How Korean semiconductor firms can navigate uncertainty amid U.S. tariff bombshells

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In an interview with Aju Business, Per Stenius, Client Direcor at Reddal, discussed how Korean firms should adopt scenario analysis to prepare for multiple futures, amid fierce competition with suppliers from other countries.

In August 2025, Per Stenius, Client Director at Reddal, shared his opinion with □□□□ (Aju Business) on how Korean firms can navigate uncertainty by adopting scenario analysis for different possible outcomes. He outlined four scenarios:

1. Open pathway: Tariffs fall and supply chains become more flexible

2. False calm: Tariffs ease, but supply chains stay rigid

3. Adaptive diversification: Tariffs persist, but firms can flex their supply chains

4. Geopolitical gridlock: Tariffs widen and global trade hardens along political lines

With the current development, “Adaptive diversification” appears most likely. To remain resilient, Korean chipmakers should stress-test strategies, diversify suppliers and production locations, strengthen risk management, and embed scenario planning into annual strategy processes.

The column can be accessed in Korean via Aju Business, available at [□□□ □□] □ '□□ □□' □□□□ □ □ □□□□ □□ □□□ | □□□□.

An English version of the column is also available via Aju Press and can be viewed from OPINION: How Korean semiconductor firms can navigate uncertainty amid U.S. tariff bombshells.

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As of November 2025, the U.S. and Korea agreed to cap U.S. tariffs on Korean goods, including semiconductors, at 15%. For each product, the U.S. will apply whichever rate is best for Korea – the KORUS FTA rate, the MFN rate, or the 15% Section 232 tariff. For semiconductors and related equipment, the U.S. also promises not to give Korea worse tariff terms than any future deal with another major semiconductor partner. Even though detailed product-level rates are not yet published, the agreement clearly limits how high U.S. tariffs on Korean semiconductors can go.

This development reduces, but does not remove, tariff risk for Korean firms. On the other hand, supply-chain options are showing signs of more flexibility with pathways for Korean companies to adjust where they produce and how they source key inputs. In this “adaptive diversification” setting, Korean semiconductor companies should keep diversifying production across countries, broaden their supplier base for key materials and equipment, and use scenario planning regularly so they can adjust quickly as the environment changes.