



**Wilson
Center**



Executive Summary (Continued)

Recent geopolitical events from Russia's incursion into Ukraine to the strategic competition between the United States and China and the burgeoning Russia and Democratic Republic People's of Korea's (DPRK) arms trades serve as reminders of the importance of close security cooperation between the United States and the Republic of Korea. Such close policy alignment between the US and ROK governments—exemplified in the Washington Declaration's establishment of the Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) and the US-ROK-Japan Trilateral Summit at Camp David—adds weight to both countries' bilateral and multilateral engagement in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

Beyond these security challenges, there is political appetite for the expansion of the US and ROK collaboration in nontraditional security. Pitfalls from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the US CHIPS and Science Act, however, drained nascent enthusiasm between the two countries. Moving forward, the United States should seize the opportunity to strengthen cooperation in three key areas of collaboration: 1) economic security and supply chain resiliency, 2) digital and cybersecurity; and, 3) climate & energy policy.

As one of the United States' closest allies in the Indo-Pacific, mutual political alignment between the United States and ROK bolsters US foreign policy implementation, continuity, and expansion in the Indo-Pacific region. Ensuring US and ROK policy alignment endures through 2024 and beyond is paramount for the continued success of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy at large.

Policy Recommendations

The evolving US-ROK Global Comprehensive Strategic Partnership plays an increasing—and expanding—role in US foreign policy toward the Indo-Pacific region.

Geopolitical Security Engagement:

- Mutual policy coordination between the United States and the ROK in both traditional and non-traditional security dynamics should be considered as vital for furthering US strategic interests in the region.
- Strengthening US-ROK strategic defense cooperation, through the newly-institutionalized US-ROK Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) vis-à-vis an emboldened DPRK should remain high on the US administration's priority list. Key consideration of the ROK's participation as an invited observer to NATO and, potentially, AUKUS could serve as further avenues for defense cooperation.
- Institutionalization of US-ROK-Japan trilateral relations, although early, should continue to be seen as important for both security and economic reasons. While

US-ROK Global Strategic Partnership in the Indo-Pacific

Introduction

The alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea (ROK) plays an increasingly important role in US foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific region. The 2023 Biden-Yoon Summit proclaimed the triumphs of the past with an eye towards the future. During the summit, the two nations celebrated the 70th anniversary of the alliance, establishing the diplomatic launching pad for the new US-ROK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Today, the United States and the ROK have defined clear—and, importantly, mutual—foreign policy agendas on security, defense, trade, and energy. As the United States and the ROK look towards the future of the alliance, both opportunities and challenges lay on the horizon.

Since the 1950s, the relations between the United States and the ROK have grown, evolving, and strengthening into a comprehensive strategic partnership. The [1953 Mutual Defense Treaty](#), signed in the aftermath of the devastating Korea War (1950-1953), codified the US defense commitments towards ensuring peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. A bilateral agreement between the United States and the ROK, the treaty, nonetheless, punctuated the importance of regional stability and security hinged on the Korean Peninsula. In no uncertain terms, the treaty serves as a reminder that “no potential aggressor could be under the illusion that either of them stands alone in the Pacific area.”

As the United States and the ROK look towards the future of the alliance, there are both opportunities, challenges, and, if not careful, pitfalls that remain.

In particularly, recent geopolitical events from Russia’s incursion into Ukraine to the strategic

competition between the United States and China and the burgeoning Russia-North Korean arms trades serve as reminders of the importance of close security cooperation between the United States and the ROK. Such close policy alignment between the US and ROK governments—exemplified in the Washington Declaration’s establishment of the Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) and the US-ROK-Japan Trilateral Summit at Camp David—adds weight to both countries’ bilateral and multilateral engagement in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

Beyond these security challenges, there is both political drive and appetite for the expansion of the US and ROK collaboration in nontraditional security fields of economic security, digital infrastructure, cyberspace, climate, and energy policy. While lessons from the [US Inflation Reduction Act \(IRA\)](#) and the [CHIPS and Science Act](#) drained early enthusiasm between the two countries, the boom in multi-sector expansion of the United States and Republic of Korea’s coordination presents undeniable opportunities. The United States should seize the opportunity to strengthen cooperation in three key areas of collaboration: 1) economic security and supply chain resiliency, 2) digital and cybersecurity; and, 3) climate and energy policy.

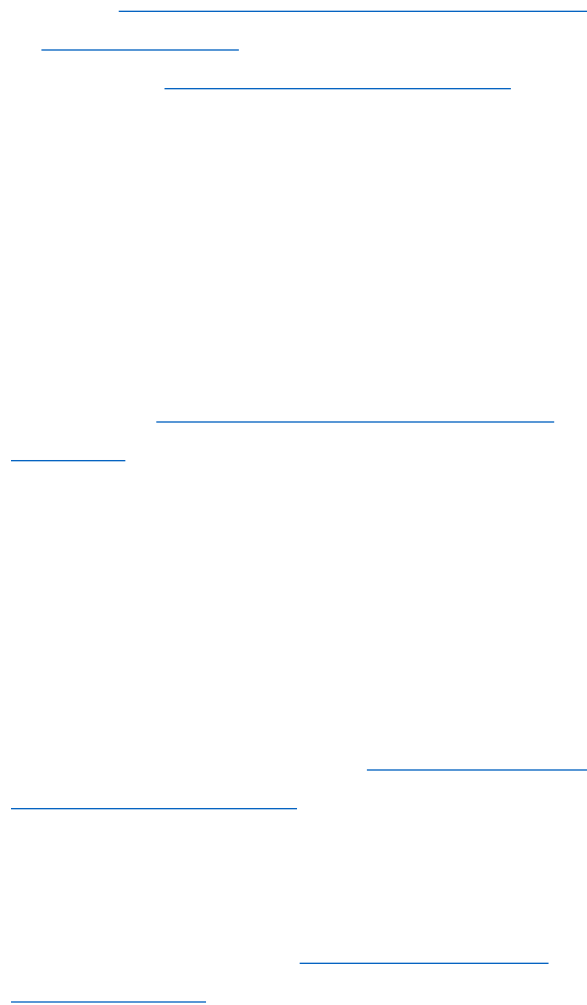
As one of the United States’ closest allies in the Indo-Pacific, the mutual alignment between the US and ROK supports US policy implementation, continuity, and expansion in the Indo-Pacific region. Ensuring US and ROK policy alignment endures through 2024 and beyond is paramount for the continued success of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy.

US-ROK Global Strategic Partnership in the Indo-Pacific

US-ROK Policy Alignment

In February 2022, the Biden administration announced the [US Indo-Pacific Strategy](#) with the aim of addressing 21st-century challenges alongside regional allies, such as South Korea. The United States reengagement in the wider

a linchpin in the region, ensuring security and peace on the Korean Peninsula and beyond. As the DPRK threat continues to advance, the US-ROK strategic defense posture in the region will be paramount for signaling strong deterrence and retaliatory capabilities vis-à-vis both traditional



Korea's WMD program continues into the US
2024 election year, further provocations from

economic cooperation. Special attention should be given to the successful institutionalization (and implications for failed alignment) of US-ROK cooperation in three critical areas: 1) economic security, 2) digital and cybersecurity, and 3)

cli9nTEMCe91 (en t)11 (o the succe)3 (s)23.1 (sfui) 1.1 (. SgGS0 ge.BDC BT10 0 0 10 72 677 Tm{(and impd17Ped lw i72 63

April 2023, the Biden and Yoon administrations launched the [US-ROK Strategic Cybersecurity Cooperation Framework](#) to promote an “open, interoperable, secure, and reliable Internet and a stable cyberspace.” To institutionalize this agreement, the two countries convened for senior-level discussion at the [4th US-ROK Working Group Meeting on the DPRK Cyber Threat](#).

In November 2023, through the co-signing of the US-ROK [memorandum of understanding](#) (MOU) between the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and the ROK National Intelligence Service (NIS), the two countries outlined areas for collaboration under the bilateral Cyber Framework officially. The CISA-NIS MOU detailed US-ROK commitments to share technical and operational best practices across cyber and infrastructure domains, consult regularly on mechanisms for cybersecurity threat response, and collaboration on incorporating critical infrastructure and supply chain resiliency. Most recently, _____
