“JoongAng Ilbo-CSIS Forum 2019: Navigating geostrategic Flux in Asia: The United States and Korea”

RECORDING DATE
Monday, September 30th, 2019

SPEAKER
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Hong Seok-Hyun: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for joining us for this JoongAng CSIS forum. We are glad John Bolton, former White House national security advisor, has made time to be with us this morning. I would also like to thank former Foreign Minister Song Min-soon for agreeing to be a member of the delegation from Seoul. I would also like to thank Richard Armitage, Kathleen Stephens and Mark Lippert for agreeing to share their insight during what appears to be a crucial point in time for reginal and global peace.

My deep gratitude goes to my dear friend John Hamre and everyone here for organizing this conference in Washington again. And of course, my thanks to members of the audience. Your being with us means a lot to us. With that said, let me start by saying that the global order is in great flux. Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula included have entered a vortex of ranging waves. Meanwhile, the North Korea nuclear issue is still stuck in a stalemate. An optimistic outlook for world peace prevailed for some time after the collapse of socialism and during the post-Cold War period.

But the stability of the world is now being seriously challenged. Unfortunately, in our work today we have to speak about the end of globalization as we face the worst of times. How can we turn the world order of today, which is facing serious instability and conflict, into an order of stability and peace? We have gathered here today in an effort to pool the best wisdom that would lead to peace in the world at large, including Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula. For starters, we hope the rivalry and conflict between the two superpowers, the United States and China, will get resolved. The clash between these two powers, prompted by trade and customs conflicts, has spread to the fields of IT, security, and military and diplomacy, and is now working up to a competition to control global standards and global supremacy.

Needless to say, this is very troubling. And some have already cast a pessimistic outlook saying the Thucydides trap will follow the hegemony rivalry. But if you close your eyes and take a long, good look back on history, you will gain a valuable insight, that the United States and China have together played a role in preventing war and armed conflict in the Asia-Pacific region since they forged diplomatic relations. The era of the U.S. and China is completely different from the era of U.S.-Japan and U.S. (audio break) wars, big and small. The
coexistence and cooperation between the two countries over the past 40 years have been the engine that prompted the collapse of socialism and the dissolution of the Cold War, as well as making it possible to realize global prosperity and peace.

That is why, I dare say, rather than focusing on their issues of contention the United States and China should take a broader perspective and pay attention to the history of U.S.-China cooperation. In fact, since modern times there has not been any history of war or confrontation between the two nations. Their bilateral cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region was the strongest pillar in defeating Japan's militarism and the Soviet Union's Communist totalitarianism and achieving world peace. If the U.S. and Chinese leaders can recall the wisdom of history, that world peace and prosperity can only be achieved through far-sighted cooperation rather than confrontation, today's short-term clash of interest can easily be overcome.

Conflicts within Northeast Asia are also troubling. Although Northeast Asia boasts the world's highest level of economic power, and exchanges and operations in the areas of trade and tourism, conflicts over issues such as nationalism, history, territory, and security have deteriorated to a dangerous point. The players in this region are running in opposite directions in the areas of trade, economy, security and peace, so much so that it has reached a state of dysfunction, or what some have called the Northeast Asia paradox.

Along these troubling issues, the recent disputes over history and the economy between Korea and Japan is most regrettable. However, it is not impossible to adhere to the universal guiding principles in dealing with human rights issues, stemming from Japan's past colonial rule in Korea and to comply with trade liberalism to resolve the ongoing economic disputes.

Ladies and gentlemen, what has been the most important pillar of prosperity and peace in Northeast Asia over the last 50 years? I believe it was the cooperation between Korea and Japan, the only two countries in Northeast Asia that respected and stayed faithful to the values of their market economy and liberal democracy. This cooperation has also contributed significantly to the development and prosperity of two nations.

The two countries should bear in mind that the ongoing conflict will adversely affect peace on the Korean Peninsula,
Japan, and throughout Northeast Asia. Korea and Japan should come up immediately with a plan to resolve their issues and restore dialogue between their governments. In particular, the faster a summit between President Moon Jae-in and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe takes place, the better. The two leaders must reach a future-orientated agreement while supporting universal human rights and free trade.

The role of the United States is very important here. The United States must take proactive steps to bring forth regional stability and to continue and strengthen trilateral cooperation among Korea, the U.S., and Japan. With that, I strongly urge the U.S. play a fair and appropriate role to prevent the situation from taking a turn for the worse.

Ladies and gentlemen, lastly, I would like to touch upon a subject which our survival depends on peace on the Korean Peninsula. As you will agree, the most serious threat to peace on the peninsula is the North Korean nuclear issue. The decisive factor in resolving the nuclear issue and achieving peace on the Korean Peninsula is the alliance between the Republic of Korea and the United States of America. Confrontation and conflict between Korea and the United States should not exist in the first place, as it most powerfully, powerfully undermines peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Therefore, negotiations on defense cost sharing, the transition of wartime operational control, joint military exercises, the strengthening of Korea’s defense and security posture, as well as the stance against North Korea’s nuclear issue and Korea-Japan military information agreement, should be discussed through close consultation between Seoul and Washington. That’s the only way to reach concrete and comprehensive agreements, as well as substantial progress. And in every stage of this process, we must not lose sight of the perspective – that is, to further strengthen our alliance.

Ladies and gentlemen, the trilateral cooperation among President Moon Jae-in, President Donald Trump, and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in addressing North Korea’s nuclear issue is a special lineup we may never see again. The three leaders should make their best efforts for dialogue. Close consultation among the three leaders over the past two years led to the first-ever U.S.-North Korea summit and transformed a dangerous situation that could spiral into war to regular dialogue. It was a series of remarkable and dramatic moments that took the world by surprise.
However, the current phase of repeated talks and deadlocks must end, and we must now head towards achieving results in North Korea’s denuclearization. We look forward to a bold decision by North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, who places great importance on economic development. There’s no time for hesitation. I hope Chairman Kim will realize as soon as possible that nuclear armament and economic development cannot go hand in hand. He must realize that sanctions against his country are strong international agreements which even his country’s traditional supporters, China and Russia, are participating in. It is also important to have a program to guarantee the North Korean regime eased sanctions and improved U.S.-North Korea relations in line with significant progress and verification in the process of denuclearization.

There is one thing to keep in mind. In any case, U.S.-North Korea dialogue should not proceed at the expense of weakening the South Korea-U.S. alliance or inter-Korean relations. South Korea should never be left out in the process of resolving the North Korean nuclear issue. The Korean and U.S. governments must clearly be on the same page on this matter.

Chairman Kim Jong-un must restore suspended inter-Korean talks for the sake of dialogue with the United States and peace through denuclearization. He needs to be aware that negotiations with the U.S. will not be able to achieve any progress without South Korea’s participation. North Korean authorities must put an end to groundless slander and defamation of the South Korean leader and government. It is my belief that improvements in inter-Korean cooperation brought on by progress in denuclearization will expedite North Korea’s economic development and peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula.

Ladies and gentlemen, cooperation among the U.S. and China as well as Korea and Japan, denuclearization of North Korea, a strong South Korea-U.S. alliance, and improvement in U.S.-North Korean relations are crucial in bringing peace to the world, Northeast Asia, and the Korean Peninsula. Through our leaders’ wisdom and determination, and a breakthrough in the current situation, I sincerely hope that all five countries – that is, South Korea, North Korea, the U.S., China, and Japan – will be the vanguards of peace in the world. Thank you for listening. (Applause.)

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