

# Secretary Antony J. Blinken at the 8th Annual CSIS Republic of Korea–United States Strategic Forum 25 September 2023

**T**hank you very, very much, and good morning. John, wonderful to be back here.<sup>1</sup> And so good to be with all of you this morning. I want to thank John Hamre, I want to thank Ambassador Kim for the invitation to be here.

As I was walking in, I heard the voice of my good friend and colleague Jin Park. And I just want you to know that he is an exceptional colleague, and I'm so gratified to be able to work with him virtually every day.

And yes, this is something, as Victor said, of a homecoming for me, having been here nearly 20 years ago. I have to admit to feeling a little bit jealous, because I'm a veteran of the building on K Street. So, every time I walk into this building, it's—what happened? Timing is everything.

But thanks to John Hamre, thanks to other colleagues, I had a couple of extremely rewarding years here at CSIS. And in particular, I had an opportunity firsthand to watch John grow it into the tremendous intellectual force that it is today, and I benefited from the expertise of an extraordinary community of scholars. The only reason I left is I was—I had my arm twisted by a certain senator from the state of Delaware who had just taken over the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

And it's especially good to be with my friend, Dr. Cha. He is quite literally one of the first calls that we make whenever we need cool counsel on regional crises and developments. We were talking just a few minutes ago, and that levelheaded response, the thoughtfulness that he brings to everything, is a tremendous source of strength. The only place he doesn't bring that equanimity is when it comes to his and my beloved New York Giants. This is starting out to be a little bit of a tough year.

But this forum comes at a moment of remarkable dynamism and importance for the US–Korea relationship. As you all know, in just a few days we will celebrate

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<sup>1</sup> Secretary Blinken delivered this speech Center for Strategic and International Studies' ROK-U.S. Strategic Forum 2023, Washington, DC, Monday, 25 September 2023.

70 years since our countries signed the Mutual Defense Treaty—70 years of relationship that has grown from a key security alliance into a vital global partnership, one that’s broadening in scope and significance seemingly every day.

Now, first and foremost, that’s a testament to the extraordinary close ties between our people and between our economies, to the democratic values and the vision for the world that we share, but also, I believe, to the leadership of President Biden and President Yoon.

And it’s a testament to the power and purpose of our diplomacy. Since day one of this administration, we have worked to re-engage, to revitalize, to reimagine our core alliances and partnerships.

Our intensified engagement with the Republic of Korea is maybe one of the most striking examples of how we’re not only deepening our alliances, but also how we’re weaving them together in innovative and mutually reinforcing ways across issues and across continents and into new, fit-for-purpose coalitions. Simply put, on so many consequential priorities for our people, for the Indo-Pacific, for the world, we are working in partnership with the Republic of Korea.

And I think if you look at it, we have been strengthening all aspects of our partnership, starting with our security. If you go back seven decades, our two nations joined in an alliance, as we say, “forged in blood.” A pact sealed by the shared sacrifice of thousands of our servicemembers who stood together, who fought together, who died together to defend Korea’s freedom and democracy. Ever since, our alliance has been fortified by our enduring cooperation—by the shared spirit of “Katchi kapshida”—“we go together.”

Today, that commitment to mutual defense is ironclad. And that starts with extended deterrence, particularly in the face of the DPRK’s provocative actions, including its missile launches, which as everyone here knows, violate multiple UN Security Council resolutions and undermine stability on the peninsula and beyond.

Beyond the launches themselves, the DPRK’s threats to broader security were demonstrated clearly by Kim Jong-un’s visit to Moscow this month. Now, we’re seeing this a two-way street that is increasingly dangerous, with on the one hand a Russia desperate to find equipment, supplies, technology for its ongoing aggression against Ukraine, but also a DPRK that is looking for help to strengthen and advance its own missile programs. We’re working hand-in-hand with other partners and allies to highlight the dangerous ways Russian and North Korea’s military cooperation threaten global peace and security.

In April, President Biden and President Yoon pledged to significantly strengthen US–ROK coordination through the Washington Declaration, committing to engage in deeper cooperative decision-making on nuclear deterrence, including through enhanced dialogue and enhanced information sharing; discussing

nuclear and strategic planning, enhancing the visibility of U.S. strategic asset deployments to the Korean Peninsula, including by restarting port visits of nuclear-capable missile submarines; and expanding the cooperation and coordination between our militaries.

Already, in just the space of a few months, we're translating the declaration into concrete action. Earlier this summer, for the first time in four decades, a nuclear-capable submarine made port in Busan. The Nuclear Consultative Group, created by the Washington Declaration, had its first meeting in July. And this month, the U.S.-ROK Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group held its second meeting already in Seoul.

Last month—I think as you all saw—President Biden hosted President Yoon and Prime Minister Kishida for a historic Camp David summit. Now, we all tend to throw around the word *historic* a little bit loosely, but I think this one genuinely meets the definition. It really did mark the start of a new era in trilateral cooperation among our countries. Just over the last year, Korea and Japan have continued to address difficult and sensitive issues of history while pursuing an increasingly ambitious and affirmative agenda. And this starts with the political courage and personal commitment of their leaders.

At the summit, our leaders discussed how to strengthen cooperation on a range of shared priorities. We committed to consult with one another expeditiously to coordinate our responses to threats to our collective security and interests. On the North Korean nuclear front, our countries agreed on practical ways to improve our joint responses through the real-time sharing of DPRK missile warning data, trilateral defense exercises, and efforts to counter the DPRK's malicious cyber activities, a growing challenge, which fund its WMD and ballistic missile programs.<sup>2</sup>

We've already had the opportunity to demonstrate that enhanced trilateral cooperation, in response to the DPRK's second failed attempt to deploy a satellite launch vehicle earlier this month, can make a difference.

At Camp David, the leaders emphasized our shared commitment to a rules-based order. That includes freedom of navigation, peaceful resolution of disputes. They also reaffirmed the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as an indispensable element of security and prosperity for the entire international community.

Our security alliance is essential; it's at the foundation of our partnership. But it's not the only element that makes our relationship so consequential. We're also intensifying our economic partnership.

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<sup>2</sup> Weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Since the KORUS Free Trade Agreement was approved, bilateral trade has surged dramatically. And over the last two years alone, Korean companies have invested more than USD 100 billion in the United States, driving innovation, creating good jobs for Americans and Korean workers alike.

In Bay City, Michigan, at the SK Siltron CSS—CS—excuse me—CSS facility, which provides key inputs for semiconductors, we’ve brought Korean and American innovation together to drive even greater growth for our countries. In Whitfield County, Georgia, thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act, Hanwha Qcells is setting up a USD 2.5-billion plant to make solar panels. That will support thousands of local jobs and the global transition to a green economy.

Investments like these in each other’s countries and workers are critical for strengthening our supply chains and reducing our reliance on unreliable suppliers.

We’re also working together to power inclusive, sustainable, shared economic growth across the entire Indo-Pacific region. Together, through the 14-country Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, we’re supporting a race to the top on issues that are shaping the twenty-first-century economy, including supply chain resilience, the clean energy transition, digital connectivity. At APEC, we’re teamed up to advance a more “resilient and sustainable future for all”—focused on greater trade and investment in the region, innovation, digitalization, and strong and inclusive growth.<sup>3</sup>

And we’re also partnering together on a range of development initiatives—sustainable management of river systems in the Mekong subregion, climate resilience in the Pacific Islands, marine protection throughout Southeast Asia.

The United States and our partners are committed to making and demonstrating a stronger offer to countries in the region and to developing countries around the world, working to deliver on the issues that actually matter in their lives, from high-quality infrastructure to inclusive economic growth, to climate resilience and adaptation solutions. The strength of that offer is directly tied to the strength of the partnerships working to deliver it.

Technology and innovation have long been the foundation of both our countries’ economic strength, and we’re broadening our cooperation there to take on global challenges. For example, we are collaborating on potential green shipping corridors between our countries, which will require all ships to use low- or zero-emissions

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<sup>3</sup> The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a regional economic forum established in 1989 with the objective of harnessing the increasing interdependence within the Asia-Pacific region. APEC’s 21 members aspire to foster greater prosperity among the region’s inhabitants. This is achieved by promoting well-balanced, inclusive, sustainable, innovative, and secure economic growth, while expediting regional economic integration.

fuels, and all ports to reduce emissions so that we can put the shipping sector on the path to full decarbonization by 2050. We're launching a next-generation critical and emerging technologies partnership to enhance collaboration on everything from biotechnology to batteries, semiconductors to digital and quantum technologies. We're even taking our technological partnership all the way to space, with new cooperation on space science and lunar exploration. All of these efforts, all these initiatives designed to enhance the global good.

Finally, we're putting our partnership to work in driving peace and security around the world.

That includes in Ukraine, where Korea under President Yoon has been a valued partner in supporting Kyiv in the face of Russia's brutal war—and in its defense of principles at the heart of the international order and the United Nations Charter: sovereignty, territorial independence, freedom. President Putin's aggression against Ukraine has been a monumental strategic failure for Putin, but it has succeeded in one thing: bringing the Transatlantic and Indo-Pacific closer than ever before. When Russia cut off oil and gas supplies to Europe to try to freeze countries out of supporting Ukraine, Korea—along with Japan—joined America's liquified natural gas producers to ensure that European countries would have enough energy to keep their homes warm throughout the winter.

Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand are now regular and active participants in NATO meetings. As President Yoon has said, European and Indo-Pacific security are now truly indivisible.

All across the world stage, Korea is taking on increasing global leadership. As a partner in reforming multilateral development banks so that they meet the needs of people in low- and middle-income countries; as the next host of the Summit for Democracy; as a participant, along with Japan, at the U.S.-hosted Trilateral Conference on Women's Economic Empowerment: a critical pillar of development—in democracies and nondemocracies, low and middle-income countries alike. And when Korea takes its seat as a nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council next year, we look forward to its strong voice, the voice that will—it will bring in defense of the UN Charter.

And of course, all of you know this is an extraordinary moment for brand Korea around the world. If you look at the Netflix list of top shows, inevitably you will find Korean programming at the top of that list. A few months ago, I had the opportunity to be on one of our late-night TV shows based in New York, and as we drove up to the stage door, I saw a huge crowd of young people gathered. And I thought, well, that's pretty nice—a lot of people waiting here for me. Turned out there was another guest on the show that night, the leading Korean K-pop band.

*Blinken*

Needless to say, the young people gathered at the door had no idea who I was, but were extremely excited about the K-pop band that followed in my wake.

But I think what you're seeing is an extraordinary ambition between and shared by Korea and the United States for the next generation of our partnership. Just over the last couple of years, we've made great strides in beginning to realize that vision. And we're prioritizing steps to institutionalize our cooperation across so many areas, so that it endures for many years and many governments to come—to the benefit of our people and, we believe, to people around the world.

CSIS, the Korea Foundation, so many people in this room today, who are joining us by video, are absolutely critical to these efforts. And what I look forward to is the opportunity to make sure that the ongoing dialogue that we have continues, so that we together can continue to take the US–Korea partnership into the future.

Thank you so much. 🌟

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