

Walking a Tightrope

As U.S.-China Tensions Escalate, Korea Must Chart a New Path

Tensions between the United States and China are escalating and spreading into every corner of the complex bilateral relationship, including trade, advanced technologies, finance, ideology, talent, and the military domain. In 2019, former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who played a critical role in Nixon's opening to China, warned that the two countries were at "the foothills of a Cold War." If left unresolved, he added, there could be dire consequences—worse than those of World War I.

Xi Jinping is driven by his grand vision of a "Chinese dream." He secured the foundations for an unprecedented third term as president at the 20th party congress last month, as he prepares for a "new great struggle" to achieve China's dominance on the world stage.¹ Meanwhile, the Biden administration is raising the pressure on Beijing through a series of legislative measures under the banner of "Made in America." It is bringing economic security to the forefront of its diplomacy, encouraging allies to participate in initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and the so-called Chip 4 alliance.

Moreover, the United States is openly criticizing China's human rights record, including the situation in Tibet and Xinjiang. There are growing concerns about the

risk of a military clash between the two countries, particularly over Taiwan. In its recently published national security strategy, the Biden administration refers to the coming "decisive decade" in the strategic competition against China.² The 2022 national defense strategy also calls China the "most consequential strategic competitor" of the United States.³

The deepening rift between the United States and China presents many countries, including South Korea, with a vexing foreign policy challenge. There was a profound conflict between Washington and Moscow during the Cold War, and there were tensions between Japan and the United States in the 1980s. However, Seoul was not pressured to take a side in either era. South Korea

signed a mutual defense treaty with Washington shortly after the 1953 armistice. This endured throughout the Cold War and to the present day. Even as

it challenged U.S. supremacy, Japan remained a treaty ally of the United States. The current situation is fundamentally different and more complicated. South Korea is increasingly under pressure to side with Washington or Beijing on a wide array of regional and international issues.

For some time, experts and policymakers called for relying on the United States for security while partnering with China for the economy (*an-mi-gyeong-joong*). This paradigm is now obsolete.

1 Gi-Wook Shin and Seong-Hyon Lee, "Op-Ed: In China, Xi Jinping Is Getting an Unprecedented Third Term. What Should the World Expect?", *Los Angeles Times*, October 20, 2022, <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2022-10-20/china-government-president-xi-jinping>.

2 The White House, *National Security Strategy*, October 12, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

3 U.S. Department of Defense, *2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, October 2022, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

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How should Korea navigate this turbulent landscape? For some time, experts and policymakers called for relying on the United States for security while partnering with China for the economy (*an-mi-gyeong-joong*). This paradigm is now obsolete.⁴ The Yoon administration has proclaimed a values-based foreign policy to strengthen solidarity between liberal democracies. In his opening statement at the ASEAN summit in Phnom Penh on November 11, President Yoon reiterated Korea's support for "strengthening a rule-based international order built on universal values" to foster "freedom, peace, and prosperity" in the Indo-Pacific.⁵

Will this approach be sufficient, however? Conflicting trends in Korea's domestic public opinion complicate the picture. On the one hand, anti-China sentiment is wors-

Anti-China sentiment is worsening by the day, even surpassing anti-Japan sentiment. At the same time, there are also growing complaints about the United States, especially after the exclusion of consumer tax credits for Korea's electric vehicles in the Inflation Reduction Act.

ening by the day, even surpassing anti-Japan sentiment. At the same time, there are also growing complaints about the United States, especially after the exclusion of consumer tax credits for Korea's electric vehicles in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Taking these developments into account, this essay seeks to explore the path ahead for Korea by analyzing the nature of U.S.-China tensions and assessing the durability of Pax Americana.

HEADING INTO THUCYDIDES TRAP?

U.S.-China relations are widely characterized as "Thucydides Trap." The Peloponnesian War is regarded as one of the main reasons behind the decline of ancient Greek civilization. Thucydides, an Athenian general and historian, famously wrote that the fundamental cause of this war was due to Spartan fears over the growth of Athenian power. Drawing from Thucydides, international

relations theorists have used the concept of a Thucydides Trap to explain tensions between a rising power and a status quo hegemon. Graham Allison, a professor of political science at Harvard, popularized this concept by applying it to Sino-U.S. relations in *Destined for War*. Beginning from the clash between Portugal and Spain in the late 15th century, Allison notes that there have been 16 instances where an emerging power challenged the hegemonic power. There was a war in all but four cases. When an emerging power is strong enough to challenge the hegemon, this creates structural stresses that frequently lead to a violent conflict.

Based on his analysis of the historical record, Allison warns that the rift between the United States (America First) and China (the Chinese dream) is much wider and deeper than most people perceive it to be. There is now a heightened risk of an armed confrontation between the two countries over Taiwan. Nevertheless, the likelihood of a catastrophic hegemonic war still remains low. Instead, there is likely to be a prolonged conflict and competition between Washington and Beijing centered on advanced technologies.

MADE IN CHINA 2025 AND THE CHINESE DREAM

The U.S.-China trade war began under the Trump administration. Made in China 2025 (MIC 2025), a policy roadmap published by the Chinese government in 2015, drew the attention of the United States and other Western countries. In its opening paragraph, it states that "building an internationally competitive manufacturing industry is the only way China can enhance its comprehensive national strength, ensure national security, and build itself into a world power."⁶

From the emphasis on "the *only* way," it is clear that MIC 2025 is not just an industrial policy. It is an integral element of China's national security strategy. Under this plan, China seeks to achieve progress in advanced

4 A recent survey of the South Korean public indicates that "only 43 percent of . . . respondents agree with this framework to some degree." See Gi-Wook Shin, Haley M. Gordon, and Hannah June Kim, "South Korea Votes, Beijing Watches," *American Purpose*, March 2, 2022, <https://www.americanpurpose.com/articles/south-korea-votes-beijing-watches/>. See also Gi-Wook Shin, "In the Wake of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine, Korea Should Join Its Peers in Defending the Liberal International Order," Shorenstein APARC, June 1, 2022, <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/wake-russia%E2%80%99s-invasion-ukraine-korea-should-join-its-peers-defending-liberal-international>.

5 ROK Presidential Office, "President Yoon's Opening Remarks at the ASEAN Summit" [in Korean], November 11, 2022, <https://www.korea.kr/news/policyNewsView.do?newsId=148908196>.

6 PRC State Council, "Notice of the State Council on the Publication of 'Made in China 2025,'" May 8, 2015. Translation provided by the Center for Security and Emerging Technology, Georgetown University, https://cset.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/to432_made_in_china_2025_EN.pdf.

manufacturing technologies such as big data, information technology, aerospace, artificial intelligence, and biotechnology. The goal is to become the world's leading manufacturing power by surpassing the United States.

After MIC 2025 sparked controversy in the West, the Chinese government has refrained from referring to it in public. Nonetheless, it has continued to implement this policy in practice. At the 2021 *Lianghui*, the concurrent annual meetings of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political and Consultative Conference, the Chinese government strengthened its resolve to reduce its dependence on U.S.-led global value chains as it sought to develop advanced technologies. Specifically, it emphasized the economic policy of dual circulation, which aims to raise domestic consumption while expanding exports of high value-added goods to foreign markets.

The advanced technologies that China is focusing on have potential military applications. For example, drones, artificial intelligence, and facial recognition technology can be used for reconnaissance satellites and unmanned aerial vehicles. China is pursuing military-civil fusion through the Military-Civil Fusion Development Committee, chaired by President Xi. This indicates that Xi intends to personally oversee China's ambitious efforts to challenge the United States. At this year's *Lianghui*, Xi stressed that China is in a strategically advantageous position in its deepening competition with the United States. Furthermore, he unveiled a plan to achieve his "dream of a strong military" by modernizing China's armed forces through mechanization and the use of advanced information technology. Despite a slowdown in China's economy, Xi increased defense spending by 7.1 percent.⁷

Those who analyze Xi Jinping's character classify him as an ideological purist, a true believer of socialism. He sees a historic opportunity for China to become a global superpower, and believes that it is his calling to realize socialism in the 21st century. Unlike his predecessors, he does not shy away from conflict with the United States. In a September 30, 2022, essay in *Qiushi*, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) leading theoretical journal, Xi stated that "today, we have never been so close to achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and we have never been more confident in our faith and ability to achieve this goal."⁸ Only two weeks before the CCP's

20th party congress, where he would secure a third term as general secretary, Xi stressed the need for strong leadership to prepare for the intensifying competition with the United States.

Under Xi's leadership, the CCP is driven by the zeitgeist of the Chinese dream, of realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The goal is to make the People's Republic of China (PRC) the most powerful economic and military power in the world. The emphasis on achieving this goal by 2049 is no coincidence, as it will mark the centennial of the CCP's victory in the Chinese Civil War, where it defeated the Kuomintang and established the PRC. This timeline also aligns with Xi's vision of building an advanced socialist country by 2050, which he proclaimed at the 19th National Congress of the CCP. China has a truly ambitious vision, one that leaves the United States no choice but to respond.

FROM AMERICA FIRST TO MADE IN AMERICA

When Donald Trump proclaimed "America First" as his slogan in his bid for the White House, his primary target was China. He blamed China for the loss of American jobs, claiming that the United States was suffering greatly from China's unfair trade practices and interference in markets. This message bolstered his support among white blue-collar workers in the Rust Belt, as they had witnessed a dramatic decline in manufacturing jobs. This enabled him to win key swing states in the Midwest, leading to his victory in the 2016 election.

Upon entering office, Trump consistently maintained a hardline policy against China. For example, the "Secure 5G and Beyond Act of 2020" passed the House 413-3 and cleared the Senate on March 6, 2020. The intent of this law was to create a "whole-of-government approach" to protect America's telecommunications networks from national security threats posed by Chinese companies such as Huawei and ZTE, which played a major role in the rollout of 5G networks across the world.⁹ His administration increased government oversight of Chinese investment in or acquisition of U.S. tech companies and scrutinized partnerships between American universities and Chinese entities. It tightened visa review procedures for students and visiting scholars from the PRC. It also designated Confucius Institutes in the United States as a "foreign mission" that "[advances] Beijing's global

7 "China to Raise Defense Spending by 7.1% to \$229 Billion," AP News, March 5, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/business-china-congress-d03b477b646b055241e7712f86bacee6>.

8 Xi Jinping, "The Historic Mission of the Chinese Communist Party in this New Era," *Qiushi*, September 30, 2022, http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2022-09/30/c_1129040825.htm. The original text reads "今天，我们比历史上任何时期都更接近、更有信心和能力实现中华民族伟大复兴的目标"。

9 For the full text, see Secure 5G and Beyond Act of 2020, Pub. L. No. 116-129, 134 Stat. 223 (2020), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-116publ129/pdf/PLAW-116publ129.pdf>.

propaganda and malign influence campaign on U.S. campuses and K-12 classrooms.”¹⁰ All of these measures stemmed from a recognition that China was rapidly closing in on the United States. The National Intelligence Council estimates that if current trends continue, China will surpass the United States to become the world’s largest economy between 2030 and 2035.

The American public’s view of China has continued to deteriorate after Trump left office. According to Pew

Research, 47% of respondents held a negative view of China in 2018. This surged to 60% in 2019 and 82% in 2022.¹¹ Despite a transfer of power to the Democrats in 2020, the overall orientation of U.S. policy toward China has remained unchanged. Under the banner of “Made in America,” the Biden administration has carefully crafted a dense web of policies aimed at China.

In the past three months alone, there have been a raft of legislative and executive measures that encompass semiconductors, electric cars and batteries, and biotechnology. This includes the CHIPS and Science Act (August 9), the IRA (August 16), and an Executive Order on Advancing Biotechnology and Biomanufacturing Innovation (September 12). These steps are intended to check China’s rise and promote the growth of America’s advanced technology and clean energy sectors. The CHIPS and Science Act sets aside \$52.7 billion dollars for America’s semiconductor industry.¹² Companies that receive subsidies under this law are barred from expanding operations or otherwise investing in China for the purpose of manufacturing advanced semiconductors.¹³ As noted below, certain provisions of the IRA will also have

significant ramifications for Korea’s exports of electric cars to the U.S. market.

As it undertakes a series of legislative steps at home, the Biden administration has pursued multilateralism abroad. This is a key difference from Trump, who

preferred bilateral arrangements. The Biden administration is seeking to institutionalize economic and technological alliances through initiatives such as IPEF and the Chip 4 alliance, and it is encouraging Korea and other allies to participate. By

stressing intellectual property rights and China’s unfair economic practices, strengthening its own technological capabilities, and reinforcing relevant international norms, Washington is compelling Beijing to operate within a U.S.-led international order. Even in Silicon Valley, where anti-China sentiment is not as deeply rooted as it is in Washington, there are serious concerns about the risk of Chinese industrial espionage and intellectual property theft. There is a palpable hesitation among start-ups to accept funding from Chinese investors. Chinese investment in America increased throughout the 2000s until reaching a peak of \$46 billion in 2016. This plummeted by almost 90% to \$5 billion in 2018, due in part to political tensions.¹⁴

WILL PAX AMERICANA ENDURE?

Since the beginning of Pax Americana in 1945, there have been three challenges to America’s status as a global hegemon: by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, Japan in the 1980s, and China in the present day. The Soviet Union engaged in a tense military confrontation with the United States for decades, but collapsed in the late 1980s due to

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10 U.S. Department of State, “Designation of the Confucius Institute U.S. Center as a Foreign Mission of the PRC,” August 13, 2020, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/designation-of-the-confucius-institute-u-s-center-as-a-foreign-mission-of-the-prc/index.html>.

11 Christine Huang, Laura Silver, and Laura Clancy, “China’s Partnership With Russia Seen as Serious Problem for the U.S.,” Pew Research Center, April 28, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/04/28/chinas-partnership-with-russia-seen-as-serious-problem-for-the-us/>.

12 The White House, “Fact Sheet: CHIPS and Science Act Will Lower Costs, Create Jobs, Strengthen Supply Chains, and Counter China,” August 9, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/09/fact-sheet-chips-and-science-act-will-lower-costs-create-jobs-strengthen-supply-chains-and-counter-china/>.

13 Kinling Lo, “US Chips Act Bars American Companies in China from Building ‘Advanced Tech’ Factories for 10 years,” *South China Morning Post*, September 7, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/3191596/us-chips-act-bars-american-companies-china-building-advanced-tech>.

14 Jacob Funk Kirkegaard, “Chinese Investment into the US and EU Has Plummeted since 2016,” Peterson Institute for International Economics, September 16, 2019, <https://www.piie.com/research/piie-charts/chinese-investment-us-and-eu-has-plummeted-2016>.

the limitations and internal contradictions of its communist system. Japan once threatened to displace America from the apex of the global capitalist order, but lapsed into the “Lost Two Decades” after its economic bubble burst in the early 1990s. What can we say about the future of China, which is engaging in a fierce competition against the United States? In short, I believe that China will not surpass the United States in our time.

Those who predict that China will eclipse the United States point to economic trends. China surpassed Japan in 2010 to become the world’s second largest economy. It also became the world’s largest exporter in 2014, when its gross domestic product exceeded 60% of U.S. GDP. In purchasing power parity terms, China has already leapfrogged the United States. Both present-day statistics and long-term economic trends point in one direction. If the Chinese government makes a concerted effort to invest in key strategic industries, as outlined in MIC 2025, it is certainly feasible for China to surpass the United States to become the world’s leading manufacturing power by 2049.

China’s growth was enabled in no small part by talented individuals who studied abroad and then returned home to apply their experiences and insights. As China closes its doors to the outside world, it is also limiting its potential to become a leader in innovation.

However, China still lags far behind the United States in many areas, including military power. In absolute terms, for example, its defense spending is only one third of what the United States spends on its military. There are also a host of political, social, demographic, and economic challenges that hamper China in its campaign to attain global supremacy.¹⁵ Xi’s aggressive anti-corruption campaign is an indication of widespread corruption in Chinese society. There are also serious human rights issues in Tibet and Xinjiang, and the three Ts of Taiwan, Tibet, and Tiananmen cannot be openly discussed. China’s problems extend beyond its borders. With a land border of nearly 14,000 miles with 14 countries, managing territorial disputes is a tall order. There are also tensions with its maritime neighbors in the South China Sea. China’s efforts at public diplomacy have been unsuccessful, as can be seen from the widespread rise

of anti-Chinese sentiment in South Korea and other countries.

Amidst these challenges, Xi Jinping secured a third term as president at the 20th party congress on October 16. Since Deng Xiaoping, China has managed leadership transitions in a relatively stable fashion. Under a system of collective leadership, the leader served two five-year terms and appointed his successor in advance. These practices created a certain degree of predictability, stability, and transparency, thereby facilitating China’s dramatic economic growth and making it powerful enough to compete with the United States. Xi Jinping has sharply broken from this tradition as he seeks to become a 21st-century emperor.

Some argue that China is destined to become an imperial power. However, it will be difficult for a fast follower such as China to build an empire. In general, a country must be a first mover or trendsetter to become a hegemonic power. For example, in the corporate sector, Xiaomi may catch up to Samsung, but can it replace Apple? Tech companies such as Alibaba and Baidu

have achieved rapid growth thanks to a sizable domestic market, but they have emulated the business models of Amazon and Google. They have not created a new, transformative platform. China’s growth was enabled in no small part by talented individuals who studied abroad and then returned home to apply their experiences and insights. As China closes its doors to the outside world, it is also limiting its potential to become a

leader in innovation.

Furthermore, China is failing to serve as a role model for other countries. Except for a few countries in Africa and Asia, the Belt and Road Initiative has yet to yield meaningful results. If anything, anti-China sentiment is deepening across Europe, North America, and Asia. While the Soviet Union had the communist bloc, China lacks a reliable group of allies. China has indeed achieved remarkable growth in the past 30 years, presenting lucrative economic opportunities for individuals and companies in China and abroad. However, talented individuals across the world would arguably prefer to study, work, and live in the United States than in China. Japan’s post-war growth inspired a “Japan boom,” a desire to study and emulate Japan. There is no comparable “China boom” to speak of.

15 The dynamism of its universities also provides the United States with a significant advantage. See Gi-Wook Shin, “Why Korea’s Future Depends on Its Universities,” Shorenstein APARC, October 13, 2022, <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/why-korea%E2%80%99s-future-depends-its-universities>.

As long as those who have attained success in China eventually end up in the United States, China cannot become the world's leading superpower. These individuals are voting with their feet.

RICH MANDARINS

The Palo Alto area, where I have lived and worked for over two decades, has some of the highest housing prices in the United States. A small condo, which is equivalent to an apartment unit in Korea, costs over \$1 million. Since I moved to Stanford in 2001, the Bay Area has seen three significant surges in housing prices. The first two waves resulted from a sudden increase in wealth among young tech workers when Google and Facebook went public. On the other hand, the third surge is said to be related to Chinese residents. Locals call these individuals, who purchase high-end housing in cash, “rich mandarins.”

This group includes company founders and investment professionals, as well as entrepreneurs who have listed their companies on New York's Stock Exchange. They are mostly in their 50s, and they played a critical role in China's economic growth through their contributions to the IT sector. Although they have amassed an enormous amount of wealth, they are anxious about China's prospects and the country's uncertain political future. They are also worried that the government could seize their companies or their individual property. Their families have already moved to America, and they conduct business by shuttling between China and the United States. Some have left China in search of a new life and career.

As long as those who have attained success in China eventually end up in the United States, China cannot become the world's leading superpower. These individuals are voting with their feet. Professor Wang Jisi of Peking University has said that “the day the U.S. truly declines is when visa lines in front of its consulates are no longer crowded.”¹⁶ There is pessimism even among China's economic elite about the country's future, especially as Xi Jinping further tightens political control under a one-man dictatorship.

For China to surpass the United States and lead the international order, we should see the opposite. Instead of China's elites rushing toward the United States, there should be an outflow of American elites to China. Only then can we truly speak of a Pax Sinica. In addition, countries across the world should seek to emulate the Chinese model, not the American model. Based on my own knowledge and experience, I am convinced that the likelihood of such trends emerging in the next 20 or 30

years is vanishingly small. It is thus realistic and reasonable to expect Pax Americana to continue into the next generation, with clear implications for Korea's foreign policy going forward.

AN EMPIRE OF LIBERTY

The United States is a hegemonic power that wields unparalleled influence across the world. It exercises its economic and military power to uphold its political, military, and cultural dominance. Institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF are critical elements of Pax Americana, as are programs such as the Peace Corps and Fulbright Scholarships. During the War on Terror, the United States sacrificed great blood and treasure in prolonged conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Over the past 100 years, the United States took part in 35 wars, large and small. It will likely be recorded as the country that has participated in the most armed conflicts. Pax Americana appears to be much more robust than Pax Romana or Pax Britannica.

For these reasons, Korea's progressives criticize American imperialism and advocate for cultivating closer ties with China. We should ask, however, whether a Pax Sinica would be preferable to Pax Americana.

Compared to that of the Soviet Union or present-day China, America's empire is far more sophisticated. History also tells us so. Although the United States is criticized at times for failing to live up to its proclaimed values, it has shown the strongest commitment to democracy and human rights of any superpower. In an ideal world, the international order would be built solely on sovereign equality. However, any superpower will seek to construct its preferred international order and defend it using various levers of power, including the use of force. To maintain its global hegemony, the United States has effectively deployed a mixture of hard power, soft power, and smart power.

Based on historical experience and a critical analysis of the current state of the world, it would be dangerous to presuppose that Pax Sinica will displace Pax Americana anytime soon. From Korea's standpoint, it would be unwise to call for strategic ambiguity or for maintaining an equidistant posture between the United States and China. As previously noted, the paradigm of

16 Tuvia Gering, “Discourse Power,” May 30, 2022, <https://discoursepower.substack.com/p/discourse-power-may-30-2022>.

an-mi-gyeong-joong is no longer viable.¹⁷ The Yoon administration's clear articulation of its intent to build a values-based alliance with the United States and other liberal democracies is commendable. In fact, there are only a handful of countries other than Korea—Israel, Canada, and Australia—that have both a defense treaty and a free trade agreement (FTA) with the United States. Korea must foster relationships with these countries, which are a valuable diplomatic asset.

At the same time, it would be imprudent to focus only on abstract values and neglect vital economic or security interests. Let us consider a recent example. Korea's leading conglomerates—including Samsung Electronics, Hyundai Motor Group, and SK—have pledged to invest \$26 billion in the United States this year alone. However, the recently passed IRA only provides consumer tax credits to electric vehicles manufactured in North America. There is deep disappointment and anger in Korea, as this creates a significant disadvantage for Korea's auto companies. To put it bluntly, Korea's companies are paying the cost of the Korean government's failure to address stark economic realities.

first is an op-ed entitled “Yoon Has Been Played by the United States” (September 20) by Park Hyeon, a senior columnist at the progressive *Hankyoreh*. The second is an op-ed entitled “The IRA Undermines Trust in the Alliance” (September 26) by Lee Mi-Sook, a well-known conservative commentator, in the *Munhwa Ilbo*.¹⁸ As former Washington correspondents, Park and Lee both have firsthand knowledge of America's inner workings. Park's column focuses on criticizing the Yoon administration, while Lee's piece expresses concern about a weakened U.S.-Korea alliance. Nevertheless, they both show that U.S. policies aimed at China could spark anti-American sentiment in Korea.

Park writes that “the United States, under the banner of economic security, is tying its allies and friendly countries into a U.S.-led economic bloc, weakening China—the hegemonic challenger—while seeking a revival of its domestic manufacturing industry.” He begins from the premise that “this kind of protectionism is harmful for open, export-driven economies such as Korea.” With full knowledge of this state of affairs, Hyundai Motor Group pledged to invest more than \$10 billion in the United

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If the Yoon administration indeed seeks to reduce Korea's economic dependence on China, it should have a roadmap to strengthen economic ties with the United States while protecting Korea's own interests. As the United States brings economic security to the forefront, Korea should devise a strategy to avoid repeating the same mistake. Furthermore, even if Korea partners with the United States in advanced technologies that affect national security, it can still maintain economic relations with China in other sectors, including retail, consumer goods, and manufacturing. For values-based diplomacy to be successful, it must be upheld by interest-based diplomacy.

IN SEARCH OF A NON-PARTISAN FOREIGN POLICY

In this context, it is worth closely examining two recently published columns regarding the IRA controversy. The

States, expecting its cars to be granted subsidies in return. Instead, it was given the cold shoulder. Park adds that “the Presidential Office fell into disarray” and missed a golden opportunity to raise these concerns with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who visited Korea shortly after the final text of the IRA was released on July 27. This failure is characteristic of Yoon's foreign policy, Park concludes.

In her column, Lee writes that “the IRA could once again imperil the U.S.-Korea alliance, which faced a serious crisis under the Trump administration.” She goes on to say that “the exclusion of Korean electric vehicles from subsidies, despite the ‘national treatment’ clause in the Korea-U.S. FTA, is raising suspicions about an underlying lack of concern for Korea in the United States.” Moreover, she adds that “there are signs this dispute over subsidies could turn into something far worse—a question of hurt national pride.” She warns that “if America fails to show

¹⁷ Shin, “In the Wake of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine.”

¹⁸ These columns can be viewed at <https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/opinion/column/1059368.html> and <http://www.munhwa.com/news/view.html?no=2022092601033011000002>, respectively.

flexibility and sticks to the original provision of the IRA, this will not only erode Koreans' trust in the alliance, but also provide political fodder for progressives (former pro-democracy activists) to stoke anti-Americanism." In closing, Lee calls upon the United States "to consider Korea's view of the situation and act in a way that honors the spirit of the U.S.-Korea alliance."

As these op-eds indicate, both progressives and conservatives are openly expressing their concern about the United States' failure to show adequate concern for Korea. It is commendable for the Yoon administration to focus on strengthening the U.S.-Korea alliance and building solidarity around shared values, but it must also call on Washington to reciprocate Seoul's efforts. For instance, as Lee Mi-Sook notes in her column, Korea could suggest an amendment to the IRA to apply subsidies to electric vehicles produced in countries that have an FTA with the United States. Policy missteps could lead to a resurgence of anti-American sentiment in Korea, putting the Yoon administration in a political quagmire. The controversy over the IRA may be the first of many such issues, especially if the Biden administration intensifies its "Made in America" policy.

To overcome the unforgiving realities of Korea's foreign policy environment, the Yoon administration must be able to rely on a robust domestic consensus and strong popular support. Foreign policy requires a high level of expertise. Some issues have to be resolved behind the scenes, with experts and government officials playing a leading role. That said, foreign policy should not be left entirely in the hands of policy elites, and it should not be a partisan political football. On several occasions, minor incidents during President Yoon's recent overseas visits received undue attention in the press and became the subject of ridicule back home. This is

entirely unnecessary. For example, take the controversy surrounding a hot mic moment during a visit to New York in September.¹⁹ Looking from the outside in, it is difficult to understand why the whole country became engulfed in a bitter partisan debate about a trivial gaffe. Little attention was paid to the substance of the visit.

It is vital to establish a norm whereby important foreign policy issues are addressed in a non-ideological, non-partisan manner that garners broad public support. To do so, the Korean government must increase transparency in its decision-making process when it comes to major issues. It must also endeavor to gather and incorporate public opinion in foreign policy, so that the public does not feel unduly detached from the policymaking process. Governments across the world now recognize domestic public opinion as a critical element of their foreign policy strategy. Diplomacy cannot be effective without public support. Korea's diplomats, who are in the trenches of international diplomacy, need all the support they can get.

There is no telling when Korea might be battered by a perfect storm in its foreign policy, given the current state of U.S.-China relations. As Hal Brands and Michael Beckley warn in *Danger Zone: The Coming Conflict with China*, the race between the United States and China may end up being a sprint, not a marathon. This decade may be the most dangerous period in U.S.-China relations. In the early 20th century, Korea lost its sovereignty after failing to establish a coherent foreign policy, with different factions supporting China, Russia, and Japan. Upon liberation in 1945, extreme ideological confrontation split the peninsula in two. Korea cannot afford to make the same mistake again.

Translated by Raymond Ha

¹⁹ President Yoon, after a meeting with President Biden, was caught on a hot mic using an expletive in reference to members of the ROK National Assembly.