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The PCI News



Project Bridge Program



(Project Bridge Youth Ambassadors at the Huntington Library, Pasadena, CA)

Amid the ongoing pandemic, we are continuing PCI's flagship Project Bridge program. Last year's group, which was unable to take its trip to Korea, is still together and preparing and will go to Korea this year when it is safe and possible. During this academic year, the youth ambassadors continues to expand their knowledge on Korean history, the Korean War, education, language, arts and cultural values thru special lectures and student-led workshops thru Zoom meetings. For the first time students from Los Angeles and New York will be joined by students from Missoula, Montana. Last year the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center at the University of Montana joined as a Project Bridge partner.

William J. Perry Lecture Series

William J. Perry Lecture Postponed. For 2020 Janet Napolitano, former president of the University of California System, Secretary of Homeland Security, and Governor of Arizona, had agreed to do the lecture. Given the closure of possible venues and other mounting virus-related uncertainties, PCI and our partner have agreed to a postponement of the lecture to the first half of 2021; time and place to be determined.

Board Member's Opinion Editorial

This column featuring PCI Board Member, Tom Plate published in the South China Morning Post on January 26, 2021.

Can Biden rein in America's debilitating delusions of moral superiority?



By Tom Plate

- The relaunch of an exceptional American democratic spirit cannot proceed apace without more self-reflection. As well-meaning as Biden might be, the US must control the debilitating delusion that it is a nation of the highest virtue.

The first major American post-election-result return is being able to feel that the ground under your feet isn't always shaking and your head isn't always aching. Yes, US President Joe Biden is doing that for us, especially in this early wave of foreign-policy appointments. He is acting like a president.

Asians who know a lot about Antony Blinken, Biden's nominee for secretary of state, admire him. It is the same with Kurt Campbell, who has been appointed Indo-Pacific coordinator on the National Security Council. ("Hope Biden will listen to his advice," Southeast Asian diplomat Tommy Koh told me.)

The nominated No 2 official for the State Department is Wendy Sherman, who is keyed especially on Asia. Up for the No 3 job is Victoria Nuland. They are both simply out-and-out sharp.

Avril Harris, former deputy director of national intelligence, has already been Senate-approved with no-fuss bipartisan speed as director of national intelligence. The president's principal intel adviser leads an agency that heads 17 various US intelligence agencies. Everyone I know of who knows Harris praises the choice.

Career diplomat Linda Thomas-Greenfield has been proposed for the position of US ambassador to the United Nations. She is a veteran of the US Foreign Service, which under the previous president got about the same measure of respect as the UN itself – none.

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Board Member’s Opinion Editorial

This opinion piece featuring PCI Board Member, S. Nathan Park published in the Foreign Policy on November 30, 2020.

South Korea Matters More to the United States Than North Korea’s Nukes

The Biden administration should prioritize one of America’s most important allies.



By S. Nathan Park

In the last four years, despite outgoing President Donald Trump’s boasts, the threat posed by North Korea’s nuclear arsenal has become greater than ever. But the incoming Biden administration should not be blinkered by a singular focus on North Korea leader Kim Jong Un’s weapons, because the most important change in the peninsula has

been happening on the southern side of the DMZ. In a world where China is now the main foreign-policy challenge for the United States, South Korea emerged as an indispensable U.S. ally, with the potential to play the role that West Germany did during the height of the Cold War. The time has come for the United States to reorder its priorities in the Korean Peninsula: Rather than treating South Korea as a part of the solution for the North, Washington must treat the U.S.-South Korean alliance as a standalone concern, and seek to leverage the alliance to establish a rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific region.

To be sure, North Korea’s nuclear arsenal is a serious matter. But take away the weapons, and North Korea is the same country that it has been since 1973, when President-elect Joe Biden became a senator: an isolated and impoverished country whose sole importance in the world comes from the harm that it causes to its own people and the potential harm it may cause to its neighbors.

Now, consider South Korea, which is certainly not the same country as it was in 1973 when it was an economically struggling right-wing dictatorship. Today, South Korea is among the world’s top-10 economies, bigger even than Russia or Brazil. It is a world leader in technology and a crucial link in the global supply chain of high tech materials such as memory chips and 5G equipment. Few can match South Korea’s soft power that churns out Academy Award-winning movies and Billboard chart-topping music. (K-pop group BTS’s fandom was so strong that even Chinese state-owned media backed off from criticizing them.) Seoul’s vibrant democracy inspires others in Asia; protesters in Hong Kong and Thailand adopted Korea’s protest music and K-pop as their own anthem.

In addition, South Korea is an underrated military power. Born out of an apocalyptic civil war and after spending entire existence preparing for the next one, South Korea has seventh-largest standing army in the world with nearly 600,000 soldiers, fifth-largest air force in the world by the number of aircrafts, and its own very large arsenal of ballistic missiles. Seoul’s defense plan goes beyond merely defending against North Korea. Under President Moon Jae-in—belying his reputation as a liberal dove—South Korea has been actively building a blue water navy with aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines to protect the remote sea lanes crucial for its trade. Seoul’s foreign policy circles are quietly debating whether South Korea should pursue its own nuclear-weapons program, especially considering the uncertainty of U.S. commitment in its East Asian allies shown during the Trump administration.

The latter point poses a significant challenge to the Biden administration. Following the four years of Trump, South Korea’s opinion of the United States is at an all-time low. This is different from the anti-Americanism of yesteryear, originating from fear and resentment of the United States’ overwhelming power and influence over Korea. Under Trump, the United States became small, unreliable, and petty in the eyes of Koreans. Doubt over U.S. commitment to South Korea began to set in immediately after Trump took office, as Washington failed to support—or even acknowledge—South Korea as it was subject to China’s massive economic retaliation for deploying U.S.’s THAAD missile defense system. The temporary euphoria caused by Trump’s diplomacy with North Korea did not last, as the flashy photo ops failed to lead to any tangible result. Then the extortionate demand of fivefold increase for South Korea’s contribution to stationing U.S. troops in its territory soured the public opinion once and for all. An overwhelming 96 percent of the public opposed the hike at one point; so boorish was U.S. ambassador Harry Harris with this demand—reportedly, he said the word “five billion dollars” at least 20 times in a 30-minute conversation with a South Korean lawmaker—that even South Korea’s pro-US conservative politicians came away insulted.

On the other hand, self-confidence is running high among South Koreans. The defeatist self-conceptualization as “shrimp among whales,” buffeted by the crosswinds from Korea’s more powerful neighbors, has faded significantly. In particular, South Korea’s successful response to the COVID-19 pandemic, contrasted especially with the Trump administration’s abject incompetence, has given Koreans the sense that they have arrived. A recent study showed Korean public’s national pride rose sharply from 2019 to 2020. High-ranking officials freely express that they have the power to shape

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Board Member’s Opinion Editorial

South Korea Matters More to the United States Than North Korea’s Nukes

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their own destiny, even in the face of global superpowers. In a recent symposium, Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha said: “Korea is certainly in a geopolitical position that looks like we are caught in a crossfire. But I think you can turn that around and say it’s leverage.” Lee Soo-hyuk, Korea’s ambassador to United States, was even more blunt: “I feel pride that we are now a country that can choose [between the United States and China], not be forced to choose.” KBS, South Korea’s public broadcaster, carried a two-part article called: “No More America Number One”—a harsh title with even harsher assessment of the decline of the United States under the Trump administration, made all the more shocking because of the broadcaster’s usual stiff-necked decorum.

All of this puts the U.S.-South Korean relationship at an inflection point. Repairing the alliance does not simply mean going back to the pre-Trump era, when South Korea was seen more as a U.S. client state whose international importance was limited to how much it helped advancing the U.S. objectives with North Korea. Such a crabbed view of the alliance, in fact, introduced unnecessary strain in the relationship, as the success of the alliance was judged solely on how closely the two countries were aligned as to Pyongyang. As the slogan for Biden’s transition team goes, the U.S.-South Korean alliance must be built back better. If China is the main challenge for the U.S. foreign policy, it naturally follows that the United States must give very high priority to its democratic ally nearest to China. For the United States, the health of its alliance with South Korea may well determine the outcome of its strategic competition with China as well as the establishment of the rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

Fortunately, the United States is still in a good position with respect to South Korea. In some corners of Washington, D.C., there are concerns that South Korea might abandon the U.S. alliance and join the Sinosphere, informed by a vague notion of Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations” thesis (which lumps them together as “Confucian” powers) and the idea that South Korea’s liberals (who are currently in power) are secret communists who are in league with the Chinese Communist Party. Such views are ignorant and overblown. South Koreans still like the United States much more than they like China. (In a recent poll asking a favorability rating between 0 and 100, Koreans gave the United States the score of 49.9, and China 29.6.) Koreans are fiercely proud of their hard-won democracy, and are not at all fans of illiberal China or North Korea. Further, as an exporting economy, South Korea recognizes that free trade and the liberal world order—

underwritten by the United States—are indispensable to its success.

But inevitably, there are smaller yet significant points at which U.S. and South Korean interests will diverge. The United States may wish its two foremost democratic allies in East Asia to get along better, but South Korea will not stop demanding that Japan face the crimes of its imperialist past. South Korea may quietly support the U.S. initiatives to check China’s rise, but it will not adopt an openly hostile rhetoric or join a group whose explicit purpose is to oppose China. Most importantly, South Korea absolutely will not begin a war with North Korea, which may very easily escalate into a nuclear war that destroys millions of lives. Taking South Korea seriously as an ally means that, in these situations, the United States will not get 100 percent of what it wants. Instead, Washington will have to persuade Seoul by pointing to the greater ideals of liberal international order that they share and nudging its partner closer to its own position—as it might do with any ally.

Doing so will require patience and persistence on the part of the United States. Restoring the trust in the alliance may take longer than the four or eight years of the Biden administration, when South Koreans can plainly see the United States is just one election and one Trump—or a similar figure—away from sliding back. The recent joint fact sheet issued by the State Department and South Korea’s Foreign Ministry, seeking to harmonize the United States’ Indo-Pacific Strategy and Korea’s New Southern Policy focusing on South Korea’s role in Southeast Asia, is a commendable effort to align the two countries’ foreign policies rather than Washington demanding Seoul to toe the line set by the United States. The Biden administration should do many more of these in different areas such as combating the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, or free trade and movement of people, to assure that it sees South Korea as an important partner.

It will also require a mental adjustment. For a long time, Washington approached the Korean Peninsula with North Korea as the main issue, and South Korea as perhaps one component of the overall solution. This order of priority must be now be reversed: Alliance maintenance with South Korea is the main issue to be addressed, one of whose components is North Korea. Fortunately, some in the D.C. foreign-policy circles are coming to this view. For the U.S. foreign policy in Asia to succeed in the next several decades, the Biden administration must do so as well.

PCI Board Members, Founders and Fellows often contribute to the media. The opinions expressed are solely those of the individuals involved and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Pacific Century Institute.



Opinion Editorial Cont.

Can Biden rein in America’s debilitating delusions of moral superiority?

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America’s UN ambassador not only gets the spotlight at the Security Council but a seat as well in Washington in the president’s cabinet. Formal Senate confirmation is required, but this will not be a problem for Thomas-Greenfield.

What is less certain is whether the UN will enjoy more meaningful use and genuine respect under Biden than under the previous guy. This is key. As downtrodden and inefficient as the UN might be, it remains the pre-eminent organisation for peace and world order.

A perceptible uptick in conflict easement, not to mention global diplomatic manners, would arise if only the five permanent members of the Security Council – facing a potent and puzzling pandemic, nuclear proliferation, horrendous climate challenge and a hundred other problems of peace and security – would operate with better teamwork.

The key to a movement towards a better norm would have to come from Beijing and Washington. However, the ways and means of both make it difficult to see this happening.

The Chinese government relies on unsophisticated “wolf warrior” growling and pushy policies designed to satiate the pride of the folks at home perhaps as much as anything else. No matter how discomforting to neighbours, Beijing does not seem to care all that much about what anyone thinks. Opposition to wolf warrior diplomacy is for wimpy lambs.

For its part, the patented US “soft power” gambit seeks to present to the world the shimmer of a kinder, gentler nation but, these days, this tattered brand is hard to peddle. Bombing a foreign political problem rarely solves it, and regime change often changes little or changes bad to worse.

The US problem in coexisting with regimes it does not like arises again and again. How sinlessly special is the US? Brave scholarship from the American academy across the decades has found the persistence of US foreign intervention telling.

A recent essay from Jackson Lears, editor of *Raritan* and distinguished professor of history at Rutgers University, comes down hard on the insolence of American public intellectuals for their part in militarism: “Few sights in Washington are more familiar than an intellectual urging ‘total war’ from the safety of the keyboard.”

In his essay this month in *The New York Review of Books*,

Lears tracks America’s own wolf warrior trail from Iran to Guatemala through Cuba, Congo, Vietnam, Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Iraq and Libya.

It is mainly China, no angel itself, that gets the rap in the US news media, but not from Lears: “Everybody does not do this; the United States does, which is why global surveys repeatedly have shown that the US is widely believed to be the greatest threat to world peace.”

A proper relaunching of an exceptional American democratic spirit cannot proceed apace, even with “you know who” and his odious team sullenly out of power, without more self-reflection. As well-meaning as Biden might be – as is reflected in his solid appointments to date – America will have to get under control the debilitating self-delusion that it is a nation of the highest virtue.

America’s elite generally do not perceive the wide mistrust. The continuing rise of China, whatever its grievous flaws in important categories of internal conduct and in all of which America claims superiority, seems for much of the world less of an outrageous development than it does for Washington.

Yes, China’s wolf warrior behaviour would seem considerably more alarming if the standard for superpower conduct had been set higher by the US itself. Why is it always so telling when one asks of another something that was obviously too difficult to ask of oneself?

Having to sort out such a heavy legacy lands at the feet of Biden and his “best and brightest” foreign policy crew. It seems almost unfair to face a burden so soon at the outset of his administration.

Yet for a long time, many of the better folk now entrusted with the governance of foreign policy have shared – and still share – the simplistic view of international right and wrong that undermines US credibility. This is one mode of thought that should be broadened. Leaders without vision are prone to go down blind alleys.

Tom Plate is a university professor and a veteran columnist focused on Asia and America. This Distinguished Scholar of Asian and Pacific Studies at Loyola Marymount University has orchestrated live interactive seminars with major universities across Asia, as part of the LMU’s path-finding Asia Media International Centre. He is also the author of 13 books, including the bestsellers “Confessions of an American Media Man” (2007), four volumes in the “Giants of Asia” series, and three in the ‘Tom Plate on Asia’ book series. He is vice-president of the Pacific Century Institute, in Los Angeles.



Invitation to Give*invitation to give*
2021

Dear PCI Family,

Let us first express our deepest thanks for your past ongoing support of the Pacific Century Institute (PCI) and its mission.

Usually, this is the time of year you would receive an invitation to the annual PCI dinner, which has always been held the last Thursday in February. The dinner is PCI's premier fundraising event and the venue at which it awards its prestigious Building Bridges Award.

But these are no ordinary times. So you will not be receiving a dinner invitation. Regretfully, PCI has cancelled the dinner for this year. We all know the factors which led to this decision. And we certainly hope to more than make up for it with an especially good event next year with excellent recipients of the Building Bridges Awards (Yes, we already have some very special candidates in mind.)

Even with no dinner, PCI's programs will continue this year wherever and however they can. Therefore, we are asking you to donate, in lieu of attending the dinner, to support the ongoing work of PCI.

This year, we are scheduled to help sponsor:

- Journalist and student exchanges
- Media analysis and dissemination
- Language learning programs
- Agriculture and forestry analyses
- Publications focusing on the Pacific Rim
- Military and diplomatic studies by academics and practitioners
- Fellowships and professorships

And, of course, we are continuing PCI's flagship Project Bridge program. Last year's group, which was unable to take its trip to Korea, is still together and preparing and will go to Korea this year when it is possible. For the first time the students from Los Angeles and New York will be joined by students from Montana selected and supported by the Mansfield Center. It promises to be an especially rewarding experience.

If the circumstances of this unique year allow you to contribute, we would be most grateful.



Spencer H. Kim
Dinner Coordinator



Kathleen Stephens
Chair, PCI



Raymond F. Burghardt
President, PCI



PCI Sponsored Programs

Friends of Korea

Since 2018, PCI has sponsored 32 Friends of Korea (FoK) life-time memberships to Project Bridge Youth Ambassador Program Participants upon graduating from the program. We are delighted to share that in 2021, FoK will welcome a new cohort of students. In addition to the 16 students from New York and Los Angeles, four students from Missoula, Montana will receive their membership. This allows the students to have opportunities for ongoing engagement with Korea, Koreans, and Korean Americans through FoK activities.

James T. Laney Professorship

Since fall semester of 2013, PCI has been sponsoring the James T. Laney Chair Professorship at Yonsei University's Underwood International College and Yonsei Institute for North Korean Studies. Yonsei University has been recruiting Korean and foreign distinguished figures, career diplomats, professors and others as chair professors. Current chair professor, Dr. Lee Jong-seok, former minister of Unification of the Roh Moo-hyun administration was appointed in 2019 and has been holding virtual lectures throughout the pandemic.



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