After the sinking of the ROK Navy corvette Cheonan on March 26, 2010, the situation on the Korean Peninsula has rapidly deteriorated, worsening already high tensions and heightening the prospect for accidental military clashes. Prospects for the Six-Party Talks are also very negative, as new moves to initiate additional sanctions against North Korea have replaced diplomatic efforts for the resumption of talks. Given the current situation, is there any possibility for an inter-Korean summit? A summit might, paradoxically, be the only means of exit from the crisis. Interestingly, in 1993, during heightened military tensions stemming from the first North Korean nuclear crisis, a proposal for an inter-Korean summit was accepted. The meeting was only canceled because of Kim Il-Sung’s sudden death on July 8, 1994.

Today, for inter-Korean relations to resume, a whole new framework is needed given the nullification of all existing North-South agreements. Such a renewed relationship can only be achieved through a third inter-Korean summit. Moreover, progress on the North Korean nuclear issue is impossible until the current state of North-South relations is improved. In the end, the only solution is an inter-Korean summit, which could bring a breakthrough in both North-South relations and the nuclear issue at the same time.

The main challenge for holding a summit at present is the need for some kind of preconditions and an agreement to ensure that meaningful achievements are possible. The Lee Myung-bak administration had a firm position on North Korea even before the sinking of the Cheonan. Now, following the Cheonan incident, Lee and his advisers will be forced to take a much stronger position.

First, preconditions are essential for any inter-Korean summit to take place. North Korea must apologize and punish those responsible for the sinking of the Cheonan in some way or another, as President Lee has demanded. It would be difficult for North Korea as a propaganda-based state to make a public apology, especially considering that it has already publicly denied its involvement. Nevertheless, it would not be impossible for North Korea to send a special envoy and deliver a message of regret to President Lee, and to inform Seoul of related measures taken to prevent further incidents.

Second, North Korea must guarantee that progress will be made in any inter-Korean summit on key disagreements such as the nuclear crisis and abduction issues. The need for such progress is even more profound when taking account of the post-Cheonan political situation.

How can an inter-Korean summit, if it were to occur in the near future, substantially contribute to the North Korean nuclear issue? An agreement to resume Six-Party Talks would be the minimum contribution of any inter-Korean summit. North Korea currently refuses to return to the talks, insisting on the lifting of sanctions and initiation of peace talks with Washington as preconditions. If North Korea were to declare, during a summit with the South, its willingness to unconditionally return to Six Party Talks, that would substantially facilitate the easing of the nuclear crisis.

If North Korea were to declare a moratorium on nuclear testing as a result of an inter-Korean summit, that would also significantly contribute to DPRK denuclearization. Such actions
do not have to be agreed upon within the Six-Party Talks because they could be unilateral decisions made by Pyongyang. Making North Korea abandon its uranium enrichment program would be an impossible task, as that step is a very useful bargaining chip in the North’s negotiations with the United States. However, making North Korea agree to a moratorium on nuclear testing is worth the effort to hold an inter-Korean summit.

The case of Pyongyang’s moratorium on missile testing in the late 1990s is a useful example in this regard. In September 1999, the United States and North Korea agreed on a moratorium on missile testing as long as the U.S.-DPRK dialogue continued on the easing of sanctions against the North Korean regime. Pyongyang agreed to continue the moratorium on two occasions, when Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi visited North Korea in September 2002, and again in May 2004. Considering these cases, there is a good chance that a moratorium on nuclear testing could be agreed upon in an inter-Korean summit. In this instance, a clear statement would be much more desirable than a vague message. If the goal were to be realized, it would be one of the greatest achievements in South Korea’s diplomatic history.

Another minimum achievement would be to secure North Korea’s commitment to denuclearization in Kim Jong-Il’s own words and then to insert those comments into a joint statement at the end of the summit. If North Korea were to violate the agreement, clear remarks by Kim Jong-Il would have considerable binding power, as once a political decision has been made by Kim, it becomes virtually impossible to reverse it.

Under the current serious situation on the Korean Peninsula, an inter-Korean summit is possible and can contribute to North Korean denuclearization. A shopping list of potential goals for a summit that are plausible and worth trying for includes: (1) the resumption of Six-Party Talks, (2) a moratorium on nuclear testing, and (3) a clear commitment to denuclearization expressed in Kim Jong-Il’s own words. If one item in this list can be realized, then a third inter-Korean summit will be seen as having contributed to the denuclearization of North Korea. Under current circumstances, it does not appear that Six-Party Talks will be resumed before the revival of inter-Korean relations. Therefore, the Lee administration can work on reestablishing and improving relations with Pyongyang in an effort to achieve the above three goals.

The Obama and Lee administrations must closely cooperate to achieve such objectives in an inter-Korean summit. The two administrations have already declared a common “comprehensive” approach to the North Korean nuclear issue. Feasible achievements in an inter-Korean summit can serve as elements of this “comprehensive package”. Such gains would be evaluated as a big diplomatic victory of the Lee administration and would draw a good starting line for both six-party and U.S.-North Korea bilateral talks.

Kim Sung Bae is Research Fellow of the Institute for National Security Strategy. Dr. Kim would like to thank the East Asia Institute-Asia Security Initiative Scholars Program supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for the generous support for research.

NEWS & EVENTS

JULY 14, 2010 – INSTITUTE FOR FAR EASTERN STUDIES, SEOUL, KOREA
NONTRADITIONAL SECURITY IN NORTH KOREA
The Institute for Far Eastern Studies at Kyungnam University will hold a conference on nontraditional security challenges in North Korea. Scott Snyder, Center for U.S.-Korea Policy Director, will serve as a panelist.

JULY 7, 2010 – KOREA ECONOMIC INSTITUTE, WASHINGTON DC
U.S. POLICY TOWARDS KOREA NOW: A FORUM WITH THE LEADERS OF CFR’S LATEST TASK FORCE REPORT
2-3:30pm, 1800 K Street NW, Suite 2010
Following the release of the Council on Foreign Relations latest task force report on U.S. policy toward the Korean peninsula, the Korea Economic Institute held an open forum discussion with project co-chairs Jack Pritchard, KEI President and former special envoy for negotiations with North Korea, and General John H. Tilelli, President and CEO, Cypress International, and former Commander-in-Chief of the UN Command, Combined Forces Command, and U.S. Forces Korea, and task force director Scott Snyder, Center for U.S.-Korea Policy Director. Event details are available at www.keia.org. Read about the report in In Asia.

KOREAN MEDIA FEATURES CENTER FOR U.S.-KOREA POLICY FORUM
RECASTING THE KOREAN MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT
University of Southern California, University Park Campus, Davidson Conference Center, Vineyard Hall
A two-part Korean language article by Yonhap News details the forum “Recasting the Korean Model of Development” organized by the Center for U.S.-Korea Policy, Korean Economic Association and Korean Political Science Association on June 30-July 1 in Washington. The article quotes presenters from the conference, saying that capacity-building in modern technology, education reform, and eradication of corruption were some of the key factors behind Korea’s development that might be applied for sustainable development in developing
countries. The Korean Chosun Ilbo also covered the forum in an article that notes the importance of the U.S.-Korea FTA and wartime operational control transfer as addressed by Ambassador Han Duk-soo, ROK Ambassador to Washington in his opening remarks.

VIEWS ON THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE

“This alliance is the linchpin of not only security for the Republic of Korea and the United States but also for the Pacific as a whole... Both on the security front and on the economic front, our friendship and alliance continues to grow. My personal friendship with President Lee and my admiration for him continues to grow.”


“As we commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Korean War, I offer our deepest, most sincere gratitude to all the American veterans and their families for what they did. The friendship and bond that we share is reinforced by the strong and robust military alliance, which in turn was the basis for the Republic of Korea’s remarkable twin achievements of the past six decades, namely achieving economic growth and becoming a true liberal democracy.”


“60 years later after the start of the Korean War, the United States is standing closer than ever with South Korea. Our alliance is stronger, deeper, and more profound—not just on the peninsula, but globally—than it has ever been before.”


“Our alliance will be even stronger as we synchronize emerging capabilities of the Republic of Korea armed forces and the changes of ROK-U.S. command and control structures.”


PUBLICATIONS


Jill Kosch O’Donnell (July 2010), "ROK Green Growth Quarterly Update," Center for U.S.-Korea Policy.


For a complete list of publications, please visit: www.centerforuskoreapolicy.org.
The Center for U.S.-Korea Policy aims to deepen and broaden the foundations for institutionalized cooperation between the United States and South Korea by promoting a comprehensive U.S.-ROK alliance partnership on emerging global, regional, and non-traditional security challenges. A project of The Asia Foundation, the Center is based in the Foundation’s Washington DC office.

The Asia Foundation is a private, non-profit, non-governmental organization committed to the development of a peaceful, prosperous, just, and open Asia-Pacific region. Drawing on 50 years of experience in Asia, the Foundation collaborates with private and public partners to support leadership and institutional development, exchanges, and policy research.

For more information on Center activities please visit: [www.centerforuskoreapolicy.org](http://www.centerforuskoreapolicy.org).

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This newsletter is produced by the Center for U.S.-Korea Policy to provide updates and analysis on current policy issues related to the U.S.-ROK alliance partnership. All views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s).

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