

Sejong Institute
"A Global Partnership between Japan-Republic of Korea"

June 23, 2025
Hideshi Futori

I am delighted to visit the Republic of Korea again in this milestone year that marks the 60th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between the ROK and Japan. I would also like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to give a talk today at the Sejong Institute.

With Lee Jae-myung having taken office as the new president, there are concerns in Japan about his hardline stance toward our country. However, during the election campaign, he spoke of Japan as being an "important cooperative partner," and emphasized the continuity of diplomatic and security policies. Under the new administration's "pragmatic diplomacy", I hope that the momentum of the friendly relations established under the Kishida and Yoon administrations will be maintained.

President Trump, through high-tariff policies, is intentionally undermining the international order based on the rule of law. Furthermore, China, Russia, and North Korea continue to violate international rules and attempt to change the status quo by force. With the international order being seriously challenged, strategic cooperation between Japan and the ROK is needed more than ever.

Together our countries should clearly state our goals to create a new global partnership. We are neighbors and at the same time, we are allies sharing universal values such as freedom, human rights, and democracy. By issuing a new joint declaration titled the "Japan-Republic of Korea Global Partnership," our two nations must strengthen our relationship in a global and institutional context.

As a new strategic initiative, we need to strengthen cooperation in regional security and economic fields. Firstly, consultations between foreign and defense ministers, so called the two-plus-two meetings, between Japan and the ROK should be a regular event. It is vital in the current turbulent environment that Japan and the ROK have a framework in place to discuss diplomatic and security matters including enhancing joint exercises more closely. In recent years, Japan has held two-plus-two meetings with 9 countries. However, surprisingly Japan and the ROK have yet to hold such a meeting.

Secondly, an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, known as ACSA, should be signed between Japan and the ROK. Negotiations to do so began at a Japan-ROK Defense Ministerial Meeting in 2011, but in the face of high political hurdles, an agreement has yet to be signed. Japan has already signed ACSAs with 8 countries, but has still not signed with the ROK, the most strategically important partner, is a critical issue. Domestic Legislation for Peace and Security has enabled Japan's Self-

Defense Forces to provide logistical support, not only for the US military, but also likeminded foreign militaries. In addition to establishing a framework for defense, signing an ACSA will also provide a logistical support for emergencies.

Thirdly, the ROK should actively participate in the Quad (the strategic dialogue between Japan, the United States, Australia, and India). Former President Yoon spoke positively about joining this group. The Quad is one of only a handful of international mechanisms that promotes trustworthy international cooperation between countries that share the same values. I have repeatedly proposed to the Japanese government that a Quad Plus needs to be established. In order to create a successful global partnership, the ROK should participate in issues of regional security.

It is also important to promote strategic economic cooperation. One example of this is for the ROK to join the CPTPP. Japan has played a leading role in developing this partnership. The CPTPP is not just a free trade agreement, it also establishes 21st century rules, providing new standards for global trade and investments. The ROK shares the same universal values as other CPTPP members. By joining this partnership, Japan and the ROK can further cooperate to expand global free trade.

The final topic is regarding North Korea. North Korea's ballistic missile launches and nuclear tests pose a global threat. It is more important now than ever for Japan and the ROK to demonstrate leadership and build an international framework that will not tolerate unlawful conduct and human rights violations. Ever since I was elected, I have made it my life's work to address the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea. Unfortunately, diplomatic negotiations have made no progress for over 23 years. With the clock ticking, I will continue to pursue all possible avenues to returning the abduction victims, and bring Kim Jong Un to the negotiating table. I sincerely ask for strong solidarity and cooperation from the ROK toward resolving the abduction issue.

First, there is mutual interest, then, there is mutual understanding. I believe by becoming global partners, Japan and the ROK can overcome our issues and contribute in solving global issues. The road ahead may not be smooth, but our strategic global cooperation will be extremely important for peace and stability for the international community. With a new administration for the ROK and the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations, this year must be used to further strengthen relations between our countries. I will actively pursue parliamentary diplomacy. I will conclude my talk by expressing my sincere hope that Japan and the ROK will work together for mutual prosperity, as well as the peace and stability around the world. Thank you for your kind attention.