



The Australian Institute of International Affairs and
Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security

Global Korea, Global Australia Roundtable

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Closing Remarks

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When the Australian Institute of International Affairs met with the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security (IFANS) of the Republic of Korea and proposed a joint event, it was agreed that there were a number of topics where unofficial dialogue between Australia and Korea would be beneficial.

Despite very different histories, Australia and Korea are among the most like-minded countries in the international system. Both countries share substantial economic ties and have complimentary economies; both are increasing their cooperation in the areas of security and defence; and both are increasing their cooperation in global and regional forums. Importantly, both countries share similar values, have mostly consistent interests and display great admiration and friendship for one other.

Given that both countries view the other as important, the question is how to maximise the mutual benefits of cooperation.

The “Global Korea, Global Australia” event looked at a range of areas for potential cooperation. The Roundtable commenced with an analysis of the two country’s grand foreign policy strategies. The discussion then turned to examining three levels of cooperation: the global governance level, the regional level, and the bilateral level. US-Sino relations, power shifts in the Asia-Pacific region, the Group of Twenty (G20) and the East Asia Summit (EAS) were all raised as issues for possible future collaboration and recognised as areas where both countries could potentially have an impact as middle powers.

Broadly, the discussion examined four main issues:

- Australia-Korea: Middle Powers’ Grand Strategy
- Cooperation in Global Governance
- Regional Architecture in the Asia Pacific
- Australia-Korea Common Economic Agenda

In the first of the four sessions on strategic direction, the disturbing scenario of the growing power of China in the absence of sufficiently strong international institutions was raised. Another concern voiced related to the uncertainty surrounding North Korea and the potential for sudden change in the country after the passing of Kim Jong-Il. Experts in the field remarked that there is still the

possibility of another power shift in the near future. In the face of this uncertainty, and at a time of the return of Asia to its historic position in world affairs, there is a particular role for middle powers like Australia and Korea to play in promoting stability in the region.

These commonalities suggest that Australia and Korea would benefit from continuing academic exchange on a range of topics. This exchange could be facilitated through events, research collaboration, research visits and/or visiting experts. One possible option could be to host an event for Australian and Korean experts on China to come together to discuss what each party has observed occurring in China. Another would be to work on targeted research or a publication examining the way that Australia and Korea are managing their alliance relationship with the US. This issue of managing the US strategic alliance has been at the heart of debate in both countries and is a topic on which both sides can collaborate and share knowledge. At present, Australia is in the process of preparing a White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century. It is important that the outcomes of this White Paper are disseminated in the region.

During the second session on global governance, the major conclusion reached was that the G20 stands apart as a key forum for Australia-Korea cooperation. Notwithstanding the very positive Korean views of the United Nations, G20 is the forum which provides Australia and Korea with a seat at the table for the middle power activism that each is seeking. It is clear that Australia and Korea both have a great stake in the success of the G20 and thus in nurturing and supporting the organisation. Australia and Korea should continue to work together to support the G20 and to strengthen it as an institution. In particular the two countries should strive to work together on specific issues in order for the G20 to have impact. G20 should continue to focus on core economic and financial rule setting roles, but also on specific issues such as climate change, energy and development. On the subject of energy there were some concrete suggestions relating to low carbon energy, nuclear safety, multilateral fuel supply and non-proliferation. Forum attendees analysed current cooperation in efforts to increase aid effectiveness. Particularly with Australia now announced as the host for G20 in 2014, there are real opportunities to work with and learn from South Korea.

The third session focused on regional architecture in Asia Pacific. Again there was wide consensus that the EAS currently presents the best opportunity for both countries to further their interests in the region and internationally. Whether or not it is seen as desirable to have a primary institution or whether it must be accepted that there will always be multiple institutions, it is in both Australia's and Korea's interests to give the EAS attention. It was suggested that as like-minded, non-threatening regional and global powers, Australia and Korea should cooperate on shaping a vision for sustained regional cooperation. This will entail strong leadership and showcasing the possibilities of regional cooperation. Korean participants indicated that the progress of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is being monitored, including how it may change the interests of various countries. There may be some potential for second track dialogue.

In the last session on the Australian- Korean economic agenda, it was agreed that the two countries' complementary economies can benefit from expanding trade, particularly through a Free Trade Agreement. As such, there should be renewed efforts to conclude negotiating despite the context of some domestic opposition. Other concrete suggestions to emerge from the discussion included the

possibility of Australian companies partnering with Korean counterparts to create a logistics hub; further cooperation on maritime security; and strengthening the role of education and the education sector. This last goal in particular has a good chance of success considering the growth and attractiveness of Korean culture worldwide. A final point that was made was that both countries should continue their own internal economic reform process. The status of both countries depends fundamentally on economic strength, therefore continuing each country's individual economic reform processes is key to preserving that high status.

A final conclusion to be drawn from discussion was that, in both countries, there continues to be a lack of understanding and appreciation for the importance of the relationship, despite some improvements. The AIIA clearly has a role in educating the Australian public in the importance of Korea: the AIIA holds more than 200 events per year on the international issues affecting Australia. The AIIA will continue to promote public understanding and interest in these issues.