

Southeast Asia's First Korea Centre Debuts in Singapore



Present at the launch of the Korea Centre were (from left to right): Dr Geun Lee, President, Korea Foundation; Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Singapore; Dr Teh Kok Peng, Chairman, NUS East Asian Institute; and Professor Tan Eng Chye, NUS President

Peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula are vital for East Asia and the world as a whole. The longstanding relationships between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Singapore and other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries have contributed to the development of both North and South Korea. Singapore also hosted the 2018 US-DPRK summit, the first historic summit between the two countries. South Korea's New Southern Policy Plus has raised its partnership with ASEAN to the level of relations with its traditional four major diplomatic partners of the United States, China, Japan and Russia. These developments have given rise to greater attention to developments on the Korean Peninsula in Singapore and beyond and increased the demand for analysis of developments on the Peninsula.

The establishment of the Korea Centre of the East Asian

Institute (EAI), National University of Singapore, is therefore timely and aims to meet this rising demand. The EAI Board approved the establishment of the Korea Centre in its meeting in June 2021. The Centre also has the endorsement of the embassies to Singapore of the ROK and the DPRK, and the financial support of the Korea Foundation. It will be the first Korea Centre in Southeast Asia focusing on contemporary politics, economy, society and international relations, as well as North-South interaction.

Mission and Vision

The Korea Centre's mission is to analyse issues on governance, peace and development in the Korean peninsula to enhance understanding and interaction between the two Koreas and ASEAN countries. Its vision is to be the best Korea Centre in the Indo-Pacific outside of the ROK dedicated to the study of contemporary issues of public policy, peace and development in the Korean Peninsula and its international relations. Some of its activities include hosting conferences and seminars, publishing a quarterly Bulletin and interacting with its counterparts from the two Koreas.

Structure

The Korea Centre will have an advisory board and core staff from EAI. The Centre will draw on a network of adjunct research fellows with internationally recognised expertise on the Korean Peninsula and manage an ASEAN-Korean Peninsula network among interested researchers. Administratively, the Korea Centre is an integral part of EAI. The Centre will be headed by Dr Lam Peng Er, Principal Research Fellow of EAI. The Korea Centre will operate within EAI's existing budget and through the funding of the Korea Foundation.

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Speech by Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me first extend my warmest congratulations to East Asian Institute (EAI) Chairman Teh Kok Peng, EAI Director Bert Hofman and Korea Foundation President Dr Lee Geun, assisted by the Republic of Korea (ROK) Embassy, on the creation of this new Korea Centre. You are like parents at the point of conception. I think all of us were hoping for COVID babies. I am afraid that really has not happened, but I am glad you all were able to give birth to this academic baby.

As Professor Tan Eng Chye, President of NUS (National University of Singapore) recounted just now, this place – (NUS) Bukit Timah campus – is a special place. It was the birthplace of Raffles College, which together with King Edward VII College of Medicine, merged to form the University of Singapore. I entered NUS in 1980, which was incidentally also the year that Nanyang University merged with University of Singapore to become NUS. I still have recollections of that point in time, (when) the Arts faculty was still here, the Law faculty was in Kent Ridge and my Medical faculty was in Sepoy Lines, where today's Ministry of Health is. The reason for this long story is to tell you that this is sacred ground. As Professor Tan Eng Chye said, this is a birthplace, this is a cradle.

This was also a halfway house for the National Institute of Education – my father was a lecturer here – and (this was) also a cradle for SMU (Singapore Management University). This is all very auspicious and therefore, Bert, you have got to make sure that the Korea Centre succeeds. We have given you the best possible start.

I should also say that I want to thank Teh Kok Peng for agreeing to be Chairman of EAI. I wanted Bert and the staff of EAI to know that I feel very guilty that this is, in a sense, my first official visit to EAI. I want to assure all of you that your writings and analyses are in fact very well read within Cabinet. PM himself goes through them and highlights and underlines important passages. So, remember that what you think about, discuss, analyse and write down here has impact far beyond an academic campus.

The EAI, in the view of the Singapore Government, is a key think tank with a key role to analyse the political, economic and social developments in Northeast Asia.

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We all know that Northeast Asia is actually a very dynamic, sometimes even volatile place. It has got vibrant economies. It obviously has diverse cultures, and it makes a difference to the world and it makes a difference to Singapore. If you focus on the Korean Peninsula itself, it is a delicate focal point within Northeast Asia. It is home to 77 million people with a very rich historical and cultural heritage with dynamic economic growth and even greater potential for the future. But what makes the story of Korea in a larger sense more fascinating is that history has not been very kind to Korea and the Koreans. It is this human story of survival against the odds, fortitude against great pressure, of ingenuity, of imagination, of hope that in fact makes the story of Korea not only so fascinating to ordinary people who respond to K-drama and K-pop, as Professor Tan has mentioned, but also worthy of academic and political analysis. In a sense, our establishment of the Korea Centre is actually overdue. Again, I want to make the point so that the Korea Foundation will understand that your investment in this centre is worthwhile. So please continue to support Dr Teh and Professor Tan when they come to you in future.

Singapore also is glad that we were able to have played a small role in facilitating dialogue and advancing the peace process on the Korean Peninsula. We hosted the inaugural

THE HUMAN STORY OF SURVIVAL AGAINST THE ODDS

Summit between then-US President Trump and DPRK Chairman of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong Un when they met in Singapore three years ago in 2018. I must say it also gave me an excuse to visit Pyongyang. As a Foreign Minister who is fairly well travelled, that was one unforgettable, fascinating trip in its own right.

I can tell you categorically that Singapore and the DPRK enjoy formal, cordial, and functional relations, despite the challenges the DPRK itself faces due to its own unique political circumstances. I can tell you also from personal insight, having been there (to Pyongyang in 2018), I was impressed by what I saw as a modern, clean, well-organised city. One thing which I was watching for and counting was the number of construction cranes because that is usually a good index for construction activity and economic activity. There were signs of growth, maybe not bustling, but there were definitely clear signs of growth. The people I met and spoke to were determined, committed, and motivated to doing better for themselves. But I should also say that it is the most unusual place I have ever visited, the way that they related to each other and the way that they related to us was most unusual. I am making all these points to say that the study of the Korea Centre and of the unique experience and journey of the DPRK, which is not yet over, is well worth studying.

Singapore has a close and very warm friendship with the ROK. Ambassador (Choi) can testify to that. I can also say (that) from personal experience with your Foreign Ministers. We celebrated the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations last year (2020). Bilateral cooperation extends to multiple fields, including traditional sectors such as trade, culture and tourism, as well as in emerging areas like the digital

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**THE KOREAN PENINSULA REMAINS
FASCINATING, REMAINS COMPLEX AND WELL
WORTH THE ANALYSIS AND ACADEMIC WORK THAT
THE KOREA CENTRE WILL EMBARK ON**”

economy and the facilitation of start-ups. Right now, we are working towards a substantial conclusion of the Korea-Singapore Digital Partnership Agreement. This agreement will enable us to further deepen bilateral cooperation in new emerging digital areas, including cross-border data flows, cross-recognition of digital identities and the governance of artificial intelligence – all these are critical areas.

In July 2020, the ROK established its first start-up centre in Southeast Asia right here in Singapore, with a focus on fintech and cybersecurity. I believe this could be a channel for even more Korean start-ups and SMEs to plug into the Singapore ecosystem and ultimately expand into our region. The Singapore-ROK Vaccinated Travel Lane, which we launched two weeks ago, fortunately that was in time for President Lee to visit us (for this event) and to do so without serving quarantine. It is clear that there is a level of trust and cooperation and trust and collaboration between the ROK and Singapore, which will allow us to do things effectively and safely, despite a very dynamic and challenging (COVID-19) situation.

As far as ASEAN is concerned, ASEAN has got longstanding relations with the ROK. In fact, that was the reason for my last trip to the ROK which was in 2019 for the ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit in Busan – a beautiful city which probably many of you have not been to yet. I recall the very good discussions on furthering ASEAN-ROK cooperation in multiple areas including smart cities and trade. We welcome the ROK's increased engagement of ASEAN, and in particular, recognise the recent ASEAN-ROK Joint Statement on Advancing ASEAN-ROK Cooperation for People-centred Community of Peace and Prosperity. Indeed, there is much scope for even more cooperation in areas such as public health, infrastructure development, smart cities, digitalisation and connectivity. The ROK has shown strong support for ASEAN's efforts in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic, including its contributions to the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the point I am trying to make is that the Korean Peninsula remains fascinating, remains complex and well worth the analysis and academic work that the Korea Centre will embark on. We do need a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the intricacies and implications of developments in the Peninsula, and its wider impact on us and the rest of the world.

So I am heartened that the EAI has launched the Korea Centre. Your work will be very useful in providing us with insights that we can act on. I look forward to the good work and wish you all every success. Thank you very much.

Article courtesy of Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Speech by NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye

As one of Asia's top universities that is located in Singapore, a vibrant hub for the movement of trade, people and ideas, NUS is uniquely positioned, institutionally and geographically, to be a home for research on Asia.

At NUS, we push boundaries to achieve research excellence through multiple disciplines. We have adopted an integrated approach that brings together researchers from diverse fields who engage together in innovative, groundbreaking research that leverages on diverse knowledge and approaches. Asian Studies is one of the eight integrative research clusters at NUS.

The NUS East Asian Institute is a university-level research institute that is part of the Asian Studies research cluster. In 2020, the East Asian Institute was ranked as the world's fourth best think tank in area studies affiliated with universities by the University of Pennsylvania's Think Tanks and Civil Societies Programme, Global Go To Think Tank Index Reports.

I am delighted that the Korea Centre will be established at the NUS East Asian Institute. Peace, stability and friendship in the region are critical to progress and prosperity. I hope that the nascent Korea Centre will develop expertise in the issues of peace and development in the Korean peninsula, and strive to become a leading centre for contemporary Korean studies. In so doing, the Korea Centre has the potential to be an intellectual asset to NUS, Singapore, the region and the world, in promoting solid, academic understanding of contemporary Korea.

On this note, I wish the Korea Centre at the East Asian Institute every success.

THE KOREA CENTRE WILL BECOME AN INDISPENSABLE PLATFORM WHERE KOREA AND ASEAN WORK TOGETHER TO DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING OF KOREA



Speech by Korea Foundation President Dr Geun Lee

On behalf of the Korea Foundation (KF), I wish to extend my warm congratulations on the opening of the Korea Centre at the East Asian Institute of the National University of Singapore. I would also like to express appreciation to many partners for their longstanding support and invaluable effort in making this happen.

The Korea Centre is the first research institute for Korea-related studies to be established in Southeast Asia since the KF's founding in 1997. This represents the growing importance of the ASEAN region and the Korean government's New Southern Policy, as well as a major breakthrough in Korea-Singapore academic cooperation.

While the KF has worked hand in hand with Southeast Asian think tanks, universities, and research institutes for more than two decades, existing channels were mostly one-offs and there has been no hub for continuous interaction between Korean and ASEAN scholars. The Korea Centre will surely fill this role. I am certain that, once opened, it will become an indispensable platform where Korea and ASEAN work together to deepen understanding of Korea.

I wish the Korea Centre great success in its opening ceremony and future operation!



Speech by Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Republic of Singapore, H.E. Choi Hoon



Centre as a fruition of EAI's academic love, which it has already shown through the years of solid research into Korea's New Southern Policy and evolving geopolitical situation of the Korean Peninsula. As an institution dedicated to the contemporary study of the Korean Peninsula, the Korea Centre is expected to serve as an important platform to translate the current 'Korean wave' into a deeper understanding of the political, socioeconomic, and cultural context of the Korean Peninsula issues, both in Singapore and within ASEAN.

My special appreciation goes to Director Bert Hofman, Principal Research Fellow Lam Peng Er, Senior Research Fellow Chen Gang, and Research Fellow Chiang Min-hua of EAI, without whom the establishment of the Korea Centre would not have been

My sincerest congratulations on the opening of the Korea Centre at the East Asian Institute (EAI) of the National University of Singapore, the first of its kind in Southeast Asia.

A famous senior diplomat once said that "People who end up as 'first' don't actually set out to be first. They set out to do something they love." In this regard, I take the Korea

possible. I look forward to the active research and outreach programmes of the Korea Centre. The Embassy of the Republic of Korea reaffirms its sustained engagement with and support to the Centre.

Thank you.



Korea Centre in the News

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| THE STRAITS TIMES | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2021 |

NUS sets up research centre focusing on Korean peninsula

Korea Centre set to fill a 'lacuna' and enable deeper, broader understanding of East Asia

Ng Wei Kai

Singapore's expertise on both North and South Korea is getting a boost with the establishment of a new research centre.

The Korea Centre, set up by the East Asian Institute (EAI) at the National University of Singapore (NUS), will focus on research into governance, diplomacy and development on the Korean peninsula. Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, who launched the centre

last month, said the Korean peninsula is a fascinating and complex issue well worth analysis and academic work.

"We do need a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the intricacies and implications of developments in the peninsula, and its wider impact on us and the rest of the world," he said.

The centre is helmed by Dr Lam Peng Er, principal research fellow at EAI, and is housed in EAI at the

NUS campus in Bukit Timah.

In an interview with The Straits Times, Dr Lam said the centre will allow EAI to broaden and deepen its understanding of East Asia.

"You cannot understand East Asia, China or Japan without understanding Korea, as they all have long historical ties to one another, which affect their modern-day relations," he said.

Dr Lam added that while EAI has traditionally had a good grasp

of Chinese and Japanese affairs, the new centre will help fill a "lacuna" in its understanding of Korea.

The move to establish the centre was spurred in part by the 2018 summit between then United States President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Singapore, Dr Lam said.

He added that the centre hopes to bring in talent to nurture a uniquely South-east Asian per-

spective on the Korean peninsula, and serve both Singapore and ASEAN by developing reliable, in-depth knowledge.

"Singapore should work to develop its own understanding of both North and South (Korea), leveraging its good relations with both countries, which may be able to give us access and knowledge not available to researchers from other countries that have less cordial relations," he said.

The centre, the first of its kind in South-east Asia, has been welcomed by the embassies of both Koreas in Singapore, said NUS.

The centre plans to host conferences and seminars, and publish a quarterly bulletin. Last Friday, it held an international conference - titled Assessing Seoul's New Southern Policy Plus: Perspectives From Asean, Korea And India.

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International Conference on Assessing Seoul's New Southern Policy Plus: Perspectives from ASEAN, Korea and India



Speech by Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Republic of Singapore, H.E. Choi Hoon

Professor Bert Hofman, Director of the East Asian Institute,
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Let me begin by congratulating the very first conference hosted by the EAI Korea Centre, which officially inaugurated on 29 November 2021.

The opening ceremony was graced by the presence of His Excellency Vivian Balakrishnan the Foreign Minister of Singapore as well as Dr Geun Lee the President of the Korea Foundation.

The fact that Minister Balakrishnan took time out of his busy schedule to offer his speech and that Mr Lee flew all the way from Seoul even amid omicron variant fears shows the level of interest in this very first academic centre in the whole Southeast Asia to be dedicated for the study of the Korean Peninsula.

In this regard, I find today's topic befitting. In fact, the New Southern Policy, now upgraded to the New Southern Policy Plus, has been an important enabler of the Korea Centre by substantially raising the attention of the opinion leaders as well as the public towards Korea.

My speech will first briefly assess the status of the New Southern Policy Plus or NSP Plus. Then I will touch on the two often-raised challenges concerning the NSP Plus – continuity and substance. Lastly, I want to both lay out my diplomatic aspiration as well as an open question concerning how Korea can better leverage Singapore in its implementation of the NSP Plus.

President Moon Jae-in announced the New Southern Policy shortly after his inauguration in 2017 to highlight the importance of Korea's diplomatic relations with ASEAN countries as well as India. The aim was to fundamentally

upgrade our perspective towards the region in a way comparable to Korea's engagement vis-à-vis major powers surrounding the Peninsula such as the United States, China and Japan.

Under the vision of "People-centred community of Peace and Prosperity", more commonly recognised as the three Ps, dozens, if not hundreds of projects have been pursued.

Just to share a few snapshots of how much the three Ps have developed in the past few years:

- In the area of People, the number of students from ASEAN countries studying in Korea has almost doubled between 2017 and 2020, to surpass 60,000. ASEAN countries represent the largest share, accounting for more than 40% of the foreign students in Korea.

- In the area of Prosperity, in spite of the pandemic, the trade volume between Korea and the NSP Plus partners recorded its highest ever in 2021.

- In the area of Peace, just last November the very first ASEAN-ROK Defence Ministers' Informal Meeting was held to exchange views on multilateral cooperation and capacity-building, among other issues.

NSP Plus partners have been supportive of Korea's initiative. Most lately, at the ASEAN-ROK Summit on 26 October, ASEAN leaders commended the achievements of the NSP Plus and reaffirmed the joint will to further promote future cooperation.

Areas specifically highlighted by ASEAN leaders ranged from pandemic response and public health to digital and ICT, and climate change. My government will direct its resources to address such demand.

I will refrain from going into the specifics of the NSP Plus such as the underlying considerations for policy upgrade or the seven initiatives thereof, which will be discussed in the following session. It suffices to emphasise that my government will certainly continue to firmly pursue this signature policy.

Having said that I would like to address two challenges often raised by experts both within and without Korea, which are the continuity and substance of the NSP Plus.

First, the continuity challenge. Some critics comment that the NSP and the NSP Plus is not new but rather follows the string of cooperation from the previous administrations. At the same time, they also question whether this policy will outlive the current administration. Both allegations seem plausible on the surface.

Regarding this challenge, let me quote a few lines from a poem titled "The Flower" written by a renowned Korean poet Kim Chunsoo.

(Quote) Until I spoke his name, he had been no more than a mere gesture.

When I spoke his name, he came to me and became a flower. (Unquote)

The previous Korean administrations, obviously, also had their policies towards the ASEAN region, mainly driven by geography. But it was the Moon Jae-in administration that gave a proper name to this relationship and put together a policy framework with clear vision driven not only by geography but by strategy. The naming practice has the benefit of dramatically increasing the level of political spotlight and the resources allocated, and this is exactly what the name New Southern Policy has achieved.

ASEAN and India have now become the urgent day-to-day matter of the Korean policymakers. The geographical proximity, the huge economic interests, and the sheer volume of people-to-people exchange both online and offline will dictate the continuity of Korea's policy towards the region – not the other way around. So, I can assure you that the spirit of NSP has become self-sustaining and will remain solid into the future.

I dare say that decades later, as scholars look back and evaluate Korea's relations with ASEAN, they will value the NSP hopefully at the level current scholars value Japan's Fukuda Doctrine.

In short, yes NSP inherited the cooperation of previous administrations but upgraded the relations to an unprecedented level, and yes the succeeding administrations will build on the NSP Plus to further upgrade Korea's relations with the region.

Then comes the substance challenge, especially regarding the Peace pillar among the three Ps.

Looking first at the People pillar, Korea is everywhere in the region in the form of K-Pop, K-Drama, K-Food, and more. Even after spending six months as Ambassador in Singapore, I am still surprised at the extent to which Singaporeans are exposed to the Korean culture. To be frank, many Singaporeans know more about K-Pop and K-Drama than I do.

NSP INHERITED THE COOPERATION OF PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATIONS BUT UPGRADED THE RELATIONS TO AN UNPRECEDENTED LEVEL

This goes both ways. Just before pandemic struck, Southeast Asia ranked as number one destination of Korean tourists. A survey conducted around the time of 2019 ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit showed that more than two thirds of the ordinary Korean citizens surveyed know what ASEAN is.

The Prosperity pillar is also making progress through both government-led and private-led initiatives. Let me just name a few of them taking place here in Singapore after the pandemic started:

- The Korean government supported the opening of K-Startup Centre in Singapore in July 2020. This is the first one to open in Southeast Asia.
- Korea and Singapore have been pursuing the Digital Partnership Agreement, a forward-looking future-oriented document. It is in the final stages of negotiation.
- Hyundai Motor Group celebrated the groundbreaking

“EVEN AFTER SPENDING SIX MONTHS AS AMBASSADOR IN SINGAPORE, I AM STILL SURPRISED AT THE EXTENT TO WHICH SINGAPOREANS ARE EXPOSED TO THE KOREAN CULTURE”

ceremony of its Innovation Centre in Singapore in October 2020.

As Korea continues to diversify its trade and investment, the Prosperity cooperation with NSP partner countries is bound to increase both in terms of quantity and quality.

The Peace pillar, however, is where Korea's presence is felt less. Perhaps the way Korea is perceived as found in the ISEAS “The State of Southeast Asia Survey Report” is a reflection of its relatively humble presence in the area of Peace.

This is not to say that Korea is invisible. For instance, Korea is actively pursuing greater cybersecurity cooperation with Singapore. Korea is also pursuing environmental satellite datasharing mechanism and other concrete projects through bilateral consultative channels as well as through ASEAN-ROK dialogue frameworks.

However, there is more substance to be explored in the area of Peace, even while recognising the limitations to middle-power countries. I would like to seek your wisdom in this regard.

As Korean Ambassador to Singapore, I also want to seek your wisdom on the last issue that I will touch upon, which is how Korea can better leverage Singapore in its implementation of the NSP Plus.

Singapore has played a unique role within ASEAN and beyond. Many countries have sought to work with Singapore to further enhance their cooperation with the region. For instance, Singapore-Australia Joint Ministerial Committee and the robust cooperation based on this overarching structure is an object of personal envy.

Singapore boasts excellent regional expertise and network, supported by world-leading quality governance and global top-ranking institutions.

My aspiration as Ambassador is to take Korea-Singapore cooperation to new heights for the benefit of both countries and the region as a whole. Your advice and wisdom will be greatly appreciated.

Distinguished colleagues, I don't think I am alone in saying that I miss travelling, shaking hands, exchanging name cards, and chatting over coffee breaks. I feel very sorry that we don't get to do any of those, which would have been all the more meaningful given that this is the inaugural conference of the EAI Korea Centre.

However, as we patiently wait for the better days ahead, I am grateful to the Korea Centre for putting together this online conference. My words of appreciation go to all scholars and experts who have joined from different locations in Asia to impart your wisdom.

I look forward to your insightful comments throughout the day. Thank you.



International Conference on Assessing Seoul's New Southern Policy Plus: Perspectives from ASEAN, Korea and India



From left: Professor Bert Hofman, Professor Choe Wongi and Dr Jojin V John

For the Korea Centre's first activity kick-off following its official opening on 29 November 2021, the East Asian Institute organised the inaugural international conference on "Assessing Seoul's New Southern Policy Plus: Perspectives from ASEAN, Korea and India" on 3 December 2021. The international conference, sponsored by the Korea Foundation, convened experts and academics from Southeast Asia, South Korea, India and Australia across different time zones via Zoom.

Specifically, the conference examined Seoul's New Southern Policy Plus (NSPP) as a grand strategy to diversify its foreign policy by engaging Southeast Asia and India for mutual benefits. Experts offered their perspectives on various topics such as the NSPP with regard to ASEAN centrality and India's Act East Policy, and its impact amid the superpower contestation between the United States and China.

Session I: South Korea's Middle Power Diplomacy and New Southern Policy Plus

Professor Choe Wongi from the Korea National Diplomatic Academy outlined the vision, formulation and implementation of South Korea's NSPP. He explained that the vision of the New Southern Policy (NSP) is to promote prosperity and peace for the people, and to achieve economic diversification, diplomatic rebalancing and regional cooperation. The NSP is arguably the most successful among many policy initiatives by South Korean President Moon Jae-in. The NSP is a development cooperation-centred initiative, but there is also a strategic dimension. The Republic of Korea (ROK) has vested interests in maintaining the strategic stability of the international rules-based order. The NSP focuses primarily on soft security issues rather than hard security cooperation under its peace pillar. It also serves South Korea's own economic, diplomatic and strategic interests to sustain core elements of the NSP. Professor Choe highlighted that the NSP will be the mainstay of South Korea's foreign policy in the future, and that it is an evolving framework, instead

of a static concept fixated only on economics. To conclude, Professor Choe suggested that the Moon administration commit greater efforts in clarifying its strategic outlook in the near future.

Dr Nur Shahadah Jamil of the National University of Malaysia gave her insights into ASEAN centrality and the NSPP amid the great power transition. She argued that the increasing uncertainties in regional security environment have given middle powers and smaller states bigger room to cooperate. As a result of the China-US rivalry, smaller states will likely consolidate their existing partnerships and also explore cooperation with other like-minded nations. This explains the launch of the NSP in 2017 with a wide range of collaboration with ASEAN which can be classified into three main pillars, namely prosperity, people and peace. Although the COVID-19 pandemic had led to escalating tensions in China-US relations, it actually opened up opportunities for both South Korea and other nations to assist Southeast Asian states deal with the social and economic impacts of the pandemic. The NSP is geared towards this trajectory. South Korea produces high-quality medical products such as test kits and face masks, and its strong health governance has empowered it to pursue public health diplomacy in the region. That said, the NSP extends beyond health-care cooperation to other areas of cooperation such as education, human resource development, cultural exchanges, collaboration in non-conventional security issues.

Session II: NSPP and Mekong Subregion

Professor Park Hanhkyu of Kyung Hee University elaborated in his presentation how NSPP has enhanced cooperation for sustainable and inclusive growth in the Mekong subregion. Professor Park highlighted the large economic potential of the Mekong region, which has abundant resources, a young demographic and high economic growth rate, and thus Seoul has prioritised the Mekong region in its current foreign policy towards ASEAN, which holds strategic significance. In response to pressures

from Washington and Beijing, President Moon Jae-in clarified that South Korea would upgrade its relationship with ASEAN member states to the same level as that of a major power, as a way to enhance its manoeuvring space with greater autonomy amid the ever-increasing power rivalry between the United States and China. Professor Park also underlined the significance of achieving sustainable development, which is one of the principles of the NSPP initiatives in the Mekong region, to meet the present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Another principle that the NSPP advocates is inclusive growth, which advances equitable opportunities for economic participants during economic growth with benefits distributed to all segments of society. On future outlook, Professor Park remarked that Seoul should pursue a more balanced approach towards Mekong countries and diversify its official development assistance

THE RECENT TIMES ALSO SAW THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL-SECURITY RELATIONS BETWEEN THAILAND AND SOUTH KOREA, ESPECIALLY IN CYBERSECURITY

projects and other investments to other ASEAN countries besides Vietnam.

Mr Seksan Anantasirikiat of the International Studies Centre in Thailand touched on the the Mekong cooperation between Thailand and South Korea. He pointed out that Thailand welcomes South Korea's engagement in ASEAN and Mekong, and that Thailand serves as a bridge between South Korea and other countries in the Mekong subregion. He argued that while Thailand and South Korea have shared strong people-to-people ties, there are however missing links in their economic relations. The recent times also saw the emergence of political-security relations between Thailand and South Korea, especially in cybersecurity. Mr Seksan recommended that Thailand and South Korea should seek to forge sustainable partnerships, e.g. public-private partnership in Thailand's Bio-Circular-Green Economy concept, and to conduct public diplomacy, such as organising more ASEAN roundtable sessions, setting up Korea Foundation branches in 10 ASEAN countries and establishing institutional arrangements similar to the mandate of the ASEAN-Korea Centre.

Ms Hong Thi Ha from the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore discussed the Mekong cooperation between Vietnam and South Korea and amid great power contestation. She observed that Vietnam-South Korea relations are primarily founded on commercial and economic interests, which continue to be the main driver of Vietnam's ties with South Korea. Korea's heavy investment and resources commitment, as well as its strong influence and presence, in Vietnam is beyond the capability of a country that is commonly associated with a middle power. The second observation that Ms Hong remarked is important South

Korean economic cooperation with Vietnam. She further argued that Korea's middle power statecraft has enabled it to create a state of complex interdependence between Vietnam and both the United States and China.

Session III: NSPP and Maritime States

Dr Jojin V John, research fellow at the Indian Council of World Affairs, shed light on the relations between India and South Korea, focusing on India's Act East Policy and Korea's NSPP. He noted that India-South Korea relations have grown from strength to strength in the last three decades. The convergence of economic interests and outlooks towards the international order are key drivers of the bilateral relations. However, the return of geopolitics with heightened geopolitical tensions and great power rivalry has posed major challenges to the bilateral relations. The India-China border conflict has escalated the urgency for India to advance a diversified diplomatic framework and to forge closer strategic relationship with the United States and other maritime democracies. On the other hand, South Korea has kept a low profile in security issues, prioritising its attention on economic and development cooperation. It is understandable that this has led to perception differences. An important feature of India-South Korea bilateral relations in recent years has been to improve the visibility of historical and cultural ties between both sides. To better manage perception gaps, both countries should strengthen strategic and policy communications at multiple levels and extend their partnership by initiating trilateral dialogues with potential partners in Southeast Asia. South Korea should also participate in India's initiatives, such as the National Solar Mission, the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure and the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region, which are missing in the NSPP framework.

Dr Yandry Kurniawan and Ms Resi Qurata Aini from the University of Indonesia presented their topic on "Jakarta and Seoul: Fellow G20 amid Power Transition in East Asia". Indonesia and South Korea are middle powers in Asia, which is a site of great power competition, with similar interests in maintaining regional stability and interregional cooperation. Recently, security-related initiatives and mini-alliances led by the great powers have brought damaging perceptions towards the regional political-security stability. The speakers proposed two strategies that Indonesia and South Korea could adopt in order to maintain their influence in the region while avoiding being mired in great power competition. First, Indonesia and South Korea could leverage and optimise their membership in the Group of 20 (G20). Both countries, being the members of G20, are well positioned to promote the interests of developing countries through the G20 forum and help developing countries in Asia avoid the middle-income trap. A joint programme could be established based on South Korea's best practices to help developing countries operate and function as an engine of Asian economy. Both sides could also take advantage of Indonesia's presidency in the G20 to forge cooperation among countries in the Global South. Second, both countries could optimise strategic elements in South Korea's NSPP to strengthen cooperation among southern countries. The speakers noted that while South Korea's NSP originally did not accommodate the security aspect, the NSPP has however taken into consideration the

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strengthening of international security and peace. They also suggested that the NSPP support and empower existing security cooperation framework in the region, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum.

Mr Shawn Ho, associate research fellow at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, presented Singapore's perspective of the outreach efforts of the NSPP. He observed an elevation of South Korea–ASEAN relations to a much higher level under the NSP and NSPP. The “peace” pillar in the NSP has been subsumed under a broader category of “transnational cooperation for the fostering of safety and peace” in the NSPP. This could be due to ASEAN's preference to be engaged in non-traditional security issues and the deadlock in the engagement with North Korea. Nonetheless, such changes are envisioning a greater role for ASEAN in the Korean peninsula peace process. In terms of Singapore–ROK economic cooperation, initiatives like the establishment of the Hyundai Motor Group Innovation Centre and the K-Startup Centre in Singapore are evidence of good progress under the NSP and NSPP. Such developments are, to a great extent, attributable to President Moon Jae-in's personal interest and commitment in advancing South Korea–ASEAN relations. With Moon's office term ending in 2022, it remains to be seen how the new administration would conduct its NSPP. However, Mr Ho projected a relatively positive prospect for ASEAN and ROK in the years ahead whereby both sides would continue to cooperate in key areas such as public health, future industries including 5G, big data and artificial intelligence, and non-traditional security issues such as climate change. In particular, ROK has a comparative advantage in 5G and smart cities cooperation with ASEAN. A key challenge would be living with the COVID-19 pandemic and not letting the pandemic dampen the momentum of bilateral relations.

Dr Kim Hyung Jong, associate professor in the Department of International Relations at the Yonsei University, offered his insights into South Korea's relations

with Malaysia. He first identified the major factors that influence ROK–Malaysia relations. For Malaysia's side, these factors include domestic political stability and ethnic politics, political leadership and the principle of neutrality in foreign policy. Issues such as democratisation, political leadership, North Korea and relations with big powers have, on the other hand, affected South Korea's foreign policies. During the Cold War era, political–security concerns had overshadowed economic cooperation. In the 1960s particularly, the two countries' security concerns about communism became their common interest to build a limited yet close cooperation. Between 1981 and 2007, their economic relations vastly improved owing to the growing regional production network and Malaysia's Look East Policy (LEP). However, there was limited progress from 2008 to 2018, when domestic politics overwhelmed both countries. In 2018, the new administrations in both countries were expected to resolve domestic constraints and revitalise bilateral relations through LEP 2.0 and the NSP. While the NSP has enhanced South Korea's cooperation with ASEAN countries, bilateralism has been a dominant feature, with economic interest taking more weightage compared to political and social concerns. Similarly, the NSPP has included selected bilateral cooperation with Indonesia, the Philippines and Cambodia, and dedicated limited attention on human security. In conclusion, Dr Kim indicated that Malaysia could act as a bridge for NSP and NSPP to better contribute to the implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community.

Session IV: NSPP and Human Security

Dr Park Min Joung, adjunct professor in the School of Global Service at Sookmyung Women's University, outlined South Korea's evolving diplomacy towards ASEAN and offered a human security perspective of the NSPP. Since the establishment of diplomatic partnership with ASEAN in 1989, South Korea had adopted a values-free diplomacy of pragmatism and expediency. However, with the launch of the NSP and NSPP, Seoul has made attempts to embrace the human security perspective in its foreign policies. Dr Park attributed this to the changes in South Korean policymakers' expectation, as well as those of the United States' expectation. These domestic and international expectations simultaneously affect South Korea's national role conception, which is the domestic understanding of the state's role and purpose in the international arena. Following the COVID-19 outbreak, due to the global attention that Seoul has gained through its ability to contain the virus spread and limit economic fallout, South Korean political elites have readjusted the country's self-identity as an increasingly prominent player that could provide aid to other countries. In another aspect, the United States has also expected South Korea to institutionalise the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept into its foreign policy. However, given that Seoul recognises the imperative to maintain a balancing strategy with China, the strategic link between the NSP and FOIP remains limited to human security issues such as marine pollution and natural disasters. Overall, the human security aspect in the NSP and NSPP still maintains its narrow foci. Dr Park proposed that the new South Korean government should place greater focus on community and political issues in ASEAN.



Visit and Speech of the Republic of Korea Minister of Trade and Industry Mr Yeo Han-Koo to Korea Centre



South Korea's Minister for Trade Yeo Han-Koo giving a speech

Good afternoon, everyone. It is my honour to be here today with the Korea Centre, East Asian Institute of NUS (National University of Singapore).

At the outset, I would also like to thank Executive Director Deborah Elms, Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Dr Alan Chong, Professor Sarah Tong and Professor Su-Hyun Lee for their distinguished presence as we wrap up 2021.

Korea and Singapore have been working very closely with each other both at bilateral and multilateral levels.

On a more personal note, I also have very fond memories of working late into the night with my counterpart during the final stretch of the RCEP negotiations, when I was Korea's chief RCEP negotiator as Deputy Minister for Trade Negotiations.

Singapore, as always, played a very constructive role and made great contributions towards the conclusion of the RCEP Agreement.

With the pandemic persisting, we are witnessing a rapid paradigm shift in global trade environment that features a diverse range of issues including supply chain, trade and technology, digital, public health and vaccines, climate change, labour and human rights as well as an expansion of alliances and cooperation among like-minded countries.

In particular, the competition between the United States and China continues around supply chains and emerging technologies; against this backdrop, we are seeing new issues such as strengthening resilience of supply chains,

digital transition, climate change incorporated into our trade agenda today.

At the same time, the Asia-Pacific region is growing in importance as the centre of the global supply chain, and a new economic order is being formed in the region as well, especially around trade.

With that said, Korea and Singapore are urged to play a leading role as the region's like-minded middle powers pursuing together free, open trade.

Let me now briefly discuss three broad-based trends going forward for trade policy in the Asia Pacific (to help set the tone of our discussion today).

First, establishment of a new trading order in the Asia Pacific.

With their dynamism and growth potential, the Asia-Pacific economies have tirelessly collaborated for regional economic integration as well as new regional trade rules based on their strong, collective confidence in free trade and multilateralism.

In recent years, the Asia-Pacific region has also become a key area for global economic security.

In fact, the Asia Pacific has been at the centre stage for emerging rules of trade such as the CPTPP, a high-level free trade platform (entered into force December 2018); the RCEP which is the largest FTA in the world (signed December 2020); and the DEPA, the birth of which Singapore played a leading role (entered into force January 2021).

The CPTPP is especially noteworthy as it started as P4 (Pacific 4) among the four countries including Singapore and evolved into a major trade platform of the region.

Singapore has been serving as an intellectual hub or an agora for new trade rules in the Asia Pacific as not only the seat of the APEC Secretariat but also the founding member of trade agreements such as

THE CPTPP SHOULD BECOME AN OPEN, TRANSPARENT AND INCLUSIVE TRADE PLATFORM IN ORDER TO SERVE AS A PREMIER TRADE FORUM OF THE ASIA PACIFIC

the CPTPP, RCEP and DEPA; it is expected to continue making great contributions towards the formation of new trade rules in the region, together with other countries that similarly achieved economic growth through international trade, most notable example being Korea.

The Korean government views that there is substantial

economic and strategic value to Korea's participation in the CPTPP and intends to pursue CPTPP membership through sufficient public input and society-wide stakeholder consultation.

In fact, Korea does have a lot to offer to the CPTPP.

For example, Korea's membership will help the CPTPP expand and develop into a premier trade platform in the region that is comprehensive, transparent and inclusive.

Moreover, Korea will also help further strengthen stability and resilience of supply chains across the CPTPP region, considering Korea's stature as an open trading nation as well as an industrial powerhouse (with its leadership in industries such as semiconductors, batteries and EVs).

The CPTPP should become an open, transparent and inclusive trade platform in order to serve as a premier trade forum of the Asia Pacific, especially as we are witnessing, in the second half of this year, the development of new regional trade orders gaining momentum, as exemplified by the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy (9.16) and the Indo-Pacific economic framework proposal (10.27) of the United States.

Second, the ever more increasing need for new global rules of digital trade, with the digital transition picking up its pace, triggered by the fourth Industrial Revolution and the persisting pandemic.

Singapore has been leading discussions on digital trade rules, as discussions related to digital rules and cooperation are intensifying in the Asia-Pacific region, with the DEPA and Singapore-Australia DEA paving the way forward.

Korea also shares the importance of establishing global rules for digital trade, and strengthening international digital cooperation — noting, in particular, the rapid growth of the digital domain.

In this vein, we have been actively contributing to discussions on digital trade such as the e-Commerce negotiations at the WTO as well as bilateral and regional ones including KSDPA and DEPA.

As some of you may know already, Korea and Singapore will tomorrow (12.15) the conclusion of the negotiations for the bilateral Digital Partnership Agreement and we expect our bilateral DPA will provide impetus for expansion of digital trade between Korea and ASEAN as well as Korea and Singapore, and strengthen further collaboration in emerging digital industries.

We are seeing the growing need for rules of digital trade to promote digital trade and shape favourable business environment in the Asia Pacific, which is the engine of global economic growth.

In this context, at the regional level, the DEPA should seek to expand its membership with Korea's accession and at the global level, the WTO should accelerate discussions on e-Commerce agreement.

Last but not least, climate change response has become an important global trade issue that requires an urgent multilateral cooperation, especially amid worldwide effort on the transition into green economy.

Korea has been actively contributing to the global effort for carbon neutrality — at the COP26, Korea has

pledged an ambitious 2030 NDC goals to reduce 40% of its greenhouse gas emissions compared to the 2018 level, after enacting the Framework Act on Carbon Neutrality (8.31) as the 14th country in the world to have such legislation.

We also find it very important for major economies to closely coordinate their climate change efforts, so that their various environmental measures for climate change do not become trade barriers and are implemented in a manner consistent with global rules of trade.

To this end, Korea has been actively participating in related multilateral discussions such as the TEESD at the WTO, and engaging with others for harmonisation of national-level carbon pricing mechanisms (such as the ETS and carbon taxes).

With that said, we hope to intensify our cooperation with Singapore in the process of making multilateral progress in these areas.

In the recent past, middle powers have been contributing increasingly meaningful progress in international trade, often, by taking a (small but) ground-breaking step that brings about a seismic change as in the case of the P4 which developed into the CPTPP.

The late Prime Minister Honourable Lee Kuan Yew once emphasised that "a nation is great not by its size alone. It is the will, the cohesion, the stamina, the discipline of its people, and the quality of their leaders which ensure it an honorable place in history".

I am convinced that Korea and Singapore are such nations, middle powers that have strengths and potential to serve

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as a bridge between advanced and developing economies as discussions take place on shaping global rules of trade.

I hope Korea and Singapore will continue to intensify their bilateral cooperation in key trade issues such as supply chain, digital and climate change, and together usher in co-existence and shared prosperity for the international community by playing the role of a conducive facilitator.

I very much look forward to benefitting from your insights. Thank you very much.



East Asian Institute Korea Centre Public Lecture



Difficult Choices: Alliance Decision-making in the Context of US-China Competition



Speaker: Dr Victor Cha, Vice President and Korea Chair, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington

The international system today is characterised by increasing peer competition between the United States and China. As we usher in 2022 in anticipation of new insights into the world, EAI Korea Centre has the honour of inviting Dr Victor Cha, who holds the D S Song-KF Professorship in Government and International Affairs at Georgetown University and is also Senior Vice President and Korea Chair of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC, to assess how key US allies such as South Korea, Japan and Australia respond when they are forced to choose between the United States and China over various issues. Such are the choices that Dr Cha termed as “binary choices”. EAI Principal Research Fellow Dr Lam Peng Er moderated and led an interactive Q&A session at the inaugural EAI Korea Centre Public Lecture held on 19 January 2022 via the Zoom platform.

In this public lecture, Dr Cha cautioned US allies and partners in Asia the reality of facing “binary choices” between the United States and China. Increasingly, governments around the world would also have to contend with such binary choices, which Dr Cha defined as issues which the target state would have to grapple with the opposing positions and demands of the security and economic patrons. Hence, the decisions that governments make could alienate one side or the other, and the primary determinant of these decisions is whether the state views itself as a shaper or a taker in the international system.

Dr Cha defined states that push back against Chinese binary choices as shapers, whose decisions may have longer-term significance for the rules-based international order. Takers, on the other hand, are states that adopt an accommodating approach towards China because they have less capability to resist and do not internalise the maintenance of the rules-based order in their own decision-making.

Dr Cha noted that an important intervening variable in binary choice decisions is the perceived reliability and

resiliency of US power. States that have confidence in the United States as the guardian of the rules-based order will be more inclined to stand up to China. Those that do not will be more inclined to accommodate to China. He argued that in periods of great-power competition, states in the international system inevitably encounter binary choices.

When a hegemon and a rising power demand other states to pledge their allegiance, the hegemon seeks alliance based on the states’ decision to maintain the order, while the rising power imposes binary choices that seek to change the order. The substance of these choices is related to three contesting elements of the international order, namely competition over territory, the rules of the order and political authority.

Dr Cha presented several key findings of his “Binary Choices” project that investigates 43 cases of binary choices in Asia, Europe and Latin America. The main empirical finding is that some, but not all, of key allies of the United States are quietly and persistently choosing to delink from Washington and stand in line with China, despite explicit US entreaties to align with Washington. Most of these states are, traditionally, military treaty allies of the United States, playing critical roles in the US-led security networks in their respective regions and sharing democratic values. However, their top economic partner is, coincidentally, China.

Nevertheless, Dr Cha contended that the delinking trend is not a form of bandwagoning for profits, nor is it in accommodation to China’s ascent to its historic apex of the Asian power hierarchy. Instead, it is a defensive reaction to the threat of Chinese economic retaliation, absent the patron ally’s confidence in the resilience of the alliance. Dr Cha underscored a caveat that delinking from the US position in favour of China does not mean US allies are breaking the alliance contract. US allies are not yet abandoned in core US alliance equities, such as bases, troop deployments and arms sales for intelligence cooperation. Drawing from the binary choice cases in his project, Dr Cha highlighted that there are also many allies that are linked with the United States and have opposed China. But the delinking trend is actually limited to two of the six allies, that is, Australia and Japan.

Dr Cha emphasised that China has yet to challenge the staples of the alliance. Nevertheless, there emerges a definitive trend that serves China’s strategy of gaining accommodation on a host of other political, military and economic issues while it avoids getting into wars that would trigger military provisions of the US Mutual Defence Treaty signed with US allies.

Dr Cha posed a research puzzle: How should a country respond in the face of pressures from a patron ally and a rising power?

He asserted that the primary determinant factor of a state’s choice is whether the state is a shaper or a taker

in international affairs. Shapers internalise the health and success of the regional order as a responsibility. They choose policies based on self-interests but are informed by a sense of ownership from a consult for consolidating, protecting and maintaining the rules-based order. Takers, by contrast, make choices that are informed by short-term self-interests. Hence, if a state identifies itself as a shaper in the international system, it will make binary choices that support the order.

Dr Cha posited that domestic politics and leadership have an important role in terms of whether a state identifies itself as a shaper or a taker, given that different political leaders have differing views on values and normative order. A combination of structural and non-structural factors is at play whether a state identifies itself as a shaper or taker.

The second crucial variable in binary choices is the resilience and dependency of the patron ally. Under the pressure of binary choices, states will tend to respond differently, depending on whether the patron ally is seen as a dependable guardian of the rules-based international order. If they perceive the patron as a steward of that order, they will then be more willing to defend that order.

Dr Cha explained the 2013–2020 period as his choice of time frame in examining the 43 cases in his project: binary choices started to emerge in 2013 when China became more assertive in its foreign policy, prompted in part by the global financial crisis and the US quagmire in Iraq. The period also corresponds to China explicitly embracing its liberal system of government as an end in itself, while vociferously criticising democracy abroad. The United States also started to abandon the responsible stakeholder template with China at the end of the Obama administration, before moving in full-out competition with China during the Trump presidency.

While Barack Obama's pivot to Asia was welcomed at the time, regional partners viewed it as poorly resourced and narrowly focused on the military dimension, rather than as a comprehensive strategy for Asia. The exceptions to this perception of the United States' unreliability among the 43 cases are Japan and Australia. Both allies continue to believe and invest in the United States as the guardian of the order, and where US policies were lacking, both Canberra and Tokyo brought their own diplomatic and military assets to ensure the policies were adequately resourced.

Donald Trump's proclamation of "America First" and his open disdain for the US "policeman" role in the world had generated widespread concern about America's withdrawal from the world stage. Even before Trump sapped the allies' confidence in the United States, US abdication of its role as a guardian of the liberal order was derived less from political will than from declining capabilities.

Dr Cha presented Australia and Korea as concrete cases that demonstrate domestic politics is not a variable in his model of scenarios. Changes in the Australian governments between conservative and liberal prime ministers have not significantly impacted the country's overall propensity to align with the United States.

Australia's alignment with the United States on economic issues, despite heavy trade dependence on China's foreign direct investment confirms the predictions in Dr Cha's model. In terms of the maritime security issues, Australia shows no hesitation in linking with the United States over

China's military build-up and assertiveness. China strongly criticises Australia for being influenced by the United States with regard to the maritime disputes in the South China Sea. China demanded a neutrality stance from Australia, referring to the naval exercises as encirclement operations. However, Australia did not make those choices in deference to its ally and they were independent policies formulated on the basis of its national interest. However, it is evident that Australia desires to support the rules-based order and invest in the United States as a guardian of that order.

There is no country in the Indo-Pacific other than the Republic of Korea (ROK) that has to make stark binary choices between Washington and Beijing. The country's security, democracy and prosperity are directly tied to the US alliance. However, the ROK is inextricably dependent on China in trade, particularly after the normalisation of relations in 1992. In addition, geographic proximity and the strategic belief in Seoul that China's assistance is critical to North Korea afford the ROK little opportunity to prioritise shaping of the international order when facing pressure from China.

In terms of maritime security, unlike Australia and Japan, South Korea took a decidedly more passive stance with regard to China's assertions of territorial sovereignty in the South China Sea and has offered lukewarm support for the US response in the form of the free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). On the surface, South Korea joined US and Japanese opposition to Chinese actions, but pertaining to political issues, both the conservative and progressive governments in South Korea showed a propensity to delink from the patron ally and to respect China's interests.

In sum, US allies and partners are facing increasingly difficult choices in an era of US–China strategic competition – the overlapping pressures from the United States as the primary security patron and from China as the primary economic patron have left various states with little room to manoeuvre. Despite the reality, Dr Cha believed that hedging is no longer a feasible strategy. In his assessment of the 43 cases, there are only three instances that governments were able to employ hedging when forced to make a choice. Allies and partners delinked from the United States in 21 binary choice issues, and they linked with the United States in 19 binary choice issues.

Most of the binary choices China imposed reside in a grey zone that do not trigger US treaty commitments to its allies outright, but have cast an aggregate influence over these countries, slowly and quietly drawing them into the Chinese orbit. This fits with China's strategy, which some China experts describe as competitive coercion to undermine the American alliance system without firing a shot, as well as clears China's path to setting its own rules as the region's hegemon.

Dr Cha's binary choice model suggests that the delinking behaviour by US partners may be situational rather than dispositional, which is related more to the allies' perception of their predicament, rather than a fundamental change of strategy. The absence of balancing by secondary powers is not a form of hierarchical accommodation as China seeks to usurp the Asian balance of power. It is instead the result of confidence in the United States as a guardian of the order.

Dr Cha's binary choice model also suggests the importance of reputation in alliance politics in two aspects.

First, a state's willingness to identify itself as a shaper in the US–China competition may be a function of not just how much it cares about the order, but also how much it cares about being seen as standing up for the rules-based order. If states value such a reputation, that may affect how they calculate the cost of resisting China.

Second, a state's propensity to stand up to China's bullying is a direct function of the reputation of the guardian. Negative comments about the allies, positive ones about adversaries, and silence with regard to support for democratic values and freedom around the world could incur a real cost, even if security commitments remain intact. If allies perceive this as a disengagement from the guardian, a critical factor that could compel a change in allies' behaviour would be the reputation and volition of the United States.

In his concluding remarks, Dr Cha highlighted that at least half of allies' decision to resist China depended on whether they discern a strong United States that stands united with its allies and would not abandon them. Gaining either allies' support or making hard binary choices would be easier when these allies are convinced that standing together is better than standing alone. A more effective strategy may be to titrate the number of hard choices presented to allies and prepare the right conditions for attaining support. The United States may attempt to frame binary choices, not those that favour the United States or those that are anti-China, but as options that support a resilient and rules-based Asia. The reliability of a US presence and its continued global engagement are critical to US strategy of competition vis-à-vis China.



Major Issues in South Korean Politics and Foreign Policy in 2021

by Ryu Yongwook

The year 2021 was a relatively quiet year for the usually action-packed Korean politics and foreign policy. Three domestic political issues and two foreign policy issues however stood out.

Domestic Politics

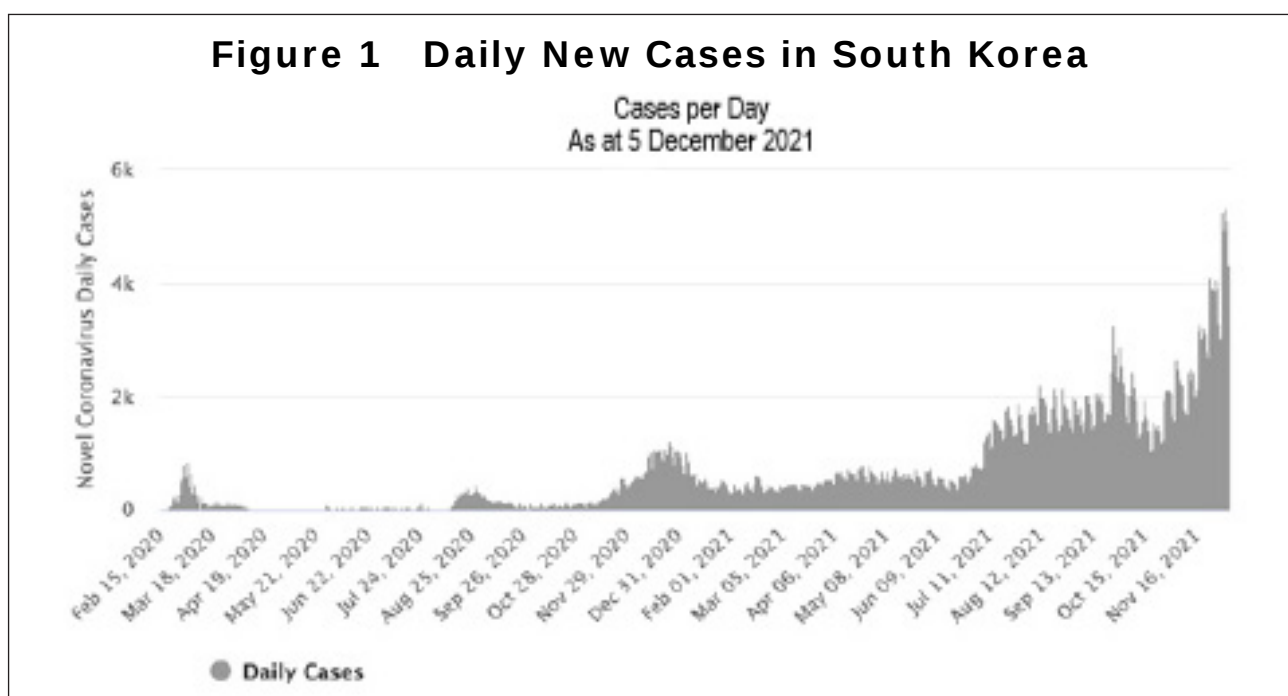
A continuing struggle against the COVID-19

The fight against the COVID-19 continued in 2021, with the emergence of new variants such as Delta and Omicron wreaking havoc on the global economy. Korea was hit hard by the Delta variant and went into the most serious COVID wave to date. As shown in Figures 1 and 2 (as of 5 December 2021), there were two sharp increases, once at

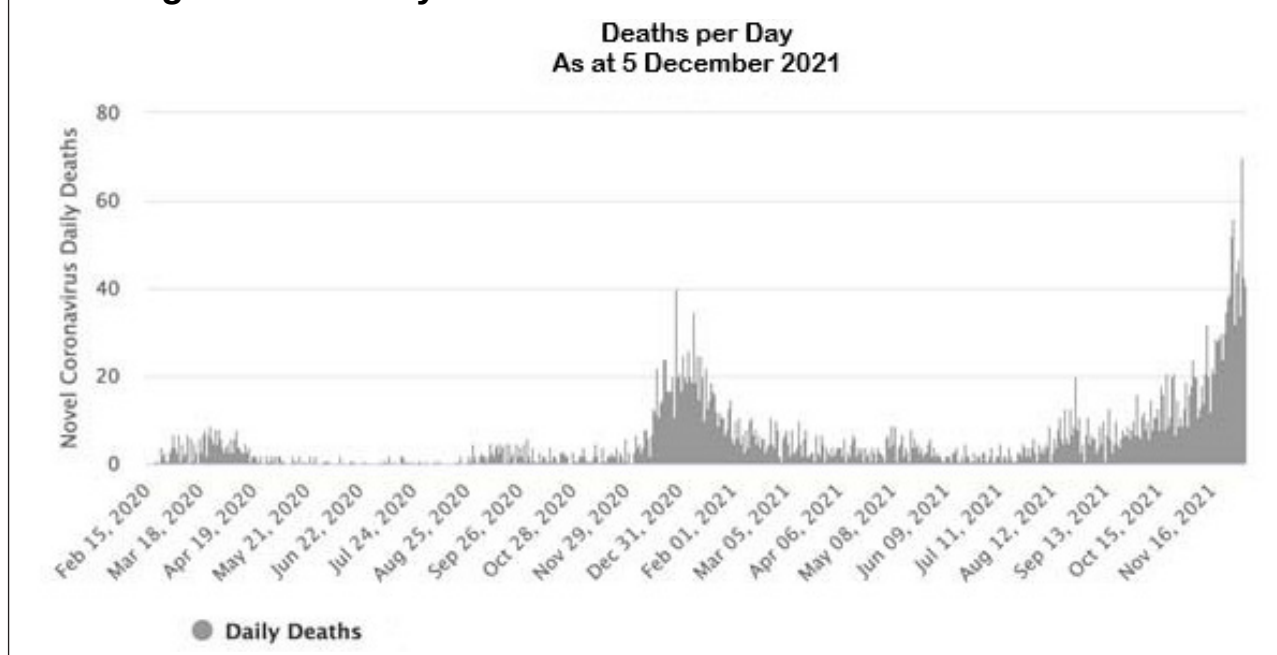
the beginning of July due to the advent of the Delta variant and the other at the beginning of November when the Moon government implemented its living with-COVID policy.

Just over one month into implementing the with-COVID policy, the new Omicron variant hit the world, and led to a sharp increase in the number of daily cases and deaths. As a result, the Moon government had to rethink its with-COVID policy, leading to confusion in policy direction. The Korean government appeared unprepared for the large increase in COVID cases and deaths, causing rising public discontent and disapproval of the way the government is handling the COVID situation. The discontent is not just among the Korean public, but also foreign embassies in Seoul which

Figure 1 Daily New Cases in South Korea



Source: Worldometers available at <<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/south-korea>> (accessed 8 December 2021).

Figure 2 Daily New COVID Deaths in South Korea

Source: Worldometers available at <<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/south-korea>> (accessed 8 December 2021).

have also been deeply troubled by the Moon government's COVID policy.¹

As the struggle against the COVID-19 has been carried over to 2022, it is likely to negatively impact on the upcoming presidential election for Moon's party. As political parties gear up for the presidential campaign, it is politics and politicking, rather than science, that is likely to dictate the debate and discussion on how the COVID problem should be handled.

A tough loss in the April by-elections

The ruling party lost two mayoral elections for Seoul and Busan in a by-election in April 2021. The former mayors of these two largest cities in Korea, both from the ruling party, had to step down due to their sex scandals. Moon's ruling party lost both elections to the conservative opposition. For the Seoul mayoral election, the opposition party garnered 57% of public support, while the ruling party received only 39.2%. For the Busan election, the difference was even larger, with the opposition taking 62.7% and the ruling party only securing 34.4%.

It was a tough loss for the Moon government in view of its resounding electoral victory just a year ago when the ruling party won a whopping 180 seats out of 300 at the general elections. The defeat in the by-elections complicates the political calculations of the ruling party's presidential candidate. While the loss lessened Moon's influence over his political party, Moon's public support remains relatively stable at around 40%. Major candidates now face a tough choice of continuing Moon's policies or distancing from Moon and his political agenda.

For the conservatives, the by-election success boosted their hope for a win at the presidential election after their crushing defeat in 2020. The result of the by-elections sets the stage for an interesting contest for the next presidency.

Presidential candidates

By the second half of 2021 all major parties had chosen their presidential candidates. For the ruling party, Lee Jae-myung, former governor of Gyeonggi province, beat Moon's Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon comfortably to become the presidential candidate. Lee Jae-myung has the reputation of being an outspoken maverick and populist politician, and wasted no time in promoting his policy of more subsidies and tax breaks for COVID-affected businesses and individuals.

The opposition party's presidential candidate was Yun Seok-yeol, the former chief prosecutor under the Moon government. Yun fell out of favour with Moon over the handling of cases that involved high-profile politicians and officials of the Moon administration. After he was sacked from his prosecutor position, he entered politics based on widespread public support, and joined the opposition conservative party and comfortably won the presidential candidacy for the conservatives.

Currently, Yun leads Lee in most opinion polls by as much as 10%. The difference will likely narrow as the election day nears, as liberals and conservatives will coalesce and consolidate their support along the right-left spectrum. The process will see how the two major candidates broaden their support base and whether they could succeed in securing support from minor candidates, who command around 5%

¹ *The Financial Times*, 7 December 2021. "Embassies blast South Korea over 'discriminatory' foreign vaccines policy", available at <https://www.ft.com/content/0bde9ba2-04af-48d3-8f08-efcbd37f08be?accessToken=zwaAAX2YyPbYkc8L3puiBK9I09OP-CO_L038Ivg.MEUCIApXEWThUGkLz62XCPfKbhXWQImrAZxlz-zUtDsGG7GzAiEAwgAjjxVQc8_k9IBPEP0aaEmih_IHDulFom0_oaqiM-Bg&sharetype=gift?token=ec90c4ba-e497-4ed9-ab9b-03ab8f3ffb56> (accessed 10 December 2021).

of public support currently. Success in this endeavour could tilt a delicate balance and win them the next presidency.

One major issue for this election campaign will be rising social inequality. Housing price has skyrocketed during Moon's presidency, while the COVID-19 situation has severely strained the livelihood of many small businesses, thereby enlarging the gap between the haves and have-nots. The two major candidates recognise the importance of tackling this issue, especially for attracting votes of the younger generations.

Lee has proposed a 'basic income for all' policy in addition to an additional disaster relief subsidy of approximately US\$1,000 for everyone. Yun's first policy proposal also directly deals with the socioeconomic inequality, especially the housing issue. He proposed the supply of 300,000 new housing units for the 20s and 30s at breakeven prices to make housing more affordable. As those in the 20s and 30s are likely to be swing voters in the presidential election, more policy proposals from both candidates designed to attract the support of the young are expected.

Addressing the problem successfully requires more than populist policy, however. If socioeconomic inequality continues to rise unabated, more extreme political views and movement on both spectrums of political ideology can create social schisms in a society that is already divided along geographical, gender, generational and religious lines. What is required is a strong will, coupled with serious policy initiative, to achieve sacrifice from the rich and a new social contract to generate and distribute wealth in this era of digital revolution.

This is not an easy task and few societies have succeeded. If Korea manages to deal with the problem successfully, it will be in a position to thrive in a fast-digitalising world where wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few tech businesses capitalising on their technological prowess in a stable sociopolitical environment.

Foreign Policy

Korea's relations with Japan in 2021 did not improve and remained sour despite Japan having a new Japanese prime minister, Fumio Kishida, at the helm. Her relations with China were also quiet mainly because China was in a rather dormant period due to its internal politics ahead of the next leadership transition and intensifying conflict with the United States. Two foreign policy issues however deserve attention.

Mending US-ROK relations

Often described as ROK-solid, the US-ROK relationship had been quite rocky rather than rock-solid; it is widely known that there was discontent between the two. The Trump administration's pressure on Korea to do more cost sharing, as reflected in the drawn-out negotiation over defence costs, generated discontent on the Korean side. On the other hand, the US administration perceived the Moon government as going out of line with America's Indo-Pacific strategy and excessively focusing on the North Korea issue to the detriment of the interests of the alliance. Undoubtedly,

the lack of follow-up progress from three summit meetings orchestrated by the Moon administration between Trump and Kim has disappointed the US administration and North Korea.

Hence when Joe Biden was inaugurated in January, the two sides had a great deal of work to do to mend their strained relations. The first summit between Biden and Moon was held on 21 May 2021, with the two sides working together to address common challenges and problems. The United States managed to nudge Korea to become more involved in the United States' Indo-Pacific strategy and secure Korea's high-tech investment, especially in the semiconductor industry. The latter is critical for the Biden administration's effort to reduce its reliance on Chinese supply chains and reorganise global supply chains in high-tech industries without China. On the other hand, the Korean side secured access to COVID-19 vaccines – an urgent issue for the Moon government back then as it faced heavy domestic scrutiny for its failure to procure vaccines – and received in-principle support from the Biden administration for Moon's policy towards North Korea.

As the year progressed, however, bilateral differences, especially over the issue of how the North Korea problem should be handled, limited the improvement the two administrations could have achieved on the bilateral relations. One issue where the two sides showed some difference was on the issue of joint military exercises. These military exercises are usually held in the spring and summer of the year, but since 2018 they have been either postponed, suspended or downsized at the request of the Moon government to help facilitate talks with Pyongyang. The United States, especially the Pentagon, became increasingly frustrated and voiced the need to resume joint military exercises. In the end, despite the North's verbal complaint and explicit threat, joint exercises were held but limited to defensive, computer-simulated command post training with minimum personnel involvement and no live field training.²

The end of war declaration

The main focus of the Moon administration's foreign policy in 2021 was about the end of war declaration. The Moon administration increasingly became agitated that its signature policy had not produced any concrete outcome even though historic summit meetings in Singapore, Hanoi and at Panmunjeom were held. With very limited time left in office, President Moon was making one last attempt at achieving a meaningful outcome in inter-Korea relations by getting all sides to agree on the end of war declaration and set the two Koreas on track towards permanent peace.

The sticking point was, once again, the North's denuclearisation effort and progress. Here the United States and ROK showed important difference. While the United States emphasised a need for tangible action and progress towards denuclearisation before the United States lifts some of its sanctions on Pyongyang and move towards a declaration to end the Korean War, the Moon government took the position that some conciliatory actions, including

² Reuters, 15 August 2021 "S. Korea, US to begin joint military drills despite N. Korea rebuke ", available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/skorea-us-begin-joint-military-drills-monday-yonhap-2021-08-15/> (accessed 8 December 2021).

the declaration, could be taken first to entice the North to the negotiating table for denuclearisation talks. US national security adviser Jake Sullivan revealed these differences when he stated that the United States has “somewhat different perspectives on the precise sequence or timing or conditions for different steps” of end of war declaration, even though it agrees with the Korean side on the core strategic initiative.³

The prospects of success were dim. Two other factors hinder success. The first is the lack of enthusiasm on the part of North Korea in the end of war declaration. Whatever version the United States and ROK could agree on is unlikely to be acceptable to North Korea, and vice versa. The second is Biden's diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics, which has thwarted Moon's idea of utilising the Olympics to bring all parties together and declare the end of the Korean War. The intensifying US-China rivalry will continue to be a hindrance to any potential progress on the North Korean problem in the future, provided the United States and North Korea are able to directly iron out their differences. This would require Kim Jong-un to fundamentally re-orientate the North's domestic and foreign policy goals; with the

young leader only showing occasional signs of interest, and not earnest effort, this seems to be a far-fetched possibility.

The Next President

Despite valiant efforts by the Moon administration, it is expected that very little will be achieved during the remaining days of the Moon presidency. Hence Korea's important domestic political and foreign policy issues will be tasks for the next president to resolve. Currently, the candidate from the ruling party Lee is ahead in polls, but the combined public support for Yun and Ahn – another presidential candidate attempting to attract the centre and centre-right votes – far exceeds that of Lee; these two candidates are likely to enter into negotiation for united candidacy in the near future. All eyes will be on the upcoming presidential election as whoever takes over from President Moon will seek to chart a course in Korea's politics and foreign policy.

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³ *The Korea Herald*, 27 October 2021. “US, South Korea May Differ on End-of-War Proposal”, available at <<http://www.korea-herald.com/view.php?ud=20211027000886>> (accessed 10 December 2021).



Kim Jong-un's Unchallenged Power and Continued Nuclear Advancement: North Korea 2021

by Kim Sung Chull

North Korea marked the 10th year of Kim Jong-un's control of power on 17 December 2021. Much earlier in January 2021, the Eighth Congress of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) held in January 2021 affirmed Kim's status as the incontestable top leader and the party's intention to continue to seek a nuclear state, Kim's key achievement in his tenure. North Korea's nuclear armament not only increasingly poses a serious challenge to security in Northeast Asia but also accelerates an arms race in the Asia Pacific. Domestically, North Korea is in a dilemmatic situation where it is politically stable but economically failing. South Korea, in its quest to regenerate the halted denuclearisation talks, has dealt with the declaration of the end of the Korean War (1950-1953) as a major diplomatic issue.

Kim Jong-Un's Status as Uncontested Top Leader

Since the demise of his father Kim Jong-il on 17 December 2011, Kim Jong-un has taken control of power in North Korea. Junior Kim has restored the KWP's authority, which crumbled under his father's leadership, and wielded power directly through various channels of the KWP instead of relying on close persons.

In the past 10 years, Kim Jong-un has gradually elevated his status in the KWP at the reinstituted meetings of the party. At the Representative Meeting held in April 2012, Kim appointed himself as the first secretary of the KWP,

while he designated his deceased father Kim Jong-il as the eternal general secretary. Further at the Seventh Congress of the KWP held in May 2016, he appointed himself as the chairman of the KWP. At the Eighth Congress from 5 to 12 January 2021, Kim had the party constitution revised and elevated himself to the post of general secretary of the KWP.

In accordance with the rising status of Kim, the KWP has made efforts to propagate Kim's personality cult throughout society. In 2021, the party began to use the term “Suryeong” or top leader on Kim, a term that had been previously used for depicting the absolute power of Kim Jong-un's grandfather and father only.

The Eighth Congress of the KWP Held amid International Isolation

At the Eighth Congress of the KWP, Kim Jong-un admitted to the failure of his economic policy of the past Five-Year Economic Development Plan (2016-2020), saying that “the plan was really underachieved in all sectors”. This admission was unusual for a top leader in such an autocratic country. He attributed the failure to both international factors, such as the economic sanctions and COVID-19-related border closures, and to domestic structural problems such as corruption, inefficiency and bureaucratism.

Kim emphasised the importance of self-reliance and self-sufficiency, without detailing the new economic plan.

He also used regressive terms such as “internal unity” and “external strength, internal softness” at the Eighth Congress, a situation which was diachronically opposite to that of the Seventh Congress held five years ago. While the previous party congress unveiled the goal of internationalisation, the Eighth Congress in 2021 wrapped up with the reiteration of the need for nuclear advancement.

The Eighth Congress included a military parade at night. This was unprecedented. As observers noted, the parade exhibited various elements of North Korea’s nuclear deterrents, particularly a new submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM). The exhibition of the SLBM was worrying as North Korea conducted a test on the SLBM on 19 October 2021.

Continued Pursuit of Missile Advancement

With the breakdown of the second Kim-Trump summit in Hanoi in 2019, Kim has seemingly concluded that nuclear advancement is the only available policy choice.

In October 2021, North Korea held an exhibition titled “Self-Defence 2021” to publicise its recently developed defence industry. Kim stated in his keynote speech that the main enemy is a war, and not the United States and South Korea. Kim’s message is clear: North Korea’s nuclear weapons are for the purpose of deterrence, not for offensive or coercive purpose.

Notwithstanding its official statements, North Korea’s nuclear arsenal has exceeded the capability of deterrence only. The scale of nuclear armament demonstrates North Korea’s ambition to become a strong nuclear power. According to a report released by the Centre for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University, North Korea mines three metric tons of uranium annually at the Pyeongsan mine, an amount that can produce about 340 kg of highly enriched uranium that could be used to make more than 20 atomic bombs.

Furthermore, North Korea has consistently advanced its delivery systems of nuclear warheads – ICBM, SLBM, hypersonic missile and cruise missile. Of the eight missile tests North Korea conducted in 2021, the first test-firing of a hypersonic missile, Hwasong 8 and the testing of a newly advanced SLBM in October are remarkable. In particular, North Korea stated that it already succeeded in its SLBM test five years ago. This was apparently intended to emphasise that the North Korean SLBM is far more advanced than that of South Korea, which conducted such a test for the first time in September 2021.¹

The SLBM test was significant because of not simply its technology but also the timing of the test-firing. It took place when South Korea made its utmost efforts to jointly declare the end of the Korean War. As the declaration requires cooperation of the United States and North Korea, the Moon Jae-in administration has tried to lay the groundwork with Washington since January 2021. Such efforts were however dampened by North Korea’s SLBM test.

North Korea’s efforts to upgrade short-range missiles are for nullifying the American and South Korean missile defence system deployed in the South Korean territory.

According to Chang Yeong-geun, a South Korean expert, it becomes difficult for the US-deployed Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) to intercept North Korea’s newly developed missiles using the low altitude and low angle trajectory and pull-up movement system. North Korea has also seemingly acquired the technology to inject solid fuel to ICBM, which is essential for manoeuvrability and concealment.

North Korea’s nuclear advancement increasingly challenges international security broadly, not to mention the security of South Korea and US bases there. North Korea has achieved a certain level of success in developing the two elements out of the Nuclear Triad – ICBM and SLBM. One deficiency is a strategic bomber system; however, even without this, North Korea’s nuclear capability far exceeds a minimum deterrence.

Breaking the Impasse? The Issue of Declaration of the End of the Korean War

Since the breakdown of the second Kim-Trump summit in Hanoi in February 2019, the denuclearisation talks have been in a stalemate, leading North Korea to focus on gearing up its nuclear deterrence capability.

To break the impasse, South Korean President Moon Jae-in, at a press conference in January 2021, re-addressed the issue of a joint declaration of the end of the Korean War. On the US part, the newly inaugurated Biden administration has repeatedly expressed its willingness to reopen talks with North Korea and the Moon administration has signalled North Korea of its intent to build a peace regime on the peninsula and to narrow the differences between Washington and South Korea on the issue.

However, narrowing the gap between South Korea and the United States and producing a draft document that is attractive enough to induce North Korea’s cooperation prove to be a formidable task. First, the Moon administration believes that a joint declaration to terminate the war between the relevant parties will be able to facilitate denuclearisation and the building of a peace regime. South Korea has tried to assure the United States that the declaration itself will not replace the Armistice Agreement signed in 1953 for the truce of the three-year war. The Moon administration stressed that the declaration of the end of the Korean War would alleviate North Korea’s concern about the “antagonistic policy” of the United States towards Pyongyang.

Second, the United States, even if sympathetic to the objective of the declaration, is not totally aligned with Seoul’s idea. US military officers and retired commanders believe that the declaration, if it remains symbolic only, is unlikely to contribute to the reopening of earnest nuclear talks and to mitigating North Korea’s security challenges. US officials are concerned that North Korea – without commitment to denuclearisation – will attempt to use the signing of such a declaration as an opportunity to rush to nullify the Armistice Agreement and to put an end to the two legacies of the Korean War: UN Command led by a US general and US military presence on the Korean

1 It is, however, noteworthy that North Korea’s first actual submarine missile test took place two years ago in 2019, not five years ago.

peninsula. US officials are hence going beyond the issue of the declaration and linking it with North Korea's earnest commitment to denuclearisation in any form.

Third, North Korea's initial interest in the declaration issue during the Kim-Trump talks had apparently subsided. Likewise for the brief interest of Kim Yeo-jeong – Kim Jong-un's younger sister – in the issue in response to South Korea's enthusiastic move in 2021. It is not surprising that North Korea would try to link the declaration issue to other issues such as the United States' North Korea policy and the legitimacy of the UN Command. Indeed, Kim Sung, DPRK's permanent representative in the United Nations, has denounced the "hostile policy" of the United States towards Pyongyang and called for dissolving the UN Command. Should the joint declaration be signed, North Korea will exert more pressure on South Korea and the United States on these issues.

As difficult as it may be, a compromised solution should be sought to reignite the deadlocked talks with North Korea. The solution could be a four-party² joint declaration that include, but not limited to, pronouncement of the end of the Korean War, repudiation of the use of force in the event of disputes, North Korea's moratorium of banned missile and nuclear tests and humanitarian incentives for North Korea. An engagement of this kind is likely to break the current impasse, failing which, the security dilemma and arms race in the Korean peninsula and Asia Pacific more broadly will be exacerbated.

Kim Sung Chull, former professor at Seoul National University, now serves as a visiting senior fellow (non-resident) at the Korea Centre. He is also the editor of Asian Journal of Peacebuilding, a SCOPUS-indexed peace studies journal

² The four parties include South and North Korea, the United States and China, which were all involved in the three-year brutal war with 2.5 million deaths.



Korean Peninsula-Southeast Asia Relations: 2021 in Review

by Shawn Ho

The year 2021 was a less eventful year for Korean Peninsula-Southeast Asia relations compared to 2018 and 2019 when the first two Summits between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the United States – along with DPRK-Singapore and DPRK-Vietnam Summits – were held in Singapore and Vietnam respectively. In 2019, the third Commemorative Summit between the Republic of Korea (ROK) and ASEAN was also held in Busan, ROK.¹ The COVID-19 pandemic had wreaked havoc to international travels and most high-level diplomatic meetings continued to be conducted virtually due to various COVID-19 travel restrictions.

ROK-ASEAN Diplomatic Relations for 2021

Diplomatic engagement between the ROK and ASEAN continued both bilaterally and multilaterally in 2021, with occasional in-person meetings between government representatives.

No heads of state travelled between the ROK and the 10 ASEAN member states in 2021. ROK President Moon Jae-in, however, did participate virtually in the ASEAN-ROK Summit and ASEAN Plus Three Summit in late October 2021.

The only ASEAN leader that President Moon met in person for a Summit meeting was Vietnamese President Nguyen Xuan Phuc. They met for the first time in their current capacities on the sidelines of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in New York in September 2021.

President Moon met briefly with some ASEAN leaders such as Indonesia President Joko Widodo and Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on the sidelines of major

multilateral meetings such as the G20 Summit in Rome in October 2021.

At the foreign ministry level, ROK Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong made two visits to ASEAN: (1) to Vietnam, Singapore and Indonesia in June 2021, his first trip to Southeast Asia in his current capacity since taking office in February 2021; and (2) to Thailand and Laos in August 2021. He also took part in the virtual ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in August 2021. None of the foreign ministers from the 10 ASEAN member states had however travelled to the ROK, mostly due to the regional pandemic situation.

ROK-ASEAN Relations Under the New Southern Policy Plus in 2021

In 2021, the ROK continued its engagement policy with ASEAN via its New Southern Policy Plus (NSP Plus) and its seven strategic initiatives of cooperation in public health, human resource development, cultural exchanges, trade and investment, rural and urban infrastructure development, future industries, and transnational issues such as climate change and environment protection.

Under the "Public Health" cooperation initiative of its NSP Plus, the ROK had assisted ASEAN and its member states with US\$5 million worth of medical equipment in 2021. In September 2021, the ROK announced that it would provide Myanmar with humanitarian assistance of US\$3 million (including US\$1 million through ASEAN) to help Myanmar overcome its socio-economic difficulties and the pandemic. The ROK had also donated AstraZeneca vaccines to some ASEAN member states – about 1.4 million doses

¹ For this article, Korean Peninsula-Southeast Asia relations refer to the respective diplomatic engagements between the ROK and DPRK with their counterparts from ASEAN and its 10 member states.

ASEAN APPRECIATES THE ROK'S SUPPORT FOR ASEAN CENTRALITY AND ITS INITIATIVES

to Vietnam, 470,000 doses to Thailand and about 540,000 doses to the Philippines.

Other major achievements for ASEAN-ROK relations would include the endorsement of the Cambodia-ROK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the conclusion of negotiations for the Philippines-ROK FTA on 26 October 2021. ASEAN and the ROK also held the inaugural session of the ASEAN-ROK Informal Defence Ministers Meeting via videoconferencing on 10 November 2021.

An Assessment of the NSP Plus

The NSP Plus has been warmly welcomed by ASEAN and its member states. In particular, ASEAN appreciates the ROK's support for ASEAN centrality and its initiatives, including the Masterplan on ASEAN Connectivity, the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN), the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and its contributions to help ASEAN member states fight the pandemic.

While the NSP Plus has done much to elevate ASEAN-ROK relations, some ASEAN academic scholars have raised several concerns. One is with the continuity of this policy since the next ROK presidential election will take place in March 2022. Another is with the ROK's overconcentration on Vietnam in terms of investment, trade, development assistance and people-to-people exchanges. ASEAN is keen for the ROK's interest in enhancing ties with ASEAN to continue after the Moon administration and for the next administration to broaden its focus in the region beyond Vietnam.

As for the seven strategic initiatives of the NSP Plus, there are several areas in which ASEAN and its member states could learn from the ROK. These include the ROK's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic along with its COVID-19 treatments and vaccines; push for a carbon-neutral society and efforts to promote recycling and Green Growth; strengths in fourth Industrial Revolution future industries, e-commerce, cybersecurity, resilient supply chains and advanced logistics/distribution capabilities. These could be considered by the governments in the ASEAN region when interacting with the next ROK administration and during the latter's review of the NSP Plus.

DPRK-ASEAN Diplomatic Relations for 2021

Interactions between the DPRK and ASEAN in 2021 were very limited due to the travel restrictions in the region and the relative lack of publicly known virtual meetings between DPRK and officials from ASEAN member states.

DPRK Chairman Kim Jong Un did not make any overseas travels to ASEAN in 2021, neither did ASEAN leaders or foreign ministers travel to the DPRK due to the regional pandemic situation. DPRK Foreign Minister Ri Son Gwon also did not participate in the 2021 virtual ARF. The DPRK has been represented by an Ambassador-level delegate for the past three years of the ARF (even though the 2019 ARF took place before the pandemic). This brings to question

whether the ARF still has a role to play in engaging the DPRK as it is one of the few multilateral platforms that the DPRK had regularly participated in at the foreign minister level.

Major Developments for DPRK-ASEAN Relations in 2021

Notwithstanding the lack of interactions, two major developments related to DPRK's relations with some ASEAN member states such as Malaysia and Indonesia took place in 2021.

First, in March 2021, Malaysia and the DPRK severed diplomatic relations due to the extradition of a DPRK citizen Mun Chol Myong (who was based in Malaysia) to the United States over alleged money laundering charges. As a result, the DPRK closed its Embassy in Kuala Lumpur and its diplomats (along with their family members) left Malaysia. This meant that it is no longer the case that all 10 ASEAN member states have diplomatic ties with both the DPRK and the ROK.

Second, on 23 July 2021, about 15 Indonesian diplomats (including the Ambassador) and their family members left the DPRK due to the strict anti-COVID-19 measures that they faced in Pyongyang. Diplomats from several other Embassies (as well as non-governmental organisation staff) in Pyongyang also left the country in 2021.

Singapore-ROK Relations in 2021

The highlight for Singapore-ROK relations was the conclusion of negotiations for the Korea-Singapore Digital Partnership Agreement, Singapore's first digital economy agreement with an Asian country. The agreement was signed in Singapore when ROK Trade Minister Yeo Han-koo visited the country in December 2021.

Earlier in June, ROK Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong paid Singapore a visit and thereafter in December, Defence Minister Suh Wook also visited Singapore for meetings.

The Vaccinated Travel Lane between Singapore and the ROK commenced on 15 November 2021, the first such agreement between two major aviation hubs in Asia. It allowed mutual visits by fully vaccinated travellers from both countries so long as they have a negative COVID-19 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, in lieu of a quarantine.

Singapore's Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Trade and Industry Dr Tan See Leng went to the ROK in November for a working visit. Another senior official, Senior Minister of State of the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment and the Ministry of Transport Dr Amy Khor, also visited the ROK in October 2021 for the fourth Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific.

Singapore-DPRK Relations in 2021

There was little known activity at the Track 1 level and interactions between Singapore and DPRK were mainly at the NGO level. For instance, on 7 May 2021, a UN Security

**The highlight for
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...DUE TO THE PANDEMIC, THE NSP PLUS COULD NOT BUILD ON THE POSITIVE MOMENTUM BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE THIRD ASEAN-ROK COMMEMORATIVE SUMMIT IN 2019

Council panel approved temporary sanctions exemptions (for nine months until February 2022) for the Singapore Red Cross to donate medical equipment to local hospitals in the DPRK to support its anti-COVID-19 efforts.

Choson Exchange, an NGO founded by a Singaporean Geoffrey See, successfully conducted the second iteration of their "Project ChangeMakers" programme in May 2021. It consisted of six web conference lessons delivered via video link to students in the DPRK and overseas. The curriculum focused on service innovation in hotel management, design thinking, customer service and branding for tourism and other industries.

Conclusion

For ROK-ASEAN relations over the past year, it is regrettable that due to the pandemic, the NSP Plus could

not build on the positive momentum brought about by the third ASEAN-ROK Commemorative Summit in 2019. The highlights for the year were the ROK's COVID-19 assistance to ASEAN member states, Cambodia-ROK FTA, Philippines-ROK FTA and the inaugural session of the ASEAN-ROK Informal Defence Ministers Meeting.

As for DPRK-ASEAN relations, a huge blow to relations came from the severing of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and the DPRK and the continued absence of the DPRK foreign minister at the ARF for the third consecutive year. On a positive note, at the NGO level, the Singapore Red Cross had been successful in donating COVID-19 medical equipment to the DPRK after obtaining sanctions exemption from the UN to do so.

While 2021 had been a less eventful year for relations between the Korean Peninsula and Southeast Asia mainly due to the ongoing pandemic that has limited in-person interactions, the high vaccination rate across the region in 2022 could reopen doors for the resumption of more activities in the diplomatic, economic and people-to-people realms. There remains great potential for further strengthening of ties between Seoul, ASEAN and Pyongyang especially in the post-pandemic world.

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Resources and Chronicle of ASEAN-Korean Peninsula Relations

As a research institute based in Singapore, the EAI monitors developments in relations and interactions between the Korean Peninsula and individual countries in Southeast

Asia as well as the ASEAN grouping as a whole. This material is presented in the form of (i) a chronology of key developments and (ii) important documents.

MARCH 2021

21st	The DPRK closed its Embassy in Kuala Lumpur and its diplomats left Malaysia with their family members after Pyongyang severed diplomatic ties with Malaysia over the extradition of a DPRK citizen to the United States.
24th	DPRK Chairman Kim Jong Un sent verbal messages to Vietnamese President Nguyen Phu Trong and Laotian President Thongloun Sisoulith to notify them of the outcomes of the Eighth Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea and called for stronger bilateral relations.

MAY 2021

7th	A UN Security Council panel approved temporary sanctions exemptions for the Singapore Red Cross to provide the DPRK with test kits and other preventive equipment against the coronavirus. The exemptions allow the Singapore Red Cross to donate RT-PCR equipment, testing kits and related items to local hospitals in the DPRK in support of their anti-coronavirus efforts. The sanctions waiver will be in place for nine months until February 2022.
15th	Choson Exchange completed a second iteration of its Project ChangeMakers (PCM) programme, consisting of six web conference lessons delivered via video link to Korean students in the DPRK and overseas. They coordinated with a network of experts from across the globe, working with the EU Business School in Geneva to design a curriculum focused on service innovation in hotel management, design thinking, customer service and branding for tourism and other industries. This programme involved university lecturers who joined by live video link from Pyongyang – one of the rare opportunities of its kind.
24th	The ROK provided US\$300,000 (S\$401,300) to a UN-led humanitarian aid initiative for Myanmar.

JUNE 2021

23rd	ROK Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong met Vietnam's Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son in Hanoi. Foreign Minister Chung called for Vietnam's cooperation in addressing difficulties facing ROK businesspeople, such as an extended quarantine period and other COVID-19 restrictions. Vietnamese Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son on the other hand expressed his delight at the fruitful development of Vietnam-ROK relations in all fields in recent years, affirming the importance of the ROK to Vietnam, one of its top trading partners. During his stay in Hanoi, Foreign Minister Chung also met President Ngyuen Xuan Phuc and Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh. Foreign Minister Chung was on a visit to Vietnam, Singapore and Indonesia for his first trip to Southeast Asia in his current capacity since taking office as foreign minister in February 2021.
24th	ROK Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong called on Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and met Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan while on a working visit to Singapore. It was his first visit to Singapore in his capacity as foreign minister. Prime Minister Lee and Foreign Minister Chung welcomed further bilateral exchanges to strengthen cooperation in confronting the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prime Minister Lee welcomed the ROK's interest in strengthening its engagement with ASEAN. The two foreign ministers discussed ways to expand and deepen Singapore-ROK cooperation, including in new and emerging areas such as FinTech and digital economy as the two countries work towards COVID-19 recovery. They also agreed on the importance of restoring air connectivity between the two countries in a gradual and safe way.
25th	ROK Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong met Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi in Jakarta and called on President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo. The two countries look forward to strengthening health cooperation in areas such as developing vaccines, drugs and diagnostic tools for COVID-19.

JULY 2021

23rd	Indonesian diplomats (including the Ambassador) and their family members left the DPRK due to the difficult conditions they faced as a result of the country's strict anti-COVID-19 measures. Diplomats from several other Embassies (as well as NGO staff) in Pyongyang did likewise in 2021.
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AUGUST 2021

6th	ROK Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong participated virtually in the ASEAN Regional Forum. He renewed calls for the DPRK to return to dialogue as Seoul sought to resume nuclear diplomacy with Pyongyang following the recent restoration of inter-Korean communication lines. The DPRK did not send its foreign minister to participate in the ARF. It was represented by an ambassador-level representative for the third consecutive year instead at the ARF.
27th	ROK Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong and Thailand's Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai met in Thailand and agreed to strengthen cooperation in future industries, health care and green technologies. The two sides affirmed their commitment to intensifying cooperation in technology, innovation, digital economy and human resources development. They also agreed to work together to promote green investment and technologies for sustainable development, while expressing their determination to enhance cooperation against public health threats. Foreign Minister Chung also called on Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha.
28th	ROK Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong met Laotian Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith in Laos, marking the first time since 2002 that a ROK foreign minister has officially visited Laos for bilateral talks. Foreign Minister Chung called for active support from the Laotian government to address the challenges that ROK companies face in the country and to help promote their participation in local infrastructure projects. Foreign Minister Kommasith urged expanded investment from ROK firms, stressing that Seoul is the fifth-largest investor in Laos.

SEPTEMBER 2021

7th	ROK announced that it would provide Myanmar with humanitarian assistance of US\$3 million, including US\$1 million through ASEAN, to help overcome its socioeconomic difficulties and the pandemic.
22nd	ROK President Moon Jae-in held a summit meeting with Vietnamese President Nguyen Xuan Phuc for the first time (since the latter was elected as Vietnam's President in April this year) on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. President Moon promised to provide more than one million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to Vietnam.

OCTOBER 2021

12th	ROK announced that it will donate 1.1 million doses of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine to Vietnam.
18th	ROK donated 470,000 doses of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine to Thailand.
26th	ROK President Moon Jae-in participated in the virtual 22nd ASEAN-ROK Summit. He pledged US\$5 million to the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund, in addition to US\$1 million last year. ASEAN and ROK leaders adopted the Joint Statement of the 22nd ASEAN-ROK Summit and approved the progress reports on (i) the ASEAN-ROK Plan of Action to Implement the Joint Vision Statement on Peace, Prosperity and Partnership (2021-2025), (ii) implementation of ASEAN-ROK FTA and (iii) ASEAN-ROK economic cooperation project. The Cambodia-ROK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was endorsed and negotiations for the Philippines-ROK Free Trade Agreement were concluded.

NOVEMBER 2021

4th	The ROK decided to donate an additional 290,000 doses of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines to Vietnam.
10th	ASEAN and the ROK held an inaugural session of the ASEAN-ROK Informal Defence Ministers Meeting via videoconferencing to discuss regional security issues. ROK Defence Minister Suh Wook unveiled Seoul's action plan for defence cooperation with ASEAN, which consists of various joint tasks related to maritime security, cybersecurity, disaster responses, peacekeeping operations, counterterrorism efforts and other areas. During the meeting, ASEAN defence officials expressed support for the ROK's diplomatic efforts to achieve denuclearisation and lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula. Separately, the ROK and Indonesia reached an agreement on the payment that Indonesia would have to make for their joint fighter jet project. The KF-21 programme – in which Indonesia seeks a 20% share and technology know-how while the ROK holds the rest – aims to mass produce jets as early as 2027.
30th	The ROK donated 539,430 doses of AstraZeneca vaccines to the Philippines. This donation brings to US\$210.7 million the ROK's COVID-19 assistance to the Philippines. Of this, about US\$200 million was in the form of concessional loans to help the Philippines procure enough vaccines in 2021 and support government efforts in scaling up its COVID-19 response. Apart from the loans, the ROK has donated 530,000 swab test kits, seven walk-through booths, two extraction equipment, six isolation beds, 970,000 masks, 167,000 hygiene kits and 1,200 units of personal protective equipment to the Philippines. It also distributed rice pouches to help about 365,000 Filipinos who are among the country's most vulnerable to cope with the pandemic. The year 2021 marked 30 years of the ROK-Philippines' development partnership.

DECEMBER 2021

3rd	The ROK's National Assembly ratified the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), with the agreement expected to go into effect from 1 February 2022. The RCEP is the world's largest regional free trade agreement and its 15 signatories include the 10 ASEAN member states, China, the ROK, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.
14th	ROK Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki and Vietnam's Finance Minister Le Minh Khai met in Seoul and discussed ways to beef up cooperation for the stable supply of urea solution and other key items, and bolster partnership in the health and vaccine sectors. Finance Minister Hong expressed his appreciation for Vietnam's cooperation in exporting urea solution to the ROK and proposed that the two countries strengthen the supply chains of key items. Finance Minister Le shared the need for the ROK and Vietnam to collaborate and grapple with global supply chain disruptions. The officials also discussed ways to strengthen cooperation in the health and vaccine sectors as a follow-up to the summit held between their leaders in September.
15th	The ROK and Singapore concluded negotiations on the Korea-Singapore Digital Partnership Agreement (KSDPA). ROK Minister for Trade Yeo Han-koo met Singapore's Second Minister for Trade and Industry Dr Tan See Leng in Singapore and jointly announced this agreement. This new digital economy agreement will enable more seamless cross-border data flows and build a trusted and secure digital environment for businesses and consumers. It is Singapore's first digital economy agreement with an Asian country and it is also the first such agreement between two Asian countries. A former ROK navy ship joined the Philippine Fleet and was commissioned as the BRP Mamanwa (LC294). The Mamanwa, a Landing Craft Utility, can transport equipment, vehicles and troops from amphibious assault ships to beachheads or piers. The boat is named after the Mamanwa indigenous people of Agusan del Norte and is now part of the Sealift Amphibious Force.

19th	ROK Defence Minister Suh Wook visited Thailand and Singapore for talks on bilateral defence cooperation. In Thailand, he met Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, who is also the Thai Defence Minister. He also visited the Fourth Wing of the Royal Thai Air Force which operates T-50 advanced trainer jets imported from the ROK. In Singapore, he met Singapore's Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen to discuss defence cooperation and exchanges.
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This chronology of events in Korean Peninsula-ASEAN relations was sourced mainly from the ASEAN Secretariat; Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs; ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Department of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines; The Straits Times; CNA; The Korea Herald; Yonhap News Agency; Arirang; KBS World; Choson Exchange; The Jakarta Post; VOA; Khmer Times; Phnom Penh Post; Philippine News Agency; The Philippine Star; National News Bureau of Thailand; and Vietnamnet.

KOREAN PENINSULA-ASEAN RELATIONS IN 2021: IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

6 August 2021	Chairman's Statement of the 28th ASEAN Regional Forum < https://asean.org/chairmans-statement-of-the-28th-asean-regional-forum/ >
26 October 2021	Joint Statement of the 22nd ASEAN-Republic of Korea Summit on Advancing ASEAN-Republic of Korea Cooperation for People-centred Community of Peace and Prosperity < https://asean.org/joint-statement-of-the-22nd-asean-republic-of-korea-summit-on-advancing-asean-republic-of-korea-cooperation-for-people-centered-community-of-peace-and-prosperity/ >
26 October 2021	Chairman's Statement of the 22nd ASEAN-ROK Summit: < https://asean.org/chairmans-statement-of-the-22nd-asean-rok-summit/ >