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Chair
Young-Sun Ha

Panel
Chaesung Chun
Yang Gyu Kim
Dong Ryul Lee

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The East Asia Institute
909 Sampoong B/D
310-68 Euljiro 4-ga
Jung-gu
Seoul 100-786
Republic of Korea

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After the U.S.-China Summit: Four Principles of Co-evolutionary Strategy towards North Korea

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Shortly after the intense military face-off surrounding the Korean Peninsula came to an end last April, the East Asian region once again entered another series of diplomatic war. The confrontation started with Japan's Cabinet Secretariat Adviser Isao Iijima's visit to North Korea, and was soon followed by a series of events beginning with Choe Ryong-hae's visit to China as special envoy of First Secretary of the Workers' Party of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Kim Jong Un, Pyongyang's proposal for the inter-Korean dialogue, the U.S.-China Summit, the North's proposal for the US-DPRK high-level discussions, and First Vice Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of DPRK, Kim Gye Gwan's visit to China. South Korean President Park Geun-hye's visit to China this week is expected to bring a conclusion to the first chapter of this war. In preparation for another round of diplomatic war, which is expected to begin this July, there have already been efforts to arrange strategic collaborative meetings including the meeting of Six-party Talks delegates from South Korea, the United States, and Japan as well as the meeting between the delegates from South Korea and China. North Korea also made strategic move through the DPRK Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Shin Sun-ho's press conference on June 21.

Since the Summit meeting between President Obama and President Xi, the North seemed to have turned away from its original intention of utilizing the inter-Korean dialogue and its friendly relation with China as a

stepping stone in order to promote the U.S.-DPRK dialogue. As the U.S.-China's joint commitment to dismiss the DPRK's "new strategic line of simultaneously developing economy and defense," and to confirm resolution to denuclearize North Korea has become clear, North Korea decided to focus on resuming the U.S.-DPRK talks and the Six-party Talks rather than to waste its political energy for inter-Korean dialogue as its temporary measure. Although China did agree to the big picture of the North's denuclearization, China maintains its priority that goes to unconditional and early resumption of peaceful dialogue and consultation for North Korean nuclear problem rather than the dialogue based on the premise of denuclearization. China focuses to serve as a mediator for facilitating the process to restart this dialogue. The stance of China makes it crucial that South Korea takes the initiative in dealing with the North Korean issues, especially in the upcoming South Korea-China Summit.

Recently, the DPRK's Permanent Representative to the UN, Sin Sun-ho demanded dismantlement of the UN Forces Command. It was announced five days after the North had proposed the U.S.-DPRK high-level discussions and ten days after the inter-Korean dialogue had foundered. Referring to the UN Command as "a tool for a war against the North, pursuant to its [America's] own defense strategy," the North strongly appealed that if the U.S. continues to maintain the UN Command, and its "hostile policy" and nuclear threats against the North, then it would not

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renounce its nuclear deterrence. Even when Pyongyang suggested the high-level discussion to Washington, it reiterated its position to the denuclearization of “the Peninsula”, rather than “North Korea.” Thus, the North’s gesture appears to be its first strategic step towards the next diplomatic war to lower relevant parties’ expectations in order to yield higher-level support upon its subsequent agreement on other demands.

The United States, under the presidential administrative order, and the International Emergency Economic Powers Act responded to the North’s request by defining the North as an “unusual and extraordinary threat” to the country and extending sanctions against the North by one year. Meanwhile, during her meeting with the former State Councilor of China Tang Jia Xuan on June 14, South Korean President Park Geun-hye asked China to convince the North into having an “authentic dialogue” with the South, and revealed that the cooperation between China and the Republic of Korea (ROK) regarding the North Korean crisis would be the primary agenda for the summit meeting between President Park and President Xi.

The upcoming ROK-China summit would be the first time for both President Park Geun-hye and President Xi Jinping to greet each other as summits. Where and how these new actors should drive their discussions on the recent crisis surrounding the Korean Peninsula may need a careful recap of the past one month of diplomatic history.

The U.S.-China Summit and the New Pattern of Relationship between the Great Powers

The U.S.-China relations is undoubtedly a crucial factor in determining the future direc-

tion of Northeast Asia. Therefore, the recent U.S.-China summit on June 7th and 8th during which President Obama and President Xi exchanged eight hours-long conversation deserves thorough evaluation. Especially the comments made by both countries on the latest meeting during the press conference as an unprecedentedly unique and intimate dialogue in the forty year-long history of the U.S.-China relations add the significance to this particular event.

The summit consisted of two official conferences, one working dinner, and one informal dialogue between the presidents during their walks. Details of the three conferences, excluding the informal dialogue, were publicly announced via U.S. National Security Advisor Tom Donilon’s briefing and Foreign Minister of the China Yang Jiechi’s press conference.

During the first official conference, two summits expounded upon their countries’ grand strategies and their visions for developing the bilateral relations. Although neither side brought up new information, the conference served to clarify two countries’ consensus on pursuing new strategic relations underlined since 2012, and thus enhanced mutual understanding and strategic trust.

President Xi Jinping focused on the idea of “Chinese Dream” and “the new pattern of relationship between the great powers.” Summarizing Chinese Dream as “economic prosperity, national renewal and people’s well-being,” President Xi revealed his plan to “adhere to the road of peaceful development, continuously deepen reform and open up the country.” At the same time, he emphasized that China would contribute to promoting peaceful and stable regional and international environments necessary to achieve Chinese Dream. President Xi referred to what he had called “the new pattern of relationship between the great powers” during his visit to

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America last year as a Vice-President as shifting away from traditional hostile relations between great powers, and turning toward friendly relations which pursue “mutual respect, cooperation and win-win results.” He pointed to this new pattern as an ideal destination for the U.S.-China relations.

President Obama stressed America’s rebalancing strategy with four major focuses: strengthening cooperation between allies, establishing partnership with the rising great powers, especially China, reinforcing regional institutions such as the East Asia Summit, and constructing regional economic architecture for shared prosperity. During the talks, President Obama made clear that the rebalancing strategy is far from being containment policy toward China, and that the Transpacific Partnership (TPP) is always open to China’s participation. He also raised no objection toward President Xi’s idea of the new pattern of relationship between the U.S. and China, and supported the two being in a “healthy competition” rather than being “strategic rival.”

During the second conference, two summits discussed diverse issues, most of which had previously been discussed, including economy, climate change, and human rights. What is significant about the second round is that under the idea of intellectual property rights, the issue of cyber security was newly raised, and as a part of the efforts to reduce hydrofluorocarbon production and consumption, the U.S.-China joint statement was adopted.

The most notable outcome of the latest U.S.-China Summit is that two countries have made an official consensus on promoting the new pattern of major power relations. This implies that the two have started to uphold the spirit of so-called “seeking common ground

while reserving differences,” and this cooperative momentum is likely to persist for awhile.

The U.S.-China Summit and North Korean Crisis

Under the big picture of pursuing the U.S.-China cooperative relations and adhering to the major goal of regional peace and stability, North Korean crisis was discussed during the working dinner on the first day of the summit.

The U.S. reported through the briefing by National Security Advisor Donilon that the U.S. and China have come to an agreement that North Korea issue stands as a vital factor in enhancing the U.S.-China cooperation, and that the North cannot be accepted as a nuclear power and denuclearization of North Korea is the ultimate policy goal. According to the briefing, the U.S. and China have come to “full agreement” on carrying out all sanctions against the North including the UN Security Council Resolution in an intimately cooperative manner. It is noteworthy that the U.S. explicitly expressed that “pursuit of nuclear weapons is incompatible with its [North Korea’s] economic development goals”; revealed its firm opposition to the North’s new strategic line of achieving both economic development and nuclear capability; and announced that China has come to the same conclusion.

However, China’s report via briefing by State Councilor Yang Jiechi after the summit displayed a different nuance from its counterpart’s report. First of all, President Xi reaffirmed that China has been consistent with its three principles – “denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, safeguarding of peace and stability in the Korean peninsula, and solving of the North Korea nuclear issue and the pen-

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insula issue through dialogue and negotiation” – in dealing with North Korea, and the position will be maintained. China added that two parties have come to an agreement on the principles mentioned above and overall objectives in resolving North Korean crisis, and expressed that China is willing to promote the close U.S.-China cooperation to resume dialogue with the North as soon as possible. Unlike the U.S., China has made no comment whatsoever after the summit on imposing multilateral sanctions against the North, nor has it mentioned about its objection toward the North’s new strategic line. Additionally, it is important to bear in mind that China has put its emphasis on the mechanisms of conversation and negotiations to achieve denuclearization rather than denuclearization as a precondition for the dialogue. This indicates that China has shown no shift away from its three principles, but certain level of reorienting the degree to which it is committed to each principle.

Overall, the U.S. has pointed to denuclearization of North Korea rather than the entire Korean peninsula as its policy goal, expressed its full commitment to protect its allies from any threats imposed by North Korea, and made clear its intention to open up channels for conversation with the North only after the North has shown convincing moves to prove its volition to have “authentic” and “credible” dialogue with other relevant parties. China, in this sense, has shown a considerable difference. Furthermore, Chinese official position is far from the U.S. report that both countries had confirmed shared “threat analysis” on the implication of North Korean nuclear weapons to the Northeast Asian region.

What the U.S. and China have come to an agreement regarding the policy toward North

Korea is merely the basic principles and the final goal of denuclearizing North Korea. They still show clear differences over the road map to achieve this end. The U.S. firmly opposes to North Korea’s new line of realizing both economic prosperity and nuclear power status, supports severer punitive measures against the North, and believes that the North should initiate moves that could convince the U.S. of its willingness to make a meaningful change in order to have the US-DPRK talks. On the other hand, China maintains the view that denuclearization of the Korean peninsula is a long-term project, perceives the importance of resuming dialogue between the North and relevant parties as soon as possible when North Korea makes gestures to reveal its willingness toward a dialogue. China still argues that managing stability on the Korean peninsula should be the number one priority rather than denuclearizing North Korea.

Choe Ryong-hae’s Visit to China and Pyongyang’s New Strategic Line

It was after special envoy Choe Ryong-hae’s visit to China on May 24th when China became more assertive in emphasizing the need to recover the channels for dialogue with North Korea.

According to China’s reporting, President Xi explained the mentioned above three principles China abides by regarding the Korean peninsula during his meeting with special envoy Choe Ryong-hae. In response, Choe Ryong-hae stated that North Korea wishes to “develop its economy, improve people’s livelihoods, and create peaceful external environment,” and is willing to “work with the parties concerned to properly solve relevant issues

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through the six-party talks and other dialogues and consultation of various forms, so as to safeguard peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.” During his meeting with member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China, Lin Yunshan which took place a day before his meeting with President Xi, special envoy Choe Ryong-hae expressed his appreciation toward China’s attempts to promote peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and efforts to achieve the aim through peaceful dialogues and negotiations. China reported that Choe Ryong-hae reconfirmed the Pyongyang’s willingness to “accept” China’s request and resume dialogue with relevant parties to Lin Yunshan, as well.

What is interesting about China-DPRK dialogue is starkly different ways China and the DPRK summarized the outcome of the conference. North Korea’s report simply stated that “both sides exchanged views on the situation of the Korean Peninsula and issues of mutual concern.” Such difference is a clear revelation of two parties’ diverging views and understanding.

Strictly adhering to its three principles previously mentioned, China has urged North Korea to focus on economic development and improvement of people’s livelihoods rather than to build nuclear capability, and to return to the Six-party Talks. North Korea, however, has shown selective consent only to the second and the third principles of China, and made clear its intention of retaining its nuclear power.

As long as North Korea holds onto its new policy line of simultaneously constructing economy and bolstering up nuclear capabilities, it would not accept the relevant parties’ demand for denuclearization. However, in

order for the North to achieve another end of reinforcing its economy, it is inevitable that the North show certain level of efforts to direct its policy toward denuclearization in exchange for economic support from the international community.

This is how the dilemma of the North’s new strategic line begins. As North Korea has to secure two goals of ensuring political and military security as well as economic development, Pyongyang would hardly focus only on nuclear test or missile launch. Under the same logic, the North cannot zero in on projects such as normalizing Kaesong Industrial Complex, resuming tourism on Mt. Geumgang, and promoting reunion of separated families that could stir up its economic growth, because it cannot dismiss the importance of enforcing political and military strength. Therefore, Pyongyang has no choice but to disperse its focus on the June 15th North-South Joint Declaration and the July 15th North-South Armistice Agreement to create a proper balance between its economic and political/security concerns.

The recent remark made by the DPRK’s Permanent Representative to the UN which emphasized “the road of pushing forward the building of a socialist economic power and improving the people’s standard of living through the line of simultaneously achieving economic development and nuclear power building” reaffirmed North Korea’s logic of necessitating nuclear power development to become an economic power. Lapsed in this dilemma, it is unrealistic to expect North Korea to show an “authentic” gesture that the U.S. and South Korea have strongly demanded to resume dialogue with the North. In other words, unless the Kim Jong-un administration devises a new strategic line that ceases to ad-

here to nuclear power development, even if China pushes ahead with its three principles, the Six-party Talks that goes beyond sham diplomacy seems unlikely to happen.

South Korea's Policy Doctrine toward North Korea: the "Four Principles of Coevolutionary Strategy"

Then what should be President Park Geun-hye's manner in discussing the crisis surrounding the Korean peninsula during her meeting with President Xi Jinping?

Most urgent task left for South Korea is to come up with a clear and coherent policy doctrine toward the DPRK. Throughout the U.S.-China summit, President Obama and President Xi presented in a definitive manner the principles for their countries' grand strategies and specific matters including North Korean crisis, and stayed consistent with their positions. Likewise, as President Xi would once again state "Chinese Dream" and three principles China abides by during the ROK-China summit, President Park Geun-hye should also pronounce Korean Dream and the principles the country observes in order to draw a clearer picture of what South Korea's new strategy of the inter-Korean trust-building process. Nonetheless, there seems to be an intrinsic problem in this new strategy of trust-building process. The simple idea of building the inter-Korean trust by first providing low-level humanitarian assistance to the North, and then phasing in higher-level economic cooperation when the North shows a favorable response underestimates the complexity of the recent crisis. Therefore, this commentary suggests the four principles of Coevolutionary Strategy that gives a more

detailed picture of what the new strategy of South Korea should look like.

The first principle of the doctrine toward the North has to be denuclearization of North Korea. The former Lee Myung-bak administration's "Denuclearization, Openness, 3000" Plan took a hard-line stance that the North should take considerable de facto efforts toward denuclearization in order to receive any response from relevant parties. The Obama administration takes a comparatively moderated stand that dialogues require the North to recall the 2.29 Agreement which pertained to authentic and definite measures such as the freezing of the uranium enrichment program and the moratorium on nuclear and missile development. China supports the most alleviated position out of the three that any signs of North Korea's willingness to have dialogues should call upon immediate response from the international community. As a new administration, President Park Geun-hye should decide upon what and how much South Korea wants from the North regarding denuclearization, and seek for active cooperation from the U.S. and China. For now, it is important that while the South keeps pace with the U.S., it should also come up with the standards to which China could consent. At the same time, the standards should go beyond freezing the status quo as did the 2.29 Agreement, and call upon more sincere and practical efforts toward denuclearization of North Korea.

The second principle is that South Korea should shift the Pyongyang's attention away from the current line of developing both economy and nuclear capability, and toward a modified version or the new Line 2.0. It is a stated fact that strict regulations imposed by the international non-proliferation regime make it implausible for North Korea to

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achieve both economic development and nuclear deterrence. However, as the Kim Jong-un administration has already adopted the policy as a “ro-seon” or “line,” the international community’s reckless opposition to the new line, condemning that its failure is inevitable, would only raise tensions on the Korean peninsula without inducing any desirable response from the North. Instead, there needs to be refined efforts to convince the Kim Jong-un administration of the possible future of ensured peace and security without nuclear deterrence by conducting talks on establishing peace system and providing blue print for the future Korean peninsula. At the same time, South Korea should clearly reveal its intention of assisting North Korea in developing its economy, improving livelihoods of the people, and creating peaceful external environment, and proactively lead the international cooperation for Pyongyang to carry out the Line 2.0 that promotes economic development and military reinforcement without developing nuclear capability.

The third principle suggests international co-evolution that is responsive to North Korea’s policy of pursuing economic growth and nuclear-independent self-defense development, the Line 2.0. Current Park administration’s Northeast Asian Peace and Cooperation Initiative maintains relatively ingenuous position that first working on issues which easily incur regional cooperation would have “spill-over” effect and lead to gradual expansion of cooperation and ultimately, resolving the “Asia Paradox.” Nevertheless, the idea of expecting non-military cooperation to eventually lead to military cooperation overlooks the gravity of the current security crisis in the region. Envisioning a Northeast Asia peace and security mechanism that correlates North Korea’s Line

2.0, regional community should set the basis for long-term regional cooperation on both economy and security. In this way, mutual trust based on interactive policy changes and extensive cooperation between North Korea and the relevant parties could be established.

The fourth principle draws a detailed picture of co-evolution on the Peninsula. If the trust-building process is bound to specific time and issue areas, like current South Korean government suggests, the third principle mentioned above which encourages efforts to facilitate comprehensive cooperation is hard to realize. This does mean that the Park Geun-hye administration should follow the form of previous administration’s “grand bargaining” which included every issue area. Rather, it is important to have in mind the the inter-Korean trust building measure would better serve its aim if it includes various aspects such as military, politics, economy, and personal exchanges.

In addition to the four principles, President Park Geun-hye should focus on establishing a new pattern of the ROK-China relations in the 21st century in correlation to the new pattern of the U.S.-China relations discussed during the preceding summit between President Obama and President Xi. At the same time, President Park should appeal to President Xi that East Asia has entered the era different from the traditional Cold War era, and thus is in the need to construct a new regional economic and security order. Under the “Asia Paradox” which stresses rising political and historical tensions between Asian countries in spite of strengthening economic ties, it is especially important that Beijing and Seoul bring attentions of Asia Pacific countries to multilateral approach to peacefully settle recent conflicts.

In fact, South Korea's repetitive request for China to play a special role in dealing with North Korea each summit is not conducive to conceiving new strategic direction for the future ROK-China partnership. At the current stage, it is of foremost importance that two parties construct stronger trust toward each other in order to devise and carry out effective policy cooperation.

In 1972, the Era of Détente began, but the inter-Korean reconciliation foundered. To avoid the repetition of this painful history, the Park administration should foster a broad understanding in constructing international, regional, and inter-Korean strategies, and maintain consistent manner throughout the upcoming series of diplomatic war.

EAI Security Net _____

Chaesung Chun, Seoul National University

Young-Sun Ha, Seoul National University

Yang Gyu Kim, East Asia Institute

Dong Ryul Lee, Dongduk Women's University