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Keynote Speech

by H.E. Kang, Kyung-wha

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Ambassador Nicholas Burns,

Ms. Anja Manuel,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you, indeed, for inviting me to the Aspen Security Forum. I am very honored and delighted to be part of this prestigious event this year, although in a virtual manner.

2020 will go down in history as a year that we all have been preoccupied with the Covid-19 pandemic. As the end of year draws near, it seems we are at a turning point in this painful experience. Vaccines are now in the pipeline and the end of the tunnel seems within reach. But in many countries around the world, the situation will likely get worse before starting to look better, and it will take a great deal of international cooperation and solidarity before we see the end of the pandemic.

Of course, we are also in transition toward a new administration in the United States, one that promises a change of course on some key global issues and continuity in others. Foreign and security policy practitioners around the world are scrambling to read the signals coming from the transition team, although concrete policies will emerge only after the new administration has settled in. At such an opportune moment, and in interaction with the seasoned experts and professional gathered today, I am very grateful for this opportunity to talk about the ROK-US alliance, how it has evolved over time and where it should go forward in the coming years.

The ROK-US alliance was forged to deter North Korea and keep the fragile peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia. For nearly seven decades, the alliance has successfully undertaken this role, managing intermittent periods of military tension and buttressing political dialogue with a solid combined defense posture. Beyond the peninsula, the alliance has served as a core part of the security arrangement in Asia, helping to preserve the U.S. lead in safeguarding the liberal international order in the region.

In the process, Korea achieved a remarkable feat in national development, building from the ashes of war a thriving market economy and a vibrant democracy. This transformation was brought about by the hard work and aspiration of the Korean government and people, but it would not have happened without being backed up by the ironclad commitment of the US to the security of the ROK and military assistance, as well as technical assistance and economic aid. This in turn has further enriched and deepened the alliance.

The dynamics of the alliance have evolved along with the steady growth in Korea's national capacity and global profile. Over the decades, Korea has taken on more and larger responsibilities in bilateral and multilateral relations. One of the poorest recipients of development assistance just a few decades ago, we are now celebrating 20 years of membership in the OECD DAC, a member of G20, and an influential voice and model on a host of global issues, including nonproliferation, human rights and democracy, cyber security and other new security threats. Accordingly, our long-held alliance has also become more reciprocal and mutually beneficial militarily, economically, and strategically.

Korea's contribution to the alliance, both in military and financial terms have continued to increase. Korea has stood alongside the U.S. in all of its wars during the past half century, joining the U.S. in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq, fighting piracy in the Middle East and Africa, and taking part in peacekeeping operations around the world. Since the 1990s, Korea has shared the costs for U.S. troops stationed in Korea based on the Special Measures Agreement (SMA). Our commitment to the alliance is on display at Camp Humphrey's, America's largest overseas military base, which cost 10.8 billion U.S. dollars to construct, largely paid for by the Korean government. At 2.6 percent of the GDP, Korea's defense spending level is higher than for any other ally of the United States.

On the side of co-prosperity, the two countries' economies have become more integrated and interdependent. The ROK-US Free Trade Agreement solidified the economic pillar of our relationship, complementing the strong security alliance. Last year the trade volume between our two countries reached \$135.2 billion, which is a record high since the FTA came into effect. The U.S. trade deficit against Korea has also decreased since the revised FTA went into effect in 2019. The economic cooperation has also expanded into new areas ranging

from ICT and innovative technologies to energy, R&D, and partnership in emerging markets.

Recent investments in the US by Korean companies such as Samsung, Lotte, SK, Hanhwa and Hyundai in automotive components, industrial equipment, consumer electronics, and other sectors have further deepened the partnership for coprosperity. According to the U.S. State Department in a report last year, major Korean companies created 52,000 jobs and invested 1.1 billion dollars in R&D in the United States.

As Korea's national capacity and global role has continued to grow, so has the strategic importance of our alliance. Based on our shared values and common interests, our two countries are now forging a new strategic partnership vis-à-vis other countries and regions.

For example, in recent years, we have coordinated our regional policy on Asia between Korea's New Southern Policy and the U.S.' Indo-Pacific Strategy. In efforts to align our interests in the region, the two governments released the second Joint Fact Sheet last month, which summarized efforts in several areas aimed at promoting collaboration between the two policies. These encompass development cooperation, infrastructure, energy, anti-corruption, countering transnational crimes and maritime security. They will create many opportunities for ASEAN countries in capacity building and human resources development, which will contribute to the region's dynamism and prosperity.

As we look to the future, there is much room for the ROK-US alliance to continue to strengthen and expand in the service of peace and security, and prosperity in the region and beyond.

The most pressing task facing the alliance is to engage North Korea towards the goal of complete denuclearization and permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula. Our two governments have maintained close cooperation and coordination in tackling the challenges posed by North Korea's nuclear and missiles development. This constitutes a grave security threat not only in Northeast Asia but also the whole world. Our joint efforts in recent years have produced milestone agreements between the top leadership of the ROK, the US and North Korea on the shared goal of achieving complete denuclearization and permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Since the US-North Korea summit in Hanoi in early 2019 fell short of an agreement to advance denuclearization, the engagement with North Korea has remained stalled. This year, as North Korea focuses on the Covid-19 challenge and recovery from the devastation of the summer typhoons, it has been even more unresponsive to our call for resumption of dialogue. Nonetheless, we remain ready to reengage, and our offer stands of assistance to the North on Covid-19 and other cross-border challenges and humanitarian needs. And we very much look forward to working with the new US administration to build upon the achievements of the past years and take concrete steps towards realizing a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula that is at permanent peace.

This is an arduous task for sure, given the long history of mutual distrust and the wide divide that needs to be bridged on the building blocks of denuclearization and permanent peace. However, my government is committed to stay the course

while further strengthening the cooperation and coordination between our two allies.

We also hope to join force with the U.S. in tackling various global issues in science and technology, space, cyber security, non-proliferation, and counter-terrorism. Past experience indicates the strength of the alliance when sharing the same focus. Seoul hosted the G20 summit in 2011 and Nuclear Security Summit in 2013, both of which were initiated by the Obama administration. Building on these experiences of collaboration, I believe the ROK and the U.S. can take concerted action to deal with today's global challenges, such as Covid-19, climate change, and democracy's retreat.

To start, we need to further boost our efforts to defeat **COVID-19** together. Since the early stages of the pandemic, we have collaborated in many respects. Our experts and policymakers regularly share best practices. In times of urgent need in the U.S., Korea has provided essential medical supplies and facilitated the purchase of COVID-19 test kits. We have worked hard to keep our borders open to travelers to and from each other. This is quite an exception in these times of border closures and denial of entry of foreigners. And, it is true testament to the uniquely strong friendship between Koreans and Americans that there have been no loud calls for our borders to be closed to each other, as have been the case for many other countries.

Combined with Korea's relative success against the pandemic and the U.S.' global leadership, I believe the alliance will be able to spearhead international efforts in global public health cooperation. Korea has actively taken part in the

U.S.-led Global Health Security Agenda, and look forward to reinvigorating the initiative.

On climate change, President Moon has recently announced that Korea will go carbon neutral by 2050 and pledged to invest 7 billion U.S. dollars in Korea's Green New Deal. This plan is very much in sync with President-elect Biden's vision on climate change. We are excited about the return of US leadership on the climate change agenda, and the huge room for bilateral and multilateral cooperation and collaboration in tackling this existential challenge for the future of humankind.

As part of our contribution, Korea will be hosting the 2nd summit of the P4G, Partnership for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030 in May next year. We very much look forward to the active contribution of the new US administration to this event, so that it will serve as a big stepping stone towards a very successful COP 26 at the end of next year.

The third area for cooperation would be centered on our shared commitment to democracy. The ROK has achieved full-blown democracy with the abiding support of the U.S. over the past decades. The current government in particular was born out of candlelight rallies and the earnest aspirations of the people for greater transparency and accountability in our democracy. We are therefore endeavoring to solidify democratic values and institutions across society. Covid-19 has put this to the test, and I believe our democracy has performed admirably by sticking to the principles that define us as a democracy: openness, transparency, civic activism, and innovativeness.

We continue to be an active member of the “Community of Democracies”, which is an international forum initiated by the Clinton administration in 1999, and we look forward to contributing to its revival or the “Summit for Democracy” initiative that the president-elect announced during the campaign.

The ROK-U.S. alliance has much hard work ahead. Most of all, keeping our sights on the ball towards the goal of complete denuclearization and permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula will require a great deal of focus, patience and nerve. It will also require close collaboration with China, Japan and Russia. The task is rendered all the more complex by the intensifying rivalry between the global powers. But as long as we work hand in hand with the new US administration, I am confident of moving the process forward.

In their first phone call, President Moon and President-elect Biden reaffirmed their commitment to a robust ROK-U.S. alliance and peaceful and prosperous Korean Peninsula. Both of our legislative bodies have recently passed resolutions supporting the alliance. Most importantly, the close-knit relations between our two countries carry widespread public support, as clearly reflected in surveys after surveys.

As we chart the course ahead for the alliance, my government will spare no efforts in collaborating with the outgoing and incoming U.S. administrations. There can be no pause, as we work together as the closet of allies with a comprehensive set of agendas to promote and shared values to preserve.

Thank you. /End/