

China and the Two Koreas

- Panel:** Session 3 (Orchid Room)
Date/Time: Tuesday, December 11, 2012 / 15:45-17:00
Speakers: Shin Jung-seung, Korea National Diplomatic Academy (Moderator)
Chung Chong Wook, Dong-A University
Andrei Lankov, Kookmin University
Scott A. Snyder, Council on Foreign Relations
Zhu Feng, Peking University
Rapporteur: Seukhoon Paul Choi, Council on Foreign Relations

Panel Short Summary

Shin Jung-seung highlighted the leadership transitions in China, the United States, and South Korea, and asked what the foreign policies of these countries and North Korea are likely to be.

Zhu Feng stated that it is too early to know the policy positions of the new leadership in China. However, Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang are of a learned generation that is capable of directing the country to a brighter future. The new leadership is likely to pursue more balanced policies. Convinced of China's greater role in world affairs, the country's leaders will address both a domestic and international audience. They will pursue a more balanced approach to North and South Korea, and push for greater coordination with other countries to address the unpredictable nature of North Korea's situation. Furthermore, as Xi has shown a more "human" quality to his leadership style, it is appropriate that China not only address the North Korean nuclear issue, but also the country's humanitarian disaster.

Chung Chong Wook stated that while it is difficult to predict the outcome of the upcoming South Korean presidential election, both candidate Park Geun-hye and candidate Moon Jae-in agree on the importance of improving ties with China, especially in trade and investment. In addition both candidates will pursue a policy toward North Korea that will differ from that of the current Lee Myung-bak administration. Though there may not be a drastic change in policy, the current political climate in South Korea foreshadows that the

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next administration will pursue initiatives to engage North Korea.

Scott Snyder explained the US position toward China and the two Koreas within the context of its re-balancing policy. The US rebalance toward Asia is not much of a strategy as it is considered to be a reactive policy to China rather than a proactive initiative. The rebalancing strategy carries implicit expectations of U.S. allies. In regard to South Korea, the US policy suggests that the United States will expect South Korea to play a greater role in the region and enhance cooperation with Japan and other US allies. The strategy does not imply a US aversion to stronger South Korea-China relations. Rather, as high-level US-China engagement is part of the rebalance strategy, the United States is likely to encourage South Korea to engage China in a similar fashion. Finally, the Korean Peninsula may serve as an issue that facilitates US-China cooperation. However, US policy toward North Korea is likely to depend foremost on the nature of inter-Korea relations.

Andrei Lankov expressed pessimism in regard to the potential for reform in North Korea. North Korea's policies are logical when viewed from the perspective of the North Korean elite. The leadership in North Korea will seek to gain greater aid and diversify its sponsorship. North Korea has historically preferred to receive assistance from a group of countries, so that it can play one sponsor against another. Thus, North Korea is likely to attempt to improve relations with the United States and garner US aid.

While it is difficult to predict the policies of the various new leaders in the region, the simultaneous transitions in leadership seem to prevent a window of opportunity for improved relations and positive change.

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