

Outcomes and Significance of the 16th Korea-U.S. Integrated Defense Dialogue (KIDD)

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From September 26 to 27, 2019, the ROK Ministry of National Defense (MND) and the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) held the 16th Korea-US Integrated Defense Dialogue (KIDD) at the MND in Seoul. The KIDD is a semiannual high-level consultative body established in accordance with the 2011 ROK-US Security Consultative Meeting (SCM). It has traditionally been held in Washington, D.C. in the first half of the year and in Seoul in the second half, with the 15th KIDD having taken place earlier this year from April 23 to 24 in Washington, D.C. At the 16th KIDD, participants included both nations' key officials in national defense and foreign affairs, with Chung Sukhwan, Deputy Minister for National Defense Policy, Ministry of National Defense, and Heino Klinck, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia, serving as chief delegates from each side respectively. The two sides held in-depth discussions on various pending alliance issues through the Security Policy Initiative (SPI) session, the Condition-based OPCON Transition Working Group (COTWG) session, the Deterrence Strategy Committee (DSC) session, and other high-level meetings.

Major outcomes of the 16th KIDD can be summarized as follows. First, the two sides reaffirmed their common goals of complete denuclearization and establishment of permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula. Efforts made over the past year in implementing the September 19 Comprehensive Military Agreement (CMA) were evaluated as having contributed to the

easing of military tensions and building of trust in the Korean Peninsula. Moreover, the two sides agreed to continue mutual communication and cooperation in the process of implementing the CMA, while complying with the Armistice Agreement. On the other hand, the two sides concurred that they should continue to maintain a strong ROK-U.S. combined defense posture while pursuing measures to alleviate military tensions and build trust with North Korea. Furthermore, the two sides will continue implementing UNSC resolutions until North Korea complies with its international obligations for denuclearization.

Second, the two sides pledged to closely cooperate to stay vigilant to recently changing security situations on the Korean Peninsula and nevertheless continue to maintain close cooperation, including conducting Joint Study on the Future Vision of the ROK-U.S. Alliance in order to deepen and develop a solid alliance relationship. In particular, reflecting on last year's 50th SCM held in Washington, D.C., which provided an opportunity to assess the development of the ROK-U.S. Alliance for the past half century, both sides expressed anticipation that the 51st SCM to be held in Seoul this November will be a cornerstone for development of the alliance for the next 50 years. Accordingly, both sides agreed to closely cooperate to ensure that this year's SCM can adequately pave the way for mutual development of the future of the ROK-U.S. Alliance. In addition, the two sides agreed that the expansion of ROK military defense capabilities and enhancement of interoperability between the ROK and U.S. forces are crucial for improving comprehensive alliance capabilities and decided to deepen and develop cooperation in various relevant fields.

Third, the two sides assessed preparations for a transition of the wartime operational control to be progressing appropriately and determined to strengthen joint efforts to meet conditions for transition. In particular, both sides viewed the ROK-US Combined Command Post Training, conducted in August of this year, as having played an important role in assessing the Initial Operational Capability (IOC) of the Future Combined Forces Command. They pledged to report the assessment results to both nations' heads of national defense departments during this year's SCM and pursue necessary follow-up measures. In addition, they agreed to continue to develop relevant documents, including the Annexes to the Conditions-based OPCON Transition Plan (COTP), based on the Alliance Guiding Principles Following the Transition of Wartime Operational Control.

Fourth, in consideration of the changing security situation on the Korean peninsula, the two sides discussed various ways to maintain and strengthen their deterrence capabilities including nuclear, conventional and missile defense capabilities. In addition, the U.S. reaffirmed its extended deterrence commitments to the ROK. As having conducted the Joint Study on Extended Deterrence, the two sides identified measures to maintain and enhance credible nuclear deterrence optimized for threats in the region and agreed to maintain cooperation to implement specifically tailored deterrence strategies.

The 16th KIDD was also significant in that it was held just prior to U.S.-North Korea working-level negotiations on denuclearization, allowing for the ROK and the U.S. to reaffirm their joint stance and closely cooperate in establishing directions for future policies. The two sides shared the view that it is crucial to maintain a positive momentum of denuclearization talks by resuming U.S.-North Korea talks and prevent North Korea from swerving off its course towards denuclearization. To achieve this, defense authorities of both sides will work closely together to provide the necessary diplomatic and military support. Regardless of the termination of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) between ROK and Japan, the ROK and U.S. agreed to strengthen their alliance and to continue to maintain the ROK-US-Japan trilateral security cooperation to counter North Korean nuclear and missile threats.

Finally, just as previous KIDD events have contributed to defense policy cooperation between the two countries, the latest KIDD has firmly established itself as a key dialogue that serves to lead the development of the ROK-U.S. Alliance and produce joint solutions to various alliance issues. The major outcomes of this year's KIDD will be reported in detail to the SCM within the same year. It is expected that the KIDD continues to play an important role in leading development of the solid ROK-U.S. Alliance amid changing security situations around the Korean Peninsula.