear weapons on ROK territory. [This remains a constant theme in the ROK media and in other discussions, suggesting that this particular group of ROK participants was well aware of the counterarguments outlined last year and chose not to pursue this

line of argument. The fact that a majority of ROK citizens, when polled, express a desire for either the reintroduction of US tactical nuclear weapons or a ROK indigenous nuclear weapons capability, or both, remains troublesome.] Important concerns remain, however, about “nuclear blackmail” by Pyongyang or about isolated North Korean acts of provocation which fall below the extended deterrence threshold. ROK participants expressed a great deal of frustration about Seoul’s inability to respond to provocations. Some even believe that their country needs to exert “dominance” over North Korea. Related to this is a belief that the United States is preventing them from acquiring necessary military capabilities to do so.

This prompted a discussion about ROK policy and doctrine that can deter a North Korean provocation. American participants again decried the uncertainties and misunderstandings surrounding Seoul’s “Proactive Deterrence” doctrine, how it has been integrated into the ROK’s national security policy, and how it can be coupled with alliance mechanisms and extended deterrence in particular. Some still worry that “proactive” really means “preemptive.” One reassuring ROK definition focused on “proactive” as merely entailing the identification of “proportionate, appropriate responses to a variety of contingencies” to ensure that the response to future North Korean provocations would be swift but not troubling to the United States. It is not clear, however, if ROK planners understand the difficulties of such action and the capabilities required to pull it off.

### **The Alliance after the Elections**

Day two began with an examination of the state of the US-ROK alliance after the elections. Our US speaker began by stressing that the alliance has strong foundations and that North Korea policy coordination has been and will continue to be central to the alliance. As the ROK is enhancing its role in the region and in the world, it will also be important to build upon the foundations of the alliance to ensure that there is convergence of US and ROK interests. To this end, the reevaluation of the Joint Vision Statement will be critical to better institutionalize cooperation. It will be essential to do so because increasingly, the ROK is an emerging power and will become more demanding over the type of treatment and level of reassurance it wishes to receive from the United States.

Our US speaker explained that the US-ROK alliance is facing a number of challenges. The first is the renegotiation of a US-ROK bilateral nuclear cooperation agreement, which will need to be addressed rapidly since Congressional and National Assembly action will likely be needed this summer to formalize a new agreement. The current agreement is set to expire in 2014. At issue is the ROK’s demand to be authorized to engage in enrichment and reprocessing activities. While Seoul is willing to enter the international enrichment cartel for commercial purposes, its determination to conduct reprocessing activities is mainly motivated by the need to deal with spent fuel. Washington, for its part, is resisting on nonproliferation grounds. In view of the need to find a solution quickly, our speaker suggested that one possibility would be to negotiate a temporary agreement, allowing the ROK to conduct some activities under international management. The major problem is that negotiation of the agreement has been portrayed

as a "trust issue" for the alliance, which makes it difficult to find a viable solution. It would have been more productive to look at it strictly in technical terms. Regardless, our US speaker insisted that it is critical for both countries to quickly find a solution, and to remember that the existing agreement has been extremely beneficial.

Another challenge for the US-ROK alliance is linked to the US rebalancing to Asia. It is assumed in Washington that US allies will work together more actively. Yet there is significant resistance to this given the state of ROK-Japan relations and the ROK's perceptions of TPP, notably. Finally, a key question for the US-ROK alliance is how it will approach the reunification of the Peninsula. Our speaker asked: Should stability be more important than active pursuit of reunification in the Joint Vision Statement? How should China be factored into these discussions?

Our ROK speaker explained that the US-ROK alliance faces four main issues: organization of the command structure after the return of wartime OPCON to the ROK, negotiations on a bilateral nuclear cooperation agreement, defense budget negotiations, and missile defense. These issues should not be seen in isolation; rather our ROK speaker urged the Obama administration to consider them as a package to facilitate tradeoffs and public acceptance of any eventual deal. For example, he felt that while the ROK should make concessions on the nuclear cooperation agreement and defense budget negotiations, the United States should make concessions on the command structure post-OPCON transfer and on missile defense. He also stressed that an early summit between the two presidents would be helpful to talk about these issues and added that regularizing the 2+2 meetings would be very helpful, in particular to help coordinate the ROK approach to China.

During the discussion, ROK participants agreed that the United States and the ROK should negotiate upcoming key issues in a basket. When US participants countered that this would be difficult, it was recommended, even if they were negotiated separately, that they be presented to the ROK public together, so that "losses" in one area would be offset by gains in another. Regardless of how it is presented to the public, however, many agreed that the renegotiation of a nuclear cooperation agreement is likely to be critical for the US-ROK bilateral relationship because, as mentioned, it has been framed as a test for the alliance and a "trust issue" by the ROK. What is more, it will come to a head quickly, posing an immediate challenge for the relationship. Korean participants also warned that the apparent convergence of a US emphasis on missile defense and an ROK desire to close the missile gap with the DPRK doesn't mean that Seoul will embrace the US MD program anytime soon. Budget constraints and concerns about offending China will continue to limit ROK participation in that effort.

ROK participants saw little value added in joining the TPP and preferred to focus on pursuing economic agreements with China and Japan, both bilaterally and trilaterally. American participants stressed that a ROK expression of interest in TPP would help persuade Japan to join. ROK participants, however, were doubtful that Japan would join regardless. Significantly, if Japan were to join, many ROK participants suggested that Seoul might reconsider its decision. At a minimum, US participants urged their Korean

counterparts to be more aggressive in making the case for free trade and reform. South Korea has been a great beneficiary of the existing trade order and yet Seoul's defense of that system has not always been commensurate with the benefits it has received. Concomitant with that approach is a need for the alliance to have a discussion of the strategic value of East Asian trade since a deepening and broadening of the alliance relationship creates a greater sense of partnership and trust that then benefits and underscores cooperation in other domains, including on nuclear issues.

ROK participants also explained that there is a debate over the significance and relevance of the "Middle Power" concept for their country. There is as yet no consensus over the term and its potential application but Americans were reassured that it is not intended to signal a growing distance with the United States.

Throughout this discussion and others, an important divergence in perspectives was evident. Several ROK participants argued that the United States was "holding Seoul back" and preventing it from acquiring the means to defend itself or deter North Korean provocations. Americans challenged that view, arguing that the essence of the alliance demands capabilities to defend the ROK (and associated US interests) as well as deter Pyongyang. The idea that the United States restrains South Korea permeated the discussion and needs to be explored to understand its roots, to eliminate misperceptions, and to ensure that the two allies continue to work together rather than at cross purposes.

### **Potential and Limits of Trilateralism**

After drilling down on imminent alliance issues, we tackled the potential and limits to use of the US-ROK alliance as a stepping stone to cooperation with a third country, notably Japan. Our ROK speaker explained that North Korea's nuclear and missile developments as well as its increasingly provocative behavior present the Park administration with a key challenge. Some will push the new administration to build sufficient military deterrent capability to eliminate the North Korean threat. Others will favor engagement of Pyongyang through the provision of economic aid. As a realist, President Park is likely to strike a balance between these two positions. She has already made clear that she would not tolerate North Korean threats, but that she would be open an unconditional dialogue with Pyongyang.

With these considerations as a background, our ROK speaker stressed that it is important for the ROK to cooperate closely with the United States and Japan. This is because the United States is the only country able to give security guarantees to North Korea and because Japan, for its part, could provide economic aid to Pyongyang.

Our speaker recognized that enhancing trilateral cooperation among the United States, the ROK, and Japan is not going to be easy. While Seoul's primary concern is consolidating its own security, Washington is worried about stability on the Korean Peninsula. That is why he believes the United States appears reluctant to help the ROK achieve a "dominant position" vis-à-vis North Korea. Similarly, Japan shares US

concerns about regional stability, and fragile ROK-Japan relations further complicate trilateral cooperation.

Our American speaker began by describing why trilateral cooperation among the United States, the ROK, and Japan makes sense, as such cooperation would derive from the recognition that the three countries have common interests and values and they would contribute to enhancing regional stability and openness by working closer together. It would maximize the impact of alliance mechanisms and would help to operationalize multilateral initiatives because US-ROK and US-Japan alliances have unique capabilities: resident US forces, high level of interoperability, and frequent training operations. Trilateral cooperation would also bring two key US allies closer together and would be particularly useful as a means to deal with regional challenges and threats, chiefly North Korea. It would also provide a template for other trilateral or mini-lateral initiatives with countries such as Australia, the Philippines, India, Singapore, Russia, and others.

The US Department of Defense already conducts a number of significant initiatives, notably through defense ministerial talks. Trilateral discussions have also taken place after each North Korean rocket launch, and there are plans to institutionalize these discussions at the assistant secretary and working levels, although the modalities remain unclear. Moreover, there are J-5 strategic talks and several maritime trilateral exercises.

Our American speaker stressed, however, that the limitations to stronger trilateral cooperation among the United States, the ROK, and Japan are primarily a function of ROK-Japan domestic political sensitivities. In addition to the raw emotion and historical legacies dividing the two countries, the ROK is also anxious about how Beijing perceives such cooperation; for instance, Seoul refused to hold a public press conference after the latest Defense Trilateral Talks Plenary for fear of how it would be perceived in Beijing. It will be critical to ensure that the development of trilateral dialogues is not perceived as a mechanism aimed at China.

Under these circumstances, our US speaker offered ways to enhance trilateralism. One way to address political sensitivities is to keep agendas simple and focused; that said, it would soon become critical to move beyond discussions and engage in practical, kinetic or table-top exercises. Also essential to building trilateral institutional knowledge and increase the value of cooperation will be maintenance of a record of exchanges, meetings, and exercises, requiring input both across governments and among governments. While discussions on extended deterrence are important, they appear to be a bridge too far because more discussions are needed first at the bilateral level. Energy security is a topic that offers opportunities for trilateral talks, however, as do strategic economic discussions.

During the discussion, all ROK participants recognized the need for trilateral cooperation with Japan and the United States to better address a range of national security issues ranging from humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to space and cyber security as well as extended deterrence. As discussed in the ROK and US presentations,

however, ROK participants were obliged to note that growing resentment of Japan (as a result of territorial issues and nationalism, notably) prevents this. US participants protested that Americans “get” Korean grievances appeared to fall on deaf ears. The United States has to better demonstrate that it understands Korean grievances, without appearing to “give in” to the ROK. Perceived insensitivity to Korean complaints does not facilitate bilateral (or trilateral) cooperation, but neither can the United States take sides on contentious issues. (That is not to say the United States cannot defend principles that would put it on one side or the other...)

American participants stressed that Washington worries in particular about the risks of escalation dynamics on the Peninsula (following provocations from Pyongyang), making a strong case for some form of trilateral cooperation. Some ROK participants suggested that some “targeted” or “functional” trilateral cooperation to deal with North Korea could be envisioned.

### **The Future of the US-ROK Alliance**

Our final session looked into the future of the alliance and reflected on ways to strengthen it. Our US speaker explained that above all else, it was critical for the United States and the ROK to stay in sync as they have over the past four years. To that end, the United States and ROK presidents should deliver a joint vision statement and build upon this foundation. This would help institutionalize agreements to be negotiated over the coming years.

Our speaker argued that it would be useful for Washington and Seoul (and others) to lay out in advance the consequences that Pyongyang would suffer if it proceeded with a third nuclear test. The test could also help Seoul make a stronger case for the need for trilateral cooperation with Washington and Tokyo.

Our US speaker also insisted that the two presidents need to initiate discussions on the role and value of the alliance post-reunification. In the meantime, both sides must better define their respective roles and missions when dealing with North Korea. Both countries should also make clear that there cannot be peace on the Peninsula without the ROK being involved in a peace agreement. Similarly, while the ROK should recognize the need to let the United States lead the nonproliferation and disarmament agenda, it has to remain involved in discussions. Finally, since the United States cannot afford to normalize relations with North Korea (due to its nuclear and missile developments and belligerent activities), there needs to be a debate in the ROK as to whether some form of North-South normalization process can be launched.

Our ROK speaker identified eight actions that the ROK and the United States should take to improve coordination and deal with North Korea. These actions include:

1. In the immediate term, the ROK and the United States should make clear to Pyongyang that it will suffer consequences should a nuclear test be conducted.

2. Recognizing that North Korea is likely to keep developing its nuclear and missile capabilities, the two countries need to find a way to control escalation and prepared appropriate responses if deterrence fails.

3. The ROK and the United States should convey a clear message to Pyongyang that reduced military budgets and "sequestration" (as well as the transition of wartime OPCON) will not affect the potential of the alliance to deter North Korean provocations.

4. The ROK and the United States need to consult each other more frequently to discuss their forces' roles, missions, and capabilities in a post-Combined Forces Command era.

5. Although it may seem appealing to engage Pyongyang on specific issues (notably on nonproliferation and nuclear security), it would be a mistake for the ROK and the United States not to maintain a consistent position vis-à-vis North Korea.

6. Trilateral cooperation among the United States, the ROK, and Japan should be enhanced, and discussions should be initiated with China, particularly to mitigate Beijing's concerns about the instability that would result from a collapse of North Korea.

7. The ROK and the United States should work together to persuade global leaders that North Korea's nuclear standoff is not an isolated security issue but a complex problem that urgently needs the attention of the international community as a whole.

8. Finally, the ROK and the United States should think about a rationale for their alliance beyond the Korean Peninsula, which currently (and understandably) is their primary focus.

The final discussion touched on two main issues. First on the list was the transfer to Seoul of wartime command of the ROK's troops, scheduled to take place in 2015. Despite the current level of tensions on the Peninsula, participants agreed that the odds of another postponement or cancellation were low. The transfer is on schedule to be complete by the due date, even though the ROK is yet to finalize a number of requirements. US participants urged their ROK counterparts to do more to make the case for the transfer and quell suspicions among the ROK public that this is a US imposed move that is designed to distance the United States from the defense of South Korea. A US participant acknowledged that it is impossible to divorce this issue from burden sharing among the allies. Nonetheless, it is important to counter the perception that the United States is disengaging. One way to do that would be to figure out how to resurrect the Combined Forces Command, under a new guise, after the transfer.

Participants also discussed how best the alliance can respond to North Korea. For the United States, the bottom line is that there cannot be normalization without denuclearization, which is what Pyongyang is demanding. While acknowledging that the United States and the ROK have limited options to stall, let alone stop, North Korea's nuclear and missile developments, all participants agreed that both countries (and others)

need to send strong signals to Pyongyang as it pushes forward with its capabilities. One participant, for instance, noted that it was significant that the ROK joined the Proliferation Security Initiative after North Korea's second nuclear test. If China made the same decision after a third nuclear test by Pyongyang, this would send a strong message to the Hermit Kingdom that its behavior is unacceptable. In the meantime, all participants concluded that the US-ROK alliance needed to enhance coordination and cooperation to better respond to the North Korea threat.

First on the list of areas of focus for the next iterations of this dialogue, should one be supported, is extended deterrence. Despite the establishment of the Extended Deterrence Policy Committee, much remains to be discussed in our dialogue: there are too many misunderstandings and misperceptions about what extended deterrence is, how it works, and how it can be improved. Along with more focused discussions on extended deterrence, our dialogue should also explore how the United States and the ROK could work together to respond to military provocations that fall below the extended deterrence threshold. In view of North Korea's nuclear and missile developments and its increasingly bellicose rhetoric, it is time that the United States and the ROK strengthened coordination mechanisms to be able to respond effectively to such provocations. These are discussions that should be articulated in our dialogue and fed into track-I proceedings.

Moreover, as the United States rebalances to Asia and as the contours of the new ROK administration's policy toward China are taking shape, it will be important for our dialogue to reflect on their implications for the US-ROK alliance. Also critical will be to discuss in more depth the potential of "functional" trilateral cooperation among the United States, the ROK, and Japan, be it on extended deterrence or other topics that ROK participants suggested could be envisioned. Finally, with the US-ROK alliance facing tests of resolve with the negotiations over the US-ROK nuclear cooperation agreement and the OPCON transfer, it will be essential for our dialogue to gauge the best options for ensuring that it remains, as President Obama has put it, "the lynchpin of not security for the Republic of Korea and the United States but also for the Pacific as a whole."

## APPENDIX A

### **The Fifth US-ROK Strategic Dialogue February 4-5, 2013, Maui**

#### AGENDA

##### **Monday, February 4, 2013**

9:00AM      **Welcome remarks**

9:15AM      **Session 1: Security Policy after the Elections**

This session looks at the impacts of the US and ROK elections on regional perspectives. Is the region more or less stable than the last time we met? What factors are driving regional security policy? What impact did regional developments have on the elections? What has been the impact of the US and ROK elections in the region? Have they (or will they) alter security policy and priorities? How does each government see current US foreign policy in the region and what has been the impact of the US Defense Strategic Guidance? What are the key concerns for each government? What are their priorities and do they align? (Discussion of China and Japan apart from their role in above-mentioned issues should be withheld until sessions 2 and 6, respectively); Korean Peninsula issues will be taken up in Sessions 3 and 4.)

US presenter: Bryan Port  
ROK presenter: Paul Choi

10:45AM      **Coffee break**

11:00AM      **Session 2: China's Role in Northeast Asia**

This session will examine views of China's role in Northeast Asia. How do participants characterize Chinese foreign policy and its role in the region during this leadership transition period? How does China impact regional stability? Does either government anticipate a shift in policy toward China? If so why? What are the implications for nuclear policies and postures? What is the role of the United States in this equation? What are the constraints? How does your country see the other's relations with China and what impact does that have on your relationship with your ally? How are other countries responding to the rise of China and its new role in the region?

ROK presenter: Kim Tae-hyo  
US presenter: James Kelly

12:30PM      **Lunch**

1:45PM      **Session 3: Views of North Korea**

Here we will explore perceptions of North Korea and their impact on the ROK and the alliance with the United States. How does your government characterize the new North Korean government? After a year, is the Pyongyang leadership different from its

predecessor? How? What are Seoul's and Washington's expectations for one another when it comes to North Korea? Will the new ROK government change its approach to the North? How? What is the status of the Six-Party Talks? What are the implications of the low-level talks in Beijing between North Korea and Japan? Do Seoul and Washington agree on how to assess the North's nuclear program and how to proceed? What is China's proper role when dealing with North Korea?

US presenter: Evans Revere  
ROK presenter: In-Taek Hyun

3:15PM **Coffee break**

3:30PM **Session 4: Extended Deterrence**

This session explores thinking in each country about how extended deterrence (ED) works. How has thinking about ED evolved, in particular the nuclear dimension? What is the reassurance role of nuclear weapons? Does ED need to be strengthened vis-à-vis North Korea? If so how? Is ED applicable in the South China Sea? The East China Sea? How should it be applied/used in each case? What lessons can we draw from these different cases? What should the United States do to make its ED more credible in these different contexts? What can allies do to increase ED credibility in these contexts?

ROK presenter: Shin Beomchul  
US presenter: Robert Gromoll

5:00PM **Session adjourns**

### **Tuesday, February 5, 2013**

9:00AM **Session 5: The Alliance after the Elections**

This session looks at the impact of the US and ROK elections on the alliance. Will either government change its policy toward the alliance? Why? What does each government expect its partner to do and to prioritize during the next term? What does the current US foreign policy mean specifically for the US-ROK alliance and relationship?

US presenter: Scott Snyder  
ROK presenter: Park Jaejeok

10:45AM **Coffee break**

11:00AM **Session 6: Potential and Limits of Trilateralism**

This session examines the opportunities and challenges for trilateral coordination and cooperation among the United States, the ROK, and Japan on strategic issues following elections in all three countries. What are the participants' views of such a dialogue? What do they see as the main opportunities, for each country, and to improve the regional security environment? How have ROK-Japan relations influenced the prospect for trilateral cooperation? Have leadership changes in both countries improved or complicated the prospects of closer cooperation? What are the obstacles? How can these

obstacles be overcome? What would be the role of nuclear policies, including diplomacy, extended deterrence, and energy, in such a trilateral arrangement?

ROK presenter: Rhee Sang Woo

US presenter: Amy Searight

12:30PM      **Lunch**

1:45PM      **Session 7: The future of the US-ROK alliance**

This session invites specific recommendations on what the two countries' new leaderships can do to promote regional security and stability, specifically within the context of ED, and how these policies can strengthen the alliance. How can the United States and ROK strengthen their alliance, promote strategic reassurance, and better cope with future strategic challenges? What role do nuclear weapons play in that equation? What issues deserve more attention?

US presenter: Ralph Cossa

ROK presenter: Kyudok Hong

3:15PM      **Meeting adjourns**



## APPENDIX B

### **The Fifth US-ROK Strategic Dialogue February 4-5, 2013, Maui**

#### PARTICIPANT LIST

##### Korea

Dr. Soo yun Gong  
2nd Secretary, Inter-Korean Policy  
Division,  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Prof. Hong Kyudok  
Deputy Minister for Defense Reform

Dr. Dong-Youn Kim  
2nd Secretary, North American Affairs  
Division, MOFAT

Dr. Kim Jin-hyun  
Chairman, World Peace Forum

Dr. Kim Tae-Hyo  
Associate Professor  
Department of Political Science  
SungKyunKwan University

Mr. Sang-hyun Lee  
Director General for Policy Planning,  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Dr. Park Jaejeok  
Research Fellow  
Korea Institute for National Unification

Mr. Rhee Sang Woo  
President, New Asia Research Institute

Dr. Shin Beomchul  
Director, North Korea Studies  
Korea Institute for Defense Analyses

Consul General Young-Kil Suh  
Consulate General of the Republic of  
Korea

##### US

Mr. David Carlson  
Senior Pol-Mil Strategist  
PACOM DPRK Strategic Focus Group

Mr. Ralph A. Cossa  
President, Pacific Forum CSIS

Mr. L. Gordon Flake  
Executive Director  
The Maureen and Mike Mansfield  
Foundation

Mr. Brad Glosserman  
Executive Director  
Pacific Forum CSIS

Dr. Robert H. Gromoll  
Director  
Office of Regional Affairs (ISN/RA)  
U.S. Dept. of State

Mr. James A. Kelly  
Counselor and President Emeritus  
Pacific Forum CSIS

Adm. Michael McDevitt, USN (Ret.)  
Vice President  
Director, CNA Strategic Studies  
CNA Corporation

Mr. Bryan Port  
Deputy Director of Strategy  
ROK/US Combined Forces Command,  
US Forces Korea

Mr. Evans J.R. Revere  
Senior Director  
Albright Stonebridge Group

Dr. David Santoro  
Senior Fellow for Non-Proliferation and  
Disarmament Affairs  
Pacific Forum CSIS

Dr. Amy Searight  
Principal Director (Acting) for East Asia  
Asian & Pacific Security Affairs Office  
of the Secretary of Defense

Dr. Shane Smith  
Research Fellow  
Center for the Study of Weapons of  
Mass Destruction,  
National Defense University

Mr. Scott A. Snyder  
Senior Fellow for Korea Studies and  
Director of the Program on U.S.-Korean  
Policy  
Council on Foreign Relations

Mr. Michael Urena  
Strategic Engagement Division  
Office of Strategic Affairs  
Bureau of Arms Control, Compliance  
and Verification  
US Department of State

Mr. Joseph Young  
Deputy Foreign Policy Advisor  
U.S. Pacific Command

**Observer**

Ms. Miyoung You  
Research Staff  
Korean Consulate General, Honolulu

**Young Leaders**

**Korea**

Ms. Jiun Bang Ph.D. Candidate  
University of Southern California

Mr. Seukhoon Paul Choi  
Research Associate  
Council on Foreign Relations

Mr. Seongho Hong  
Resident Kelly Fellow  
Pacific Forum CSIS

Mr. Dong Joon Park  
Researcher  
Ilmin International Relations Institute,  
Korea University

Dr. Ryo Hinata-Yamaguchi  
Resident Vasey Fellow  
Pacific Forum CSIS

**US**

Ms. Stephanie Nayoung Kang  
M.A. Candidate  
Seoul National University

Mr. Adam Liff  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Princeton University

Ms. Greer Meisels  
Associate Director and Research Fellow  
China and the Pacific Center for the  
National Interest

Mr. Nathan Pinkus  
Staff Officer  
Department of Defense

**Staff**

Ms. Nicole Forrester  
Director Young Leaders Program  
Pacific Forum CSIS