

An American View on Korea's Global Leadership Role

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The Republic of Korea is a rising country that is taking on new global leadership responsibilities. Korea is leading the way in “defining a new role” for rising middle power states in the global system. There are other rising middle power states, but Korea is unique in its efforts to take on the responsibilities of reforming global institutions, providing global public goods, and charting a path for a 21st century system of shared governance and leadership. In the background, the “global power transition” underway in the international system and the increasingly complex and challenging nature of global problems – such as global warming, nuclear proliferation, health pandemics, and economic and financial instability – create the necessity for new coalitions of leadership. The old postwar system in which the United States was the dominant provider of global governance is giving way to a new era of shared leadership. New coalitions and networks of leadership are beginning to emerge. In this regard, Korea is a pivotal state in shaping and leading this global governance transition. In the last several years under the banner of Global Korea, Korea has begun to step forward to host various global summits – for example, the G20 summit and the Nuclear Safety Summit. It has also affirmed an expanded security partnership role with the United States in its contributions to the Iraq and Afghan wars. Moreover, in the area of economic development, Korea hosted an international summit for aid last year. It has also developed a “green growth” vision of low carbon industry and economy and developed “green alliances” with other countries. In looking to the future, Korea can use its own historical-developmental experience as a model for the world. Korea is the first ODA recipient to become a donor. It has 4,000 Peace Corps workers around the world now. Korea can use its strong experience in development to help formulate international strategies for poor and transitional countries in Africa and Southeast Asia. At the same time, Korea can use its experience – and its great success – as a liberal democracy to work with the Community of Democracies to strengthen democratic institutions around the world.

The United States and Korea have a very close relationship. Their security alliance is deeply rooted in both countries. The two countries are also moving toward a trade agreement. These bilateral relationships are critically important to regional security and prosperity. But so too is today's agenda for multilateral partnership and shared leadership. Korea has an opportunity to help define how the 21st century organizes itself for a new era of shifting power and complex global interdependence. The United States clearly hopes that Korea will continue along this leadership path, doing so despite domestic political shifts.