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New Southern Policy of the Moon Jae-in Government and New ASEAN Diplomacy on North Korea's Nuclear Program

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The core goal of President Moon Jae-in's New Southern Policy is to establish '3P community' represented by people, peace, and prosperity. This new policy will provide an important opportunity to broaden the horizon of diplomacy on ASEAN from diplomacy that has been predominantly centered on economic cooperation to the one centered on security and culture.

It is the possibility of security cooperation with ASEAN countries that attracts the most attention in relation to the current situation on the Korean Peninsula. In particular, it is necessary to pay attention to the possibility of cooperation with ASEAN to establish the foundations for resolving the North Korean nuclear issue. With the Trump Administration's re-designation of North Korea as a 'state sponsor of terror' and North Korea's launch of the Hwaseong-15 ICBM missile, new tensions are emerging in North Korea-US relations. In the midst of these prevailing tensions, there is still an ongoing search for the resumption of dialogue with North Korea, which highlights the usefulness of ASEAN countries

that have maintained traditional diplomatic relationships with North Korea.

However, despite the declaration of the New Southern Policy by the Moon Jae-in government, therein lies a number of factors to consider in dealing with the North Korea nuclear issue at the multilateral or bilateral levels with ASEAN countries. While most ASEAN countries criticize North Korea's nuclear development, they tend to be overly sensitive in adjusting the intensity of criticism and display passive support rather than active support of the resolution of North Korean nuclear issue.

To understand this passive attitude of ASEAN countries to the North Korea problem, it is worthwhile to consider the history of decision-making methods of ASEAN countries. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) presented a three-step goal at the Brunei Conference in 1995 one year after its establishment: 1) promote confidence building measures, 2) develop preventive diplomatic mechanisms, and 3) adopt a gradual approach to conflict resolution. These gradual steps of trust, discussion, and comprehensive and gradual agreement reflect typical Asian thinking and culture, which puts more emphasis on intangible assets such as norms and standards rather than tangible assets such as contract clauses and provisions.

In addition, ASEAN has developed the so-called 'ASEAN way' as a code of conduct that governs relationships between member states. Often the 'ASEAN way' is a mechanism to solve current problems by means of negotiation, persuasion, and compromise rather than competition and negotiation. For the successful implementation of the 'ASEAN way,' the following should be emphasized: rather than resorting to making decisions based on Western rationalism, one should start initiating an informal, open dialogue and minimize the use of institutional methods in order to reach a consensus through the continuous process of consensus building.

Furthermore, ASEAN member states accentuate the principle of non-intervention among member countries. In the background of these principles,

therein lie norms such as Restraint, Respect and Responsibility, which are collectively called '3R.' This is why ASEAN countries emphasize the 'diplomacy of accommodation.' This principle functions as a guideline for ASEAN member states whenever subtle differences arise in dealing with the North Korean issue.

Therefore, in order to utilize the influence of ASEAN for the peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue, it is imperative to establish informal and sustainable bilateral security dialogue programs rather than focusing on short-term diplomacy centered around persuasion. While inter-governmental dialogue is still important, a prerequisite to this is building an intellectual community of trust and exchange between South Korea and ASEAN based on a network of civil experts.

Unfortunately, the four major powers surrounding the Korean Peninsula cannot find a diplomatic solution to the North Korean nuclear issue due to the escalating rhetoric between the leaders of the US and North Korea and the deterioration of Sino-DPRK relations. It is true that ASEAN countries can serve as the detour route in a situation where chances of finding a diplomatic solution to the North Korean nuclear issue seem distant. In order to take advantage of the role of ASEAN, it should be stressed that the North Korean nuclear issue is no longer confined to the Korean Peninsula and its surrounding countries but more broadly could pose a threat capable of destroying its virtuous cycle of peace, stability, and development to ASEAN states, which thrive economically and democratically based on regional peace and stability. Concurrently, strategic dialogue is needed in the process of deriving the solution of the North Korean nuclear issue based on efficient cooperation structures between the ministries of ASEAN states and the Ministry of Unification and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea. In particular, it is important to take ASEAN as a sustainable partner for various strategic talks and programs.

With the declaration of President Moon Jae-in's New Southern Policy, South Korea and ASEAN can solidify their partnership for the peaceful settlement of the North Korean nuclear issue and also establish a relationship as reliable partners of the people, peace, and prosperity (3P) community. If such a foundation can be laid, it will mean very meaningful progress for this year, which marks the 50th anniversary of ASEAN. ©KINU 2017

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