

CONFERENCE REPORT

Korea-Singapore Forum 2013:
Collaborating with Middle Powers for a Prosperous Asian Partnership



**S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL
OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**
A Graduate School of Nanyang Technological University

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Marina Mandarin
Singapore

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*Report of the inaugural Korea-Singapore Forum co-hosted
by the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) and the Korea Foundation*

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Editor: Tan Seng Chye

*This report summarises the proceedings of the Forum as interpreted by the assigned rapporteur and editor.
Participants neither reviewed nor approved this report.*

Summary

The inaugural Korea-Singapore Forum was hosted by the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) and the Korea Foundation on 29 August 2013, at the Marina Mandarin Singapore. Titled “*Collaborating with Middle Powers for a Prosperous Asian Partnership*,” the Forum was organised under the auspices of the Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Policymakers, government officials, and representatives from academia, think tanks, businesses and the media from both countries participated in the closed-door Forum.

Providing a platform to enhance Korea-Singapore ties, the Forum saw participants engage in lively discussions about the evolving dynamics in the Asia Pacific region, the prospects for the Korea-Southeast Asia partnership and the future directions for Korea-Singapore cooperation. Forum participants agreed that there was potential for Korea and Singapore to collaborate to mitigate tensions and promote constructive relations amid geostrategic uncertainty in the region. In this regard, recommendations were made to deepen Korea-Singapore engagement at the bilateral and regional levels.

Opening Session

Amb Barry Desker and **Dr Yu Hyun-seok** welcomed the participants to the inaugural Korea-Singapore Forum. They expressed hopes that the Forum would strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries, and that both countries could jointly contribute to regional peace and prosperity.

HE Dr Park Byeong-seug and **Mr Charles Chong** noted the close ties and frequent exchanges between both sides that had characterised bilateral relations over the past four decades. Both speakers highlighted the flourishing economic cooperation and cultural exchanges as important aspects of bilateral ties. Dr Park also advocated greater Korea-Southeast Asian cooperation in politics and security given that peace and stability between Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia were inter-connected.

In his Keynote Speech, **HE Mr Lee Kyung-soo** stressed that today's strategic challenges could no longer be met solely by major powers. Countries like Korea and Singapore could play a bridging role. He proposed the concept of collaborating in "niche diplomacy," i.e., on common issues within the interests and capacities of both countries to engage in. In this regard, efforts in bilateral cooperation should focus on three areas, namely, developing the creative economy, regional cooperation in multilateral fora and nurturing the intellectual capacities of both countries.

Mr Simon Wong, delivering his Keynote Speech, noted the shift of the world's power centre to the Asia Pacific. However, nationalist sentiments were on the rise especially over territorial and historical issues. Fundamentally, a trust deficit existed in the region and how countries managed it would shape the future of Asia. Against this backdrop, the Forum provided an opportunity for Korea and Singapore to examine their fundamental strengths and explore new and creative ways to further bilateral ties and contribute to peace and stability in the region.

Evolving Dynamics in the Asia Pacific Region

Four important elements had influenced the strategic relations among the major powers in the Asia Pacific, as well as the regional political and security architecture. They were the rise of China, the U.S. rebalance to Asia, the normalisation of Japan, as well as ASEAN's role as a neutral and central platform in the region promoting peace, stability and economic growth. Despite rising economic interdependency among regional countries, conflict could still erupt, particularly over the region's four potential flashpoints — the Korean peninsula, cross-Straits issues, as well as the territorial issues in the East and South China Seas.

The evolving dynamics of the Sino-U.S. relationship would shape the region in the coming years. Many Asian countries faced the paradox of rising economic dependence on China, while maintaining close political and security ties with the United States. Given their good relations with the major powers, Korea and Singapore could play a bridging role between China and the United States. To do so, both countries would have to gain trust from the four major

regional powers — China, Japan, Russia and the United States. This would require developing more complex networks of functional cooperation and continuing to build trust in the region.

Participants noted that Japan's normalisation would not be a big concern insofar as Japan remained tied to the United States under their mutual security alliance. The rising tensions in Northeast Asia due to nationalist sentiments, however, could potentially hinder progress in regional cooperation in platforms such as the ASEAN Plus Three and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

To help stabilise the region amid geostrategic uncertainties, participants suggested that Singapore and Korea cooperate in non-traditional security issues, enhance their engagement with extra-regional countries, as well as support ASEAN-centred processes and institutions in the multi-layered regional architecture.

Prospects for ROK-Southeast Asia Partnership

Korea-Southeast Asian relations had long been underpinned by strong economic ties, built on free trade agreements (FTA) with ASEAN and its member states, negotiations for the RCEP, as well as interdependence through trade and production networks. ASEAN viewed Korea's contributions to the economy, development and capacity-building of the region to be important, and in turn, Korea had responded favourably to ASEAN engagement initiatives.

At the bilateral level, Korea and Singapore had successfully positioned themselves as the "hubs" of the FTA network in East Asia. The issue now for both countries was to harmonise the various regional economic platforms such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), RCEP, ASEAN Plus Three, Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, as well as the FTAs among regional states. Harmonising

these platforms would be crucial to ensure that the many overlapping institutions did not lead to fragmented institutionalisation.

Korea's cultural soft power had also made a significant impact on Southeast Asia in recent years. The emergence of the Korean Wave had enhanced the image of Korea in Southeast Asia, and laid the foundation for more active cultural exchanges in the region. However, participants expressed concern that the Korean Wave might create caricatures which were not reflective of Korean society, and noted that Southeast Asia could seek to deepen its understanding of Korean society beyond pop culture. Cultural flows should also be two-way, and as there was insufficient interest in Korea about Southeast Asia, participants suggested more research and courses on Southeast Asia in Korean universities.

Domestic Trends and Future Directions for Bilateral Cooperation

Given the similar challenges and common interests of Korea and Singapore, participants suggested that both countries could work together on the following four issues. First, both countries could help to facilitate the peaceful rise of China. Second, both countries could cooperate on strengthening global financial stability, by initiating dialogue on exchange rates, the regulation of international financial institutions and the valuation of the Chinese Yuan. Third, Korea and Singapore could jointly develop a regional market centring on natural gas, as an alternative to imported oil which both countries relied on. Either Korea or Singapore would be a suitable location for the proposed gas hub — Singapore because of its infrastructure and connectivity to Southeast Asian producer countries, and Korea because the biggest demand for natural gas would likely be from China. Fourth, both countries could cooperate on Korean President Park Geun-hye's Grand National Objective of economic revival.

Economic revival was an element of President Park's "New Era of Hope" vision, driven by the volatile and unstable global economy, as well as the inability of economic growth to guarantee a better quality of living. Participants proposed bilateral cooperation on the creative economy, which involved the three core concepts of science and technology being the key driving forces, technological fusion, and private sector orientation and initiative to create new markets and jobs. Participants also suggested implementing an open market between Korea and Singapore, and the exploration of collaborative opportunities for small and medium enterprises between both sides. It was further highlighted that Korea-Singapore economic cooperation could benefit third countries, such as Vietnam, in terms of investment.

Wrap-up and Closing

Participants agreed that the Forum discussions had provided a better sense of the Singapore and Korean perspectives of the future strategic outlook, the changing political and security environment, and how regional peace and stability could be maintained. The presentations and discussions gave a very good sense of the relationship dynamics in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, which were affected by the U.S. rebalance to the Asia Pacific, the rise of China and Japan's increased engagement with the region. In the face of the changing regional dynamics and major power rivalry, ASEAN played a critical role in enhancing economic growth and maintaining peace and stability in the region. In this regard, ASEAN must manage and overcome the threats to its unity and cohesiveness, in order for it to maintain its centrality in the regional architecture.

The Forum saw a good exchange of views on the raising of the bilateral partnership to a "new era of cooperation." Recommendations to enhance the Singapore-Korea partnership included more joint development projects in third countries, inter-university exchanges, expanding economic cooperation and military-to-military cooperation on non-traditional security issues.

Looking ahead, the meeting suggested that the next Korea-Singapore Forum could focus on the impact of Sino-U.S. relations on the region and explore ways to enhance Korea-Singapore relations within the regional multilateral framework.





PROGRAMME

Thursday, 29 August 2013

0830–0900

Registration

0900–0935

Welcome Remarks

Amb Barry Desker

Dean

*S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)
Singapore*

Dr Yu Hyun-seok

President

Korea Foundation

Republic of Korea

Congratulatory Remarks

HE Dr Park Byeong-seug

Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly

Republic of Korea

Mr Charles Chong

Deputy Speaker of Parliament

Singapore

Keynote Speeches

HE Mr Lee Kyung-soo

Deputy Minister for Political Affairs

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Republic of Korea

Mr Simon Wong

Deputy Secretary (International)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Singapore

0935–0945

Group Photo-taking

0945–1000

Coffee Break

1000–1130

Session 1

Evolving Dynamics in the Asia Pacific Region

Presenters

Dr Choi Kang

Vice President

*Asan Institute for Policy Studies
Republic of Korea*

Mr Tan Seng Chye

Senior Fellow

*S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)
Singapore*

Dr Lam Peng Er

Senior Research Fellow

East Asian Institute

Singapore

Moderator

Professor Wang Gungwu

Chairman

East Asian Institute

Singapore

1130–1145

Coffee Break

1145–1315

Session 2

Prospects for ROK-Southeast Asia Partnership

Presenters

Dr Koh Keng We

Assistant Professor

Department of Asian History

Seoul National University

Republic of Korea

Dr Bhubhinder Singh
Assistant Professor
Multilateralism & Regionalism Programme
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)
Singapore

Dr Lee Seungjoo
Professor
Department of Political Science and
International Studies
Chung-ang University
Republic of Korea

Dr Shim Doobo
Professor
Department of Media & Communication
Sungshin Women's University
Republic of Korea

Moderator

Dr Shin Se Don
Professor
Division of Economics
Sookmyung Women's University
Republic of Korea

1315–1430

Luncheon

1430–1600

Session 3

**Domestic Trends and Future Directions for
Bilateral Cooperation**

Presenters

Dr Shin Se Don
Professor
Division of Economics
Sookmyung Women's University
Republic of Korea

Mr Chua Thai Keong
Special Adviser
Shell Eastern Petroleum (Pte) Ltd
Singapore

Moderator

Professor Tommy Koh
Ambassador-at-Large
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Singapore

1600–1615

Coffee Break

1615–1700

Wrap-up and Closing

Moderators

Dr Choi Kang
Vice President
Asan Institute for Policy Studies
Republic of Korea

Mr Tan Seng Chye
Senior Fellow
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)
Singapore

1900–2030

Official Dinner

HE Ms Grace Fu
Minister in the Prime Minister's Office
Second Minister for the Environment and Water
Resources, and Second Minister for Foreign Affairs
Singapore

Representatives

Korean Participants

Dr YU Hyun-seok

President
Korea Foundation

HE Dr PARK Byeong-seug

Deputy Speaker
The National Assembly

HE Dr KIM Jung Hoon

Chairman
National Policy Committee of the National Assembly;
Vice President
Korea-Singapore Parliamentarian Friendship Association

HE Mr LEE Sang-min

Member
The National Assembly

HE Mr LEE Kyung-soo

Deputy Minister for Political Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

HE Mr SUH Chung-ha

Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Singapore

Dr SHIN Se Don

Professor
Division of Economics
Sookmyung Women's University

Mr NAHM Yoonho

Editorial Writer
JoongAng Ilbo

Dr CHOI Kang

Vice President
Asan Institute for Policy Studies

Dr LEE Seungjoo

Professor
Department of Political Science and International Studies
Chung-ang University

Dr SHIM Doobo

Professor
Department of Media & Communication
Sungshin Women's University

Mr KIM Dong Hyun

Managing Director
Osstem Singapore Pte Ltd / Osstem Malaysia Sdn Bhd

Dr KIM Taehwan

Director
Public Diplomacy Department
Korea Foundation

Ms KWON Heeyoung

Senior Program Officer
Korea Foundation

Mr JANG Kiho

Chief Secretary to the President
Korea Foundation

Mr MOON Jae-seung

Program Officer
Korean Studies Department
Korea Foundation

Mr CHAE Sugon

Chief Assistant to National Assemblyman Lee Sang-min

Ms RYU Ji-hyun

Leader
ASEAN-ROK Cooperation Project Team
ASEAN Cooperation Division
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Singapore Participants

Mr Charles CHONG

Deputy Speaker of Parliament

Professor Tommy KOH

Ambassador-at-Large
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr Simon WONG

Deputy Secretary (International)
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr Peter TAN

Ambassador of Singapore to the Republic of Korea

Professor WANG Gungwu

Chairman
East Asian Institute

Ambassador Barry DESKER

Dean
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)

Mr HO Meng Kit

Chief Executive Officer
Singapore Business Federation

Mr CHUA Thai Keong

Special Adviser
Shell Eastern Petroleum (Pte) Ltd

Ms Susan CHONG

Chief Executive Officer
Greenpack (S) Pte Ltd

Mr Sam ONG

Group Senior Executive Vice President &
Group Deputy CEO
Hyflux Ltd

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Seoul National University

Ms GOH Sui Noi

Senior Correspondent
Foreign Desk
The Straits Times

Dr HOO Tiang Boon

Research Fellow
China Programme
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)

Ms Sarah TEO

Associate Research Fellow
Multilateralism and Regionalism Programme
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)

About the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) is a professional graduate school of international affairs at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. RSIS' mission is to develop a community of scholars and policy analysts at the forefront of security studies and international affairs. Its core functions are research, graduate teaching and networking. It produces cutting-edge research on Asia Pacific Security, Multilateralism and Regionalism, Conflict Studies, Non-Traditional Security, International Political Economy, and Country and Region Studies. RSIS' activities are aimed at assisting policymakers to develop comprehensive approaches to strategic thinking on issues related to security and stability in the Asia Pacific.

For more information about RSIS, please visit www.rsis.edu.sg.

About the Korea Foundation

The Korea Foundation was established in 1991 to promote awareness and understanding of Korea, and to enhance goodwill and friendship throughout the international community. As a representative international exchange organisation of Korea, the Korea Foundation implements a variety of activities and programmes, including support for Korean studies as well as intellectual and cultural exchanges.



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