

UPF International: 4th Think Tank 2022 Forum Features U.S. Secretary of Defense

William Selig
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UPF International -- The 4th Think Tank 2022 Forum on the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula featured the Hon. **Mark Esper**, U.S. Secretary of Defense (2019-2020). Livestreamed from Korea on February 26, 2022 (KST), Secretary Esper expressed a hopeful analysis of the region's situation and called for full cooperation between the U.S., South Korea, and Japan in the face of North Korea's nuclear threats and the challenges posed by China. [Click here to watch video.](#)

In his welcoming remarks as chair of the organizing committee, Dr. **Yoon Young-ho** said the key purpose of the World Summit is to encourage international cooperation between U.S., Japan, Korea, and the 157 nations with diplomatic ties to one or both of the Koreas. The 4th Forum was jointly organized by *The Washington Times* (USA), *Segye Ilbo* (South Korea), and *Sekai Nippo* (Japan) newspapers.



Citing the example of U.S. President Ronald Reagan's peace through strength as the best foreign policy for America and its allies, Secretary Esper emphasized that the problems on the peninsula do not just concern North and South Korea; the region and even the entire globe are impacted. "This issue must be multi-lateralized. [The peaceful reunification] is a global issue," he declared.

In his prepared remarks before an audience of several hundred at the HJ Global Arts Center about an hour

east of Seoul, and livestreamed around the world, Secretary Esper praised the strategy of Think Tank 2022 as "clear and straightforward: bring together the world's leading experts from a wide range of professional fields to work together, collaboratively, to pursue improved relations between the Republic of Korea and North Korea." He expressly thanked UPF and the founder, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon and *The Washington Times* for "spearheading Think Tank 2022's activities in multiple sectors around the globe."

To better grasp the prospects for peace and reunification, Secretary Esper touched on the other challenges affecting the region. He was sober in his analysis. "Let me begin by stating clearly, up front, that East Asia will likely be the epicenter for geopolitical instability and great power competition for years to come." He cited various flash points, including terrorist activities in the Middle East, Russia's drive to reclaim the former USSR, beginning with Ukraine, Beijing's strong-arm tactics in Asia, as well as China's militarization of islands in the South China Sea.



Describing East Asia as the "epicenter of geopolitical instability," and a "powder keg of enormous global consequence," he called on the United States to "do its special part by demonstrating resolve and leading from the front." He recalled how U.S. President Reagan won the Cold War by rebuilding the U.S. military, strengthened our alliances, improved the economy and took a principled stand. A year after he left office, the Berlin Wall fell and two years later, the Soviet Union collapsed.

Secretary Esper said, "America must lead again. It must do so with its values. It must bring along its allies and partners as well. We must once again demonstrate strength, clarity, and resolve. Diplomacy should be our primary emphasis, but it must be buttressed by a strong military, strengthened alliances, and coalitions of democracies. Together -- and I emphasize together -- we must take principled stands, compromise where it makes sense, and be willing to make short-term sacrifices for the long-term good."

Secretary Esper outlined a few basic steps.

1. The U.S. and its allies and partners must come together and work as a combined force. He specifically called for a closer alliance with India, the Pacific Island countries, and the member states of ASEAN.
2. South Korea should join with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, the Quad, which includes: USA, India, Japan, and Australia. The Quad should be transitioned into the Quint.
3. America's allies and partners should invest at least 2% of their GDP for defense.
4. Planning, exercises, and actions must be more frequent, better coordinated, and fully integrated.

"If the world's democracies are to endure, if freedoms and liberties we now enjoy are to be protected, if the free exercise of speech, of religion, and of assembly are to be preserved, then we must stand together; we must stand up for one another, and we must assist those who are not yet strong enough to resist the autocratic actions of others," said Secretary Esper.

Regarding the specific situation on the Korean Peninsula, the United States is committed to the goal of the "complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization of the North," as well as "the elimination of ballistic missiles that can reach South Korea, Japan, and beyond." To achieve this goal, the United States and its allies are willing to offer "appropriate economic and other incentives -- such as sanctions relief -- that, over time, will offer a clear and meaningful benefit for doing so as denuclearization is achieved."

He emphasized the need for strong partnership among the allies, exceptional leadership, and a vision based on our core goals and principles. "With these key ingredients, the United States and our allies in the Indo-Pacific will win this epic 21st-century contest just like we won the Cold War -- peacefully -- by honoring our principles, defending our beliefs, and acting with resolve to advance freedom and liberty for all."

After his presentation, Secretary Esper fielded questions from three panels of distinguished experts. Mr. **Thomas P. McDevitt**, Chairman of *The Washington Times*, served as the moderator for the USA panel, which included: Gen. **Bernard Champoux**, Lt. Gen. U.S. Army (ret.); former Commander, 8th Army; former Chief of Staff, UNC/CFC/USFK; Amb. **Joseph DeTrani**, Board of Managers, Sandia National Laboratories; former U.S. Envoy to the Six-Party Talks; and Ms. **Shihoko Goto**, Acting Director of the Asia Program and Deputy Director for Geoeconomics, the Wilson Center.



Topics for discussion dealt with the reduction of the U.S. presence on the peninsula, transfer of military operational control from U.S. to South Korea, how to convince China to exert its leverage on North Korea, how to get China and Russia to support the UN sanctions on North Korea, and the new U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy which was recently released by the U.S. administration.

Secretary Esper acknowledged the benefit if South Korea joined the Quad, the alliance composed of India, Japan, Australia and the United States. Mr. McDevitt asked the Secretary his thoughts regarding the Japan-Korea Undersea Tunnel proposed by Rev. Sun Myung Moon. The Secretary praised the project and said that anything that brings the nations together and fosters unity is beneficial and can be considered instruments of goodwill and peace.



The moderator for the Japanese panel was Mr. **Masayoshi Kajikuri**, Chair, Universal Peace Federation, Japan. Mr. Kajikuri introduced Mr. **Masahiro Kuroki**, President of *Sekai Nippo* newspaper, one of the Forum's hosts, and the panelists: Hon. **Yoshinori Ohno**, former Minister of Defense; Amb. **Nobuyasu Abe**, former UN Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs; and Mr. **Yoji Koda**, Vice-Admiral

(ret.), Japan Maritime Self Defense Force.



Discussion questions included the Secretary's thoughts on America's role in keeping the peace in Northeast Asia, and on giving economic support and security assurances to North Korea, which according to Secretary Esper "is a brutal regime that oppresses its people like few others." The Secretary emphasized that America "must lead with our values and maintain a presence in the region." Although admitting the difficulties and failures of the past, "there's no chance of success unless we try." He agreed with Admiral Koda, who said we need to negotiate but to also be prepared for the worst-case scenario if North Korea doesn't go along with denuclearization.

The moderator for the Korea panel was Mr. **Hwi-taek Jeong**, President, *Segye Ilbo* newspaper. Panelists included: Gen. **Nak-jun Yoon**, 30th Commander of the Republic of Korea Marine Corps; Dr. **Heung-kwang Kim**, representative of North Korea Intellectuals Solidarity (NKIS); and Dr. **Yeoul-soo Kim**, chief of Security Strategy, Korea Institute for Military Affairs (KIMA).

With Korea's presidential election scheduled for March 9, General Yoon asked Secretary Esper to describe the preferred qualities of a candidate. The secretary said the person must clearly understand the need for the U.S.-ROK security alliance and that diplomacy must be the preferred approach for the peaceful reunification of the peninsula. Secretary Esper said the candidate must demonstrate strength and resolve when dealing with North Korea, and recognize that the problems on the peninsula concern not only North and South Korea, but the region and world.



The 4th Think Tank Forum concluded with panelists expressing the unanimous view that world leaders and experts representing USA, Korea, and Japan should continue meeting on a regular basis and seek innovative ways to cooperate closely on regional and international issues.