

## **America's Dream Never Ends: Desirable Foreign Policies for the Upcoming Era**



The Robert Reynolds Distinguished Lecture Series, presented by CU Denver Business School on April 12, 2023, featured Honorable Nakyon Lee, former Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea and former Chair of the Democratic Party. This distinguished lecture was supported by CU Denver's Institute for International Business and Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER), the Carole Ann Jemal-Gibson and Greg Gibson Fund for International Business, and CU Denver's School of Public Affairs. Mr. Lee served under former President Moon Jae-in after two decades as a journalist, five terms as a member of the National Assembly, and three years as governor of Jeollanam-do Province. He is currently a visiting scholar at George Washington University's Institute for Korean Studies, and his research focuses on the peacebuilding process for the Korean Peninsula.

Mr. Lee believes that the United States is one of the most successful countries in history, due in no small part to its being the first country that is associated with the word "dream." The American dream became a vision for humanity. America had a wide and level playing field for economic success and embraced human rights, diversity of races and languages, and tolerance. The

American values inspired Americans and spread to some parts of the world.

But America has changed, and in recent years, the American dream has declined. American stature and credibility internationally have been undermined by "America first" isolationist foreign policies, Trump's withdrawal from various international agreements and organizations, protectionist economic policies, and an array of international and domestic challenges. Few people talk about the American dream anymore. The gap between the rich and the poor has widened. Politics have become polarized and political processes have become inefficient. American society focuses on guns and drugs. Intolerance of diversity abounds.

Meanwhile, China is building military power and influence. China has recently started using the word "dream," but its usage and intent is far different from that of the American dream. China's dream is a state ideology dream not intended for global citizens. China's dream is to emerge as the center of the world during the 21st century.

Can the American dream be reclaimed and rebuilt? Yes. Mr. Lee contends that it is the responsibility to America to realize its "dream" and suggests multiple paths to do so. If America turns away from its dream for any reason, it would, Mr. Lee believes, mean the eventual collapse of America, and this will reverberate globally. If America begins working toward realizing and extending the universal values of the American dream, many countries will choose to align themselves with America instead of China.

To live up to its ideals, Mr. Lee states, America needs to promote greater inclusiveness and rebuild the middle class to facilitate economic justice while advancing its leadership internationally. Keeping China at bay and

protecting democracy by helping Ukraine are critical, as is U.S. engagement in denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. This would contribute to worldwide stabilization by helping South Korea to secure demilitarization and peace in East Asia. The United States has expressed willingness to engage North Korea in talks without preconditions but has taken no action. North Korea has, meanwhile, dramatically stepped up its ballistic missile launches to 69 in 2022 alone. North Korea's economic involvement with China has increased from 20% to now 95%.

After the Korea War, South Korea was able to maintain stability in the region through its affiliation with the United States. The South Korean success was the American success. The Korean Peninsula is now again under threat. Mr. Lee states that America needs to engage in the region to secure sustainable peace for East Asia, which will have a significant impact on world peace. Doing so is a practical action that will promote significant advancement the American dream.

- Carolyn Cott, Writer and Global Forum Report Contributor