



The first round of US President Donald Trump's visit to East Asia has ended. From November 5–7 he was in Japan, and having had a summit with Prime Minister Abe while there, then followed up with a summit in South Korea, and a speech in front of the National Assembly. From November 8–10, he visited China, and had a summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping. While on November 10–11, President Trump attended the APEC summit in Danang, Vietnam, and after the second round of ASEAN—commemorating the organization's 50th anniversary—ends, and he will be returning to the United States.

This is President Trump's first visit to the major countries of East Asia since he came into office, and a wide range of economic and security issues have been on the agenda. In his visits to South Korea and Japan in particular, the focus of many discussions with Japanese Prime Minister Abe and South Korean President Moon was the North Korea nuclear issue. In the summit with Prime Minister Abe, it was agreed that a firm US-Japan alliance would serve as the basis for both countries to respond to the North Korean threat, with no discussions for discussions sake with North Korea, and a need to raise pressure on the North to the maximum. They also agreed that the Indo-Pacific strategy would be their joint foreign policy position going forward.

President Trump arrived in Seoul on November 7. In a summit meeting with South Korean President Moon Jae-in, he stated that “we have not acted militarily yet to resolve this issue, but have used all available options.” Having raised the fact that three aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines have been deployed to the seas around the Korean peninsula, he stated that “there has never been such a show of force,” and stated a strong will to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. As a result, the Trump administration has confirmed the existing US position as it seeks to manage the situation on the Korean peninsula whilst utilizing stronger pressure and sanctions to resolve the North Korean nuclear and missile problem. The resolve in the alliance appears to have been further strengthened in this regard.

Following the US-ROK summit, President Trump's remarks with respect to North Korea merit attention. He said regarding the possibility of dialogue with the North that “bringing North Korea to the bargaining table would be good for the North Korean people and the people of the world.” He also said that “I think there have been moves in this area, so we'll see what happens.” In other words, the US president confirmed that dialogue was possible even amidst tightening sanctions and pressure.

Given this situation, the fact that the North has refrained from missile and nuclear tests for almost two months (since September 15) appears to be having a positive effect. Kim Jong-un delivered a statement on September 22 as ‘Chairman of the State Affairs Commission’ in which he attacked the United States in highly aggressive terms, and whilst North Korean missile related activities were expected to continue, visible provocations have ceased for the time being. While it is not possible to reach a definite conclusion as to why, the head of the North America Office at North Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Choe Son-hee, in her visit to Russia has hinted at North Korea's position. With Chinese preparations for the 19th Communist Party Congress, China has been relatively passive in foreign affairs, and thus instead of China, the North

seemingly is looking to Russia to play the role of intermediary with the United States.

The Sino-ROK declaration points to improving relations between the two sides. Conflict between the two arose over the deployment of THAAD beginning 16 months ago. But with recent agreement to normalize relations, conflict seems to have been resolved. With informal meetings beginning last September between the two sides, frequent meetings have led to discussions about normalizing relations. These talks lasted around two months, with an agreement reached on October 31. The agreement stated that “we again confirm that the realization of a denuclearized Korean peninsula, and the North Korean nuclear issue shall be resolved peacefully as a matter of principle.” Further, “we also confirm that all diplomatic means shall continue to be used to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue... and strategic communication and cooperation shall be further strengthened between us.”

On the same day, the South Korean and Chinese senior representatives for the Six Party Talks agreed to “work together to ensure that the situation is managed in a stable fashion that deters additional North Korean provocations and lessens tensions,” and that the two countries would “work to ensure North Korea continues to refrain from confrontations, and make the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics into a ‘peaceful olympics’.” In addition, “we will continue to utilize all diplomatic means to emphasize the need for North Korea to return to talks aimed at denuclearization, and agree to work closely to ensure that talks can resume.” And moreover, “China holds in high regard South Korean efforts to improve inter-Korean relations, and will work to ensure that these efforts yield results.”

However, the Indo-Pacific strategy adopted by the US and Japan is thought to be designed to pressure and contain China. Hence, it may further aggravate tensions in the Sino-US relationship. The Moon administration said they would widen the horizons of foreign policy with respect to relations with the United States and China, yet the deepening conflict between the two is narrowing the space for South Korean foreign policy. Indeed, whilst the Chinese emphasize the need for a peaceful solution to the North Korean nuclear issue, the United States pushes for stronger sanctions and more pressure. This situation points to structural constraints on the ‘developmental solution’ that the South Korean government seeks to the North Korea nuclear issue. There are fears that the issues created by the deployment of THAAD could recur.

Given the situation, there must be no North Korean provocations. If the North does engage in nuclear or missile provocations, the turnaround over the last two months could prove to be short-lived. North Korean provocations will force a US-ROK response onto the agenda, potentially creating a recurrence of the previous vicious cycle. Along with this, should the North not participate in the Pyeongchang Olympics, they will be showing they acknowledge their own international isolation.

The South Korean government, specifically President Moon at his Administration address on November 1, outlined five principles: bringing peace to the Korean Peninsula, denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, actively resolving inter-Korean issues, peacefully resolving the North Korean nuclear problem, and resolutely responding to North Korean confrontations. And at a full meeting of the Democratic Peaceful Unification Advisory Council on October 31, he said that it was essential to work more actively in a wide range of areas to achieve the goal of ‘peace and prosperity on the Korean peninsula’. This involves greater pressure and sanctions, working with the international community. However, at the same time, it is also cooperating with China and Russia to ensure that North Korea does not engage in further provocations. In addition, to normalize and restore inter-Korean relations as well as ensure that the Pyeongchang Olympics go well, there may be the potential to engage in special active measures, like sending a special envoy to North Korea.

More than anything else, it is essential to ensure that the current turnaround continues, and that the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics and Paralympics mark a turning point in the situation on the Korean peninsula and for an improvement in inter-Korean relations. Where needed, joint exercises may be adjusted in active consultation with the United States. Given that North Korean

missiles and nuclear weapons not only exert a negative influence on the Korean peninsula but also Northeast Asia in general, there is the possibility that if the vicious circle continues, it will also have a negative impact on the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. Internationalizing the Korean peninsula issue is not easy, but our government must actively seek to do so in order to ensure that a peaceful resolution to the issue in close Sino-US cooperation can be achieved.

[MORE ARTICLES](#)

*- Opinions or points of view expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Institute for Far Eastern Studies (IFES).*

*- To join our mailing list for Issues & Analysis, please email us with your name, email address, and affiliation to [ifes@kyungnam.ac.kr](mailto:ifes@kyungnam.ac.kr)*

You can remove your email address from our mailing list by clicking the link below

[\[No longer receive e-mail\]](#)



경남대학교 극동문제연구소  
The Institute for Far Eastern Studies

COPYRIGHT(C) 2010 IFES ALL RIGHTS RESERVED  
2(Samcheong-dong) Bukchon-ro 15-gil, Jongno-gu, Seoul 110-230,  
Republic of Korea  
TEL. +82-2-3700-0739 FAX. +82-2-3700-0707  
EMAIL. [ifes@kyungnam.ac.kr](mailto:ifes@kyungnam.ac.kr)