

The ROK-China Summit: Outcomes and Tasks

Jun, Byoung-Kon (Research Fellow, KINU)

On October 13, one-day ROK-China Summit was held in Beijing. It was the third meeting of the two leaders after the Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun's visit to China in July 2003 and the Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to Korea in November 2005. Following the China-Japan Summit on October 8 and the ROK-Japan Summit on October 9, this Summit finalized the bilateral meetings among three major countries in Northeast Asia - South Korea, China, and Japan.

The Summit was initially scheduled before the ROK-US summit on September 15 in order to resolve the strained DPRK-US relations and inter-Korean relations since the North Korean missile tests on July 5. However, the North Korean nuclear test on October 9 brought South Korea and China together to exclusively discuss joint countermeasures against North Korea through the one-on-one and expanded meetings. The fact that it took place when adoption of the UN Security Council resolution on sanctions against North Korea was imminent attracted particular attention.

There are largely two distinct areas where agreements were reached during the ROK-China Summit. One is on the regional issue including the situation triggered by the North Korean nuclear test and the other is on the current issue involving the ROK-China relations including historical disputes. President Roh voiced that China's controversial Northeast Project (Dong Bei Gong Cheng), claiming the ancient Korean Kingdom of Koguryo as a part of China's history, should not negatively affect the present bilateral ties, while President Hu promised the implementation of the 'five-point verbal understanding' which was reached between the two in August 2004. Furthermore, the two countries agreed to increase the volume of bilateral trade to the level of US\$200 billion by 2012 as a way to promote the 'comprehensive cooperative partnership' agreed in 2003 and to designate 'South Korea-China Exchange Year 2010' on the occasion of 15th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral diplomatic ties.

Secondly, according to the press briefing following the Summit, the agreements reached by the two countries on the North Korean nuclear test are as follows. Both South Korea and China support the United Nations Security Council for taking "appropriate and necessary measures" against the North Korean nuclear test as a joint action of the international community. The two leaders urged North Korea to refrain from any action that could aggravate the situation and to return to the Six-Party Talks, and reconfirmed the positions that they firmly opposed to North Korea's nuclear test and that they intend not to tolerate it. While the two countries called for North Korea to abide by its commitments to the nuclear-free Korean Peninsula, the two leaders exchanged mutual appreciation for the roles and efforts exerted by the two countries in order to

resolve the North Korean nuclear issue in the past, and agreed to put in joint efforts to enhance working-level cooperation in forging diplomatic means needed to solve the North Korean nuclear problem early on in the future.

The solution to the North Korean nuclear problem shared by the two countries could thus be summarized as cooperation with the international community, peaceful resolution by dialogue, and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The nuclear test conducted by North Korea, in effect, made South Korea and China reassess their North Korea policy based on the ‘carrot’ and inevitably take up the ‘stick.’ In this sense, it would be difficult for both countries not to accept sanctions on North Korea approved at the UN.

China’s ‘stick’ is not the same kind of stick put forward by the US and Japan which includes military sanctions against North Korea. China’s stick implies effect-oriented measures against North Korea, not punishment. ‘Effect-oriented’ means the measures that could bring North Korea back to the dialogue framework such as the Six-Party Talks without provoking North Korea’s adventurism, i.e. additional missile test or nuclear test. This is because China does not want collapse of the North Korean regime through robust pressure and sanctions.

The result of the Summit is evaluated as satisfactory in the sense that the agreement clarified the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and that abrupt collapse of North Korea or arms conflict in the Korean Peninsula would run counter to our national interest. Nevertheless, the process of realizing these goals does not seem easy. Our future task entails how much balanced and leading role we can take within the competitive structures between the US-Japan and China-Russia relations in determining the level of sanctions on North Korea, as well as how to coordinate inter-Korean relations, cooperation with China, and collaboration with the international community for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Although it did not attract much attention due to the outstanding North Korean nuclear test, another mid- to long- term task for the South Korean government would be how to establish the comprehensive cooperative partnership with China while overcoming the differences of historical understanding between the two countries, as demonstrated by China’s *Northeast Project* (Dong Bei Gong Cheng).