Lee Myung-bak will visit the White House next week for his first summit meeting in Washington with Barack Obama. The meeting will be important for relations between South Korea and the United States and will influence East Asia’s regional order into the next decade. The main agenda items will include the fashioning of a vision statement for the U.S.-ROK strategic alliance for the 21st century; coordination of a policy response to North Korea’s nuclear weapons and missile tests; South Korea’s assistance to the U.S.-led war on terror in Afghanistan; recovery from the global economic crisis; and the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. At the summit, the two presidents should pay special attention to two primary issues: North Korea’s nuclear weapons and support for the war on terror in Afghanistan.

North Korea’s official statements underscore two major points. First, if North Korea’s nuclear weapons have been developed as the ultimate means of defense of the current military-first leadership, it is impossible for the DPRK to give up its nuclear weapons. North Korea criticized the “carrot and stick policy” of the United States by asserting that it would be better for the “donkey” of the U.S. Democratic Party to lick the carrot.

Second, North Korea is proposing bilateral nuclear disarmament instead of unilateral denuclearization. To prepare for nuclear disarmament, North Korea wants to increase its nuclear capabilities as much as possible before beginning talks. In the next stage, North Korea will likely offer to reduce its nuclear capabilities simultaneously with the United States in the process of “action for action. However, North Korea’s military-first leadership will not accept the final stage of nuclear disarmament because its unreasonable demands for security assurances cannot be realistically met.

Relevant countries in the six-party talks have failed to understand the meaning behind North Korea’s official statements regarding its second nuclear test. Until the final moment, U.S. Special Envoy to North Korea Ambassador Stephen Bosworth consistently expressed his hope that North Korea would not conduct a nuclear test. At the upcoming U.S.-ROK summit, the two presidents should make common efforts to respond to the real intentions of North Korea. President Lee must point out that the logic of North Korea’s military-first policy is different from the American logic based on rationality.

Under the current military-first leadership in Pyongyang, a U.S. “carrot and stick policy” cannot effectively pressure
North Korea to adopt a new goal of denuclearization. Thus Presidents Lee and Obama should candidly discuss a new approach to North Korea’s nuclear problem following the likely failure of UN-led sanctions. Considering the ineffectiveness of incentives and sanctions, we should encourage North Korea to adopt an economy-first policy of non-nuclearization instead of a military-first policy of nuclearization. Such a strategy requires a co-evolution of North Korea’s military-first leadership and international environments of stability and prosperity simultaneously.

North Korean leaders must come to realize that North Korea’s nuclear weapons as the ultimate defense of a military-first leadership will endanger the life of the North Korean people. On the other hand, North Korea’s opening and reform policy for the prosperity of their people will potentially throw down the military-first leadership. To solve this dilemma, North Korea should pursue a new type of leadership and a new opening and reform policy. South Korea should cooperate very closely with relevant countries including the United States and China to collectively support a new policy that would enable North Korea to become a successful state instead of a failed state in the 21st century.

With regard to Afghanistan, the Obama administration is concentrating its efforts thus far on a more inclusive solution following the failure of the military option. NATO now commands a 56,000-strong International Security Assistance Force, comprised of 41 countries including the United States, Britain, Germany and Canada. The Obama administration also seeks support from Asian allies including South Korea to stabilize Afghanistan’s political, security, and economic situation. Obama will pay tribute to South Korea’s economic and political accomplishments, but he will also naturally expect Korea to play a global and regional role compatible with its national strength.

The United States and NATO are adjusting their new roles to new circumstances. Korea should accordingly review its global role. We must take into account inter-Korean relations and the tender roots of democracy in the South. The Korean peninsula is still militarily a little more stable than Afghanistan. But a rash transfer of South Korean troops or U.S. Forces in Korea could be dangerous. Securing of peace on the Korean peninsula also constitutes a contribution of international public goods in a regional and global context.

South Korean democracy is still in the early stages of establishing its legitimacy, and is vulnerable to strong criticism from opposition social forces within South Korea regarding the possible dispatch of combat forces to Afghanistan. The government has decided to expand support in Afghanistan from $30 million to $74.1 million until 2011 and to bolster the scale of its contribution of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) to Afghanistan. Considering the necessity of securing development in Afghanistan through provision of PRTs, South Korea will focus on making its PRT effort successful given the domestic difficulties South Korea faces in sending combat troops.

In dealing with both the North Korean challenge and the stabilization of Afghanistan, the success of the ROK-U.S. summit depends on whether the two presidents can put themselves in each other’s shoes and fully grasp the difficulties that the other leader faces.

Young-Sun Ha is Professor of International Politics at Seoul National University.

**NEWS & EVENTS**

**AUGUST 17-21 – KOREAN GLOBAL FORUM, SEOUL, KOREA**

**10TH WORLD KOREAN FORUM**

The Korean Global Foundation will hold its “World Korean Forum,” an annual international forum that explores Korean peninsula issues including peace and reunification, prosperity, and global exchange. Details are available at [www.koreanglobalfoundation.org](http://www.koreanglobalfoundation.org).

**JUNE 30 – KIEP, SEOUL, KOREA**

**CHANGES IN NORTH KOREA AND POLICY RESPONSES OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TOWARD NORTH KOREA**

This international seminar will consider changes in North Korea in the post-Kim Jong-il regime and the response of the international community. This seminar is organized by the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (KIEP).

**JUNE 25-26 – UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, VANCOUVER, CANADA**

**EMERGING ISSUES OF NORTH KOREAN FOREIGN POLICY**

At this conference, U.S. and Korean experts will discuss domestic developments in North Korea; the new world structure; and changing environments of the United States and South Korea.

**JUNE 17 – HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, WASHINGTON, DC**

**NORTH KOREA’S NUCLEAR AND MISSILE TESTS AND THE SIX PARTY TALKS: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

Panel presenters at this hearing will include Selig Harrison, Center for International Policy; Thomas Hubbard, McLarty Associates; Richard Bush, The Brookings Institution; and Scott Snyder, Center for U.S.-Korea Policy. Details will be available at [www.hcfa.house.gov](http://www.hcfa.house.gov).
JUNE 4-5 – UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, SEATTLE, WA

NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR POLITICS: CONSTRUCTING A NEW NORTHEAST ASIAN ORDER IN THE 21ST CENTURY

This conference convened a distinguished panel of experts to assess nuclear politics in Northeast Asia at three levels: North Korean external policies and domestic political economy; the dynamics of North Korea’s key bilateral relations, and the regional security order. Details are available at www.jsis.washington.edu/koreacenter/nuclearpolitics/.

MAY 23 – ASIA TIMES BOOK REVIEW

CHINA’S RISE AND THE TWO KOREAS

Sreeram Chaulia, Associate Professor of world politics at the Jindal Global Law School in Sonipat, India, reviewed Scott Snyder’s new book, China’s Rise and the Two Koreas, in an Asia Times article, “The Dragon’s Shadow.”

PUBLICATIONS


Scott Snyder (April 14, 2009), Hanmee Dongmengeui Pokwaljuck Bijeon Choogoo (Pursuing A Comprehensive Vision for the U.S.-South Korea Alliance), CSIS. Original English version available at www.asiafoundation.org/publications/pdf/516


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VIWES ON THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE

“The goal of the United States has not changed: Our goal is complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula…We unequivocally reaffirm our commitment to the defense of our allies in the region.”


“President Roh’s dedication to democracy and human rights are two values that the United States and the Republic of Korea share…Our alliance, our partnership, and our friendship is as strong as ever, and we look forward to continuing the legacy of a man who gave his all to the service of his country.”


“Russia and China, as well as our traditional allies of South Korea and Japan, have all come to the same conclusion: North Korea will not find security and respect through threats and illegal weapons.”


“Thus far, South Korea-U.S. relations have been maintained to preserve basic principles, like freedom and democracy. From now on, the alliance should be redirected to help promote the prosperity of mankind and the establishment of global peace.”


“The FTA, built upon the principles of free markets and democracy, will take the relationship between Korea and the U.S. to the next level of comprehensive partnership. As the first U.S. FTA with a North Asian partner, the FTA with Korea will provide a good opportunity for the United States to engage more closely in the region.”

The Center for U.S.-Korea Policy is based in the Washington DC office of The Asia Foundation with seed funding from the Smith Richardson Foundation. The Center accepts donations from the public and private sector for its programs and operations. Inquiries should be directed to Scott Snyder at ssnyder@centerforuskoreapolicy.org.

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). To be added to the newsletter listserv, please contact info@centerforuskoreapolicy.org.