

Outcomes and Significance of the 20th Korea-U.S. Integrated Defense Dialogue (KIDD)

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The Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense (ROKMND) and the United States Department of Defense (US DoD) held the 20th Korea-US Integrated Defense Dialogue (KIDD) in Seoul for two days from September 27 to 28, 2021. KIDD is a high-level policy consultative meeting between the ROK and US defense authorities, hosted biannually since 2012 in accordance with the agreement of the 43rd ROK-US Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) in 2011. The first meeting of this year was held in Washington, D.C from May 12 to 13.

The 20th KIDD was attended by key ROK and US defense and foreign affairs officials, with this writer, Deputy Minister for Defense Policy, leading the ROK delegation, and Siddharth Mohandas, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for East Asia, leading the US delegation. In addition, Melissa Dalton, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense (A/ASD) for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities, together with DASD Mohandas, co-chaired the Deterrence Strategy Committee (DSC) session of the KIDD with this writer. Furthermore, the ROK and US engaged in in-depth discussions on various Alliance issues through the Security Policy Initiative (SPI), Conditions-based OPCON Transition Working Group, (COTWG), and Deterrence Strategy

Committee (DSC).

The main outcomes of the 20th KIDD can be summarized as the following five points. First, through the dialogue, the two sides reaffirmed their common goal of achieving complete denuclearization and establishing permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula. In particular, the two sides acknowledged the third anniversary of the September 19 Comprehensive Military Agreement (CMA), assessing that the inter-Korean commitment to the CMA's implementation, along with the continued enforcement and management of the Armistice Agreement by the United Nations Command, has contributed to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. Meanwhile, both sides discussed North Korea's recent missiles launches and agreed to investigate measures to strengthen the Alliance's defense posture to respond against omnidirectional threats. Moreover, both countries stressed the importance of diplomacy and the resumption of dialogue to address these changes.

Second, the two sides agreed to explore ways to further deepen and expand the ROK-US Alliance, reaffirming that the Alliance serves as a pillar of peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia. In particular, both sides pledged to strengthen cooperation in other domains including cyber and space to ensure an effective joint response against newly emerging threats and to maintain a free, safe, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. Additionally, the two sides expressed shared understanding of the importance of the ROK-US-Japan trilateral security cooperation, based on the common security interests among the three countries. They also agreed to hold a trilateral defense ministerial meeting as soon as possible. Furthermore, both sides agreed to promote cooperation on ROK and US regional strategies, including the ROK New Southern Policy and the US Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Third, through intensive discussions on key Alliance issues, the two sides sought improved mutual understanding to form a consensus. In particular, they shared the view that the Fall 2021 Combined Command Post Training (CCPT) played an important role in maintaining ROK-US combined defense posture. Both also acknowledged that considerable progress has been made toward returning Yongsan Garrison to the ROK in accordance with the Yongsan Relocation Plan and agreed to actively cooperate to expedite the return of Yongsan Garrison.

Fourth, the two sides assessed the progress of the Conditions-based OPCON Transition Plan (COTP) and recognized the significant progress made towards the transition of wartime Operational Control to the Future Combined Forces Command (F-CFC). In particular, both sides reaffirmed the mutually agreed pledges of COTP and confirmed the progress of wartime OPCON transition tasks conducted this year, including the comprehensive joint study on COTP capabilities.

Fifth, through the Deterrence Strategy Committee (DSC), the two sides shared their assessment of North Korea's recent threats including nuclear, WMD, and missiles, and discussed combined deterrence and response concepts to strengthen Alliance tailored deterrence. In addition, the US reasserted its ironclad commitment to providing extended deterrence to the ROK by utilizing its full range of military capabilities, including nuclear, conventional and missile defense capabilities. The ROK reaffirmed their decision to continue to develop the ROK military's nuclear and WMD response systems to deter and respond to North Korean threats. Following the DSC, ROK and US officials also participated in a tabletop exercise (TTX) to review measures to deter and respond to North Korea's nuclear, WMD, and missile threats. Moreover, both sides discussed the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) and Missile Defense Review (MDR) in development by the US, during which the US shared the direction of the NPR and MDR currently under examination.

The 20th KIDD meeting was significant in that it built on the relationship of trust between the new leaders of each side's delegation, formed earlier at the 19th KIDD held in May of this year, and hence, provided the space for the exchange of honest and constructive opinions on various ROK-US Alliance issues. Through the dialogue, the delegations of the two countries were able to reaffirm their common bilateral position amid a dynamic security environment and closely cooperate on future policy directions. In addition, both sides shared the view that it is important to induce North Korea into engaging in dialogues in order to achieve the goals of establishing permanent peace and complete denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. For this, the two sides agreed on close coordination between the ROK and US defense authorities to provide military support to the diplomatic efforts of the two countries.

At the latest KIDD, the ROK and US delegations reaffirmed that KIDD serves as a major consultative body that propels Alliance development and facilitates joint resolution of various Alliance issues. Subsequent KIDD meetings are expected to continue to play a prominent role as an important consultative body for the strengthening and advancement of the ROK-US Alliance. The key outcomes of this year's KIDD are planned to be discussed further at the 53rd Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) in late 2021.