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News Letter No. 85

Seoul, 31 December 2007

## **Peace in the Korean Peninsula following the Korean Presidential Elections: reflected through Korean-US relations**

The outcome of the 17th Korean presidential elections has brought attention to the new government's foreign policy, especially its policies towards North Korea and the United States. The president-elect Myung-Bak Lee expressed that "The two Koreas will open a new era of cooperation through the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula" and "lay the foundation for mutual value and peace between Korea and the US alliance on the basis of trust". North Korea's total abolishment of its nuclear weapons is a precondition to North Korea's development, peace in the Korean peninsula and future peaceful unification of the two Koreas and therefore a front burner and common interest for both Korea and the US.

### *Strengthening of Korean-American relations?*

The new South Korean president should not leave behind the constructive criticism pointed at his public pledge on the "Denuclearization and Open 3000 Plan" toward the North. According to his plan, the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula comes prior to the enhancement of inter-Korean relations, establishment of a peace regime in the Korean peninsula and international aid toward North Korea. But the Korean NGO, People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy along with Hankyoreh Newspaper in their "Presidential candidate public pledge assessment" evaluation stressed that in his public pledge Lee doesn't clearly specify Korea's role or steps in establishing a peace regime in the Korean peninsula besides the "Denuclearization and Open 3000 Plan" and maintains the same stance as presidential candidate Hwe-Chang Lee, making denuclearization a pre condition. Moreover, president-elect Myung-Bak Lee was the only candidate to stand against the "Declaration on the Denuclearization of Korean Peninsula" and the only candidate to support the continued supervision of the United Nations Command under the peninsula's peace regime. Such views could be a possible stumbling block in realizing a nuke-free Korean peninsula and a narrow view of not being able to picture a peaceful Korean peninsula

together with a peaceful North East Asia as a whole.

The evaluation of South Korean-US relations during Roh's administration should be reflected in a well balanced and objective manner both in terms of actual facts and national interest. During the five year term of Roh's "Participatory Government" South Korean-US relations showed both signs of positive outcome as well as its limits. Roh's government has paved the way for a more balanced and prospective long term Korean-US alliance, coinciding with the air of change of our era and establishing the basics for a mutual relationship between the two countries. Overall, the administration has worked for the betterment of both nation's benefits in an all encompassing way.

The criticism it has triggered and tensions built between South Korea and the US derived more from the absence of collecting sufficient public opinion and support along with the poor process of evacuating the policies rather than the fallacy of South Korea's foreign policy towards the US itself. Looking back at the five year's of Roh's regime, most of the conflict between South Korea and the US perceived by the public was sparked during the process of debate rather than from the essence of the issue itself.

The new administration should be clearly aware of the past government's policy toward the US and the merits and demerits it has brought and succeed as well as reform its policies. On the basics, it should keep the foundation the Roh government has laid in terms of the Korean-US alliance but try to overcome the limits it showed during the process of promoting the policies. Further efforts to enhance trust between heads of state and policy makers should be taken into consideration. Strengthening public diplomacy in sectors like Congress, expert groups, media and other areas can be of supplementary help in reaching this goal.

#### *Promotion of both denuclearization and peace regime in the Korean peninsula*

Expectations go that the current president-elect Lee Myung-Bak's government will bring change in terms of South Korean-US relations. Touching upon the North Korean nuclear issue, it is believed that the two countries will come closer in collaboration, but it is hard to relate this to how it will affect the denuclearization process. On December 20th phone call between the two leaders, Korean president-elect Lee and US president Bush agreed to strengthen relations and put the North Korean issue on the top of the agenda. Having set the issue of a nuke-free Korean peninsula as a problem of mutual interest and goal to be achieved in close cooperation between both countries is highly encouraging and well timed.

But it should be noted that tightened South Korean-US relations should not result in the weakening of wide collaborative relations Korea has maintained with other member states of the six party talks. Korea and China have been taking the role of mediator and facilitator every time the talks came to a stall or North Korea and the US showed sharply contrasting opinions and was pivotal in keeping the momentum and cooperation going. In terms of the denuclearization

issue, the Lee administration should keep a balanced and close collaborative channel with the US, China, Japan, Russia and other corresponding nations.

If South Korea in collaboration with the US demands North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons as a precondition, it will affect future processes of denuclearization in the Korean peninsula and in the establishment of a peace regime in the peninsula. There are chances that it might negatively affect the 9.19 Joint Declaration that states the principle of joint action and the processes that have been slowly in effect in establishing a peace regime in the peninsula. According to the Clause 4 of the 2007 Inter-Korea Summit Declaration, efforts to set a peace regime and denuclearization processes should be carried out simultaneously. But there are chances that moving the issue of denuclearization and peace regime at the same time will become null, considering Lee and Bush's position of first denuclearizing the north followed by talks on the establishment of a peace regime.

The current Bush administration pertains the critical view that the South Korean government has aided the North over the transom, tolerating human rights violations and permitting nuclear weapon's development. President-elect Lee Myung-Bak's position coincides with that of the Bush administration in that he publicly brought up the issue of human rights problems in North Korea and put the denuclearization in the Korean peninsula as a precondition for continued assistance. On the other hand, Lee's stance on the issue has puzzled North Korea, for until now it has supported inter Korean relations under the participatory government and at the same time juggled to solve the nuclear weapons problem at the same time. But Lee Myung-Bak will support this position if Bush can succeed in establishing a nuclear free Korean peninsula and normalize relations between North Korea and the US with the help of president Lee's practical line of politics and closer South Korean-US ties.

The establishment of a nuclear-free Korean peninsula is an issue of prior importance to be dealt in close collaboration between South Korea and the US, but also with North Korea. Ensuring North Korea's national security and economic development is directly interwoven with the problem of denuclearization in the Korean peninsula. This is a clear example that today's security does not limit itself to military security but is also affected by other factors. Furthermore, South Korea and the US should further enhance efforts to actively promote regional peace in North East Asia, based on a long standing trust based bilateral alliance and mutual interest on regional peace. The answer lies not solely on and is impossible to be achieved through power politics alone. South Korea and the US should strengthen bilateral ties in the form of an all comprehensive security alliance, promoting regional cooperation.

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