

APEC Summit Meeting and the North Korean Nuclear Problem

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The twenty-one member states of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) convened in Hanoi from November 17~19 for a summit meeting, and discussed various topics such as the North Korean nuclear problem, free trade, terrorism, and other issues concerning commerce. President Roh Moo-hyun had six individual summit meetings with the leaders of the four major powers - the U.S., Japan, China, and Russia - and also with Vietnam and Canada. Aside from these individual meetings, he also took part in a trilateral summit meeting with Korea, Japan, and the U.S. in order to discuss and fine tune the three nations' positions concerning the six-party talks.

President Roh Moo-hyun and President Hu Jintao met for a summit meeting on the 17th. Both leaders emphasized the need for the early implementation of the September 19 Joint Statement that was announced during the fourth six-party talks in 2005. They were also in agreement that it was vital for North Korea and the U.S. to have as much contact as possible with one another and display flexibility in their approaches in order to resolve the North Korean nuclear problem.

In the ROK-U.S. summit on the 18th, the discussions focused on the implementation of the September 19 Joint Statement following the reentry of North Korea to the six-party talks. President Roh and President Bush reaffirmed their positions that North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons must not be tolerated. The two leaders also agreed that North Korea will be rewarded with appropriate measures such as economic assistance and security guarantees if it chooses to abolish its nuclear weapons program. In the trilateral summit meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo that followed the ROK-U.S. summit, the three leaders were in concurrence that there be a need to provide incentives to the North in response to the abolishment of its nuclear weapons program, in addition to the current sanctions and pressure on the country.

In his summit meeting with Russian President Putin on the 19th, two leaders were in agreement that it is important to take an approach which utilizes both pressure and dialogue within the

principle of non-tolerance of North Korea's nuclear weapons. An oral statement announced by the chairman of APEC on the same day reaffirmed the international community's commitment to a peaceful resolution to the North Korean nuclear problem, and emphasized the implementation of the resolution of the United Nations and the September 19 Joint Statement.

In a briefing on the 18th, White House spokesperson Tony Snow said that “if the North Koreans dismantle the nuclear program, the U.S. is willing to do a whole series of things, including a declaration of the end of the Korean War and moving forward on economic cooperation, cultural, educational and other ties.” A declaration of the end of the Korean War means that the armistice should be replaced by a peace treaty. By proposing a peace treaty, therefore, the U.S. is expressing its willingness to take a bold approach to the North Korean problem.

It is expected that the six-party talks will resume in mid December. When the six-party talks begin, measures to implement the September 19 Joint Statement will be discussed. If North Korea gives up its nuclear program and returns to the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), as it had agreed in the Joint Statement, then other five nations will provide appropriate incentives such as providing energy and other economic assistance in return. The U.S. and Japan will also take the necessary steps to normalize relations with the North. Along with these, it is expected that the signing of a peace treaty will also be part of the agenda during the talks.

Clause 4 of the Joint Statement states that “the Six Parties committed to joint efforts for lasting peace and stability in Northeast Asia. The directly related parties will negotiate a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula at an appropriate separate forum.” If the North is unwilling to abolish its nuclear program, discussions about a peace treaty is meaningless. Therefore, North Korea must take preceding steps, for example dismantling its nuclear facilities such as the 5MW nuclear reactor in Yongbyon.

If the North is willing to take steps to abolish its nuclear weapons program, the peace negotiation can be proceeded in earnest. And then, the question of who will sign the peace treaty will be addressed. Up to this point, North Korea has insisted that since South Korea had not signed the armistice, the peace treaty must be signed by North Korea and the U.S. Therefore, if the peace negotiation indeed makes a progress, then the South Korean government must exert a stronger diplomatic efforts to sign the treaty between the two Koreas. If North Korea insist on a DPRK-U.S. peace treaty, the six-party talks would face another difficulty.