

2015

OCT  
07

## Paramount issue faced with North Korea is Denuclearization

Issue/Region :

Alliance, Security/America, Korean Peninsula, US-Canada



On Wednesday, October 07, 2015, the Asan Institute for Policy Studies hosted a Special Lecture by Mr. Antony J. Blinken, Deputy Secretary of State at the U.S. Department of State.

During his lecture, Mr. Blinken discussed the ROK-US alliance, especially in the context of President Park's visit to Washington, D.C. He emphasized the importance of the United States' focus on Asia, stating that the "reason is simple" as the region is home to

three of the U.S.' top ten trading partners as well as “some of the most wired and innovative cities in the world.”

Regarding Asia, Blinken stressed the foundational nature of the ROK-US alliance comprised of economic cooperation with high standards for a free trade agreement, shared security and defense cooperation, as well as the development of close bonds through educational and exchange opportunities. Presently, there are more Korean students studying in the U.S. per capita than anywhere else in the world. Nonetheless, this alliance is not enough to ensure a stable Korean peninsula, and there is a need to move towards a regional and global partnership.

Blinken highlighted that the paramount issue faced with North Korea is its denuclearization program and affirmed that “the U.S. shares President Park’s vision for a peaceful reunification with a North Korea free from nuclear weapons.” North Korea needs to meet its denuclearization obligations for the entire international community. As Blinken stresses, the U.S. supports Seoul’s field office for the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to document North Korea’s human rights violations.

Park’s visit to Washington will strengthen resolve in meeting this challenge, along with energizing efforts to pioneer “new frontiers.” Such frontiers include cyberspace with the power and risks of global connectivity, innovation, aeronautics research and space exploration, health security, environmental protection, and green energy industries.

Blinken concluded with remarks about the U.S. – Korea – Japan trilateral cooperation, emphasizing the importance of “common and coordinated approaches to regional and global issues” and how it offers opportunities for security issues. The East Asia Summit (EAS) is a premier form of dealing with political and security issues of global importance. With the upcoming 10th anniversary, the U.S. is looking forward to working with ASEAN and other nations to strengthen regional ties.

There were three notable questions to Mr. Blinken in the Q&A Session. In response to the first question whether the U.S. would actually engage with North Korea, Blinken points out that the U.S. has recently engaged with multiple countries it has had long complicated histories of opposition with. Specifically, he cited the negotiation of the Iran nuclear deal, the normalization of U.S.-Cuba relations, and improved relations with Vietnam. The U.S. is thus prepared for talks with North Korea if it is willing to be serious about denuclearization.

A second question addressed the topic of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the U.S. State Department's view towards China and South Korea's negotiations to join the alliance. Blinken's response highlighted that the TPP itself is a significant achievement that is believed to be "tremendously beneficial not only to the US but to all the signatories" with potential to serve as "a vehicle that brings in more participants." Planned to be a "race to the top, not the bottom," Blinken explains that the TPP will "expand opportunities for trade and investment in ways that will significantly increase commerce, open markets, produce job growth ... and establish higher standards for protecting the environment, labor force, and intellectual property." Blinken underscored that the TPP was "not designed to encircle China," and that the U.S. will welcome both Chinese and South Korean membership if all standards for the alliance are met and regional integration is enhanced. The U.S. welcomes China's emergence and success, as "everybody benefits from [the Chinese economy's] success and prosperity." Moreover, as initial conversations have already begun with South Korea about what is required for joining the TPP, Blinken confirms that the U.S. is "very much looking forward" to carrying this process further.

The third question raised the U.S. role in improving Korea and Japan relations, specifically over the comfort women issue. Although Korea and Japan share common values towards democracy and human rights, the U.S. plays a crucial role in mediating the two countries over historical issues. Blinken's response highlights that the U.S. has "clear strategic interest in a strong relationship between Korea and Japan" and that there is a need for stronger alliances to address a "broad shared agenda in interests and challenges to meet." Blinken points to the recent trilateral meeting in New York, where the U.S., Korea, and Japan were able to cooperate on various issues, making it "evident that common interests shared, especially those that Korea and Japan share, far outweigh any differences, ... [specifically] historical issues." Nonetheless, Blinken admits that the comfort women issue was an "egregious violation on human rights" and reassures that the U.S. has "suggested to Japan that they engage on this issues of historical sensitivity with great sensitivity to build stronger relations in the present." Going forward, it is necessary to resolve these historical issues with direct dialogue and a mutually agreeable solution that "promotes healing and sensitivity to the tragic plight of the comfort women and that then allows a focus on the future ... so that this problem is resolved once and for all." Ultimately, the U.S. will continue to make itself available to both Japan and Korea to be of assistance where necessary but both countries to engage directly with restraint, determination, and will to bring this historical dispute to a close.

Dr. Choi Kang, Vice President of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, gave introductory remarks and moderated the Q&A session.

※*The full transcript of the Asan Special Lecture is available for download above.*

**Date/Time:** Wednesday, October 7, 2015 / 5:00pm – 6:00pm

**Place:** Auditorium (1F), The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

**Written by:** Rachel Leng

## Video

151007 앤토니 블링큰 미 국무부 부장관 아산특별강연



⇒ **Mr. Antony J. Blinken** was sworn in by Secretary Kerry as Deputy Secretary of State on January 9, 2015. Mr. Blinken began his government service at the State Department where, from 1993 to 1994, he served as Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs. He was also Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies from 2001 to 2002, and from 2002 to 2008, Mr. Blinken served on Capitol Hill as Democratic Staff Director for the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Most recently, he served as Assistant to the President and Principal

Deputy National Security Advisor for the Obama Administration and during President Obama's first term, he was Deputy Assistant to the President and National Security Advisor to the Vice President.